Midoriya has been told a lot of things his entire life, like "Love", "Safe", and "Protect."

He wants to believe them. As the years trickle by and time fluctuates, he tries to understand them.

He can't.

And then U.A. comes and swipes his feet out from underneath him. And, if he's to be honest, he doesn't mind it too much, even if each day slowly wears him away. Piece by piece, bit by
bit.

(And if they're there to put him back together again, well, he doesn't mind that either.)

Notes

I want to thank BeyondtheClouds77 for converting me to this fandom for good, even if it's poisoning me from the inside out.
He was found by a man with dark hair and yellow eyes. He stared at him with his bright, cold eyes and looked his malnourished form up and down, taking in his dirty face and hands. He turned to another man beside him, speaking to him in a firm, commanding tone in a language he didn't recognize. The second man nodded before turning away, disappearing out of his line of view.

He didn't know what to think. He had been curled up beneath a small bridge that was built over a creek for weeks now, and the last thing he expected was a man with pale skin and a lean frame to approach him. The man ducked underneath the lip of the bridge, crouching next to him. His canary yellow irises seemed to lock him in place despite the fact that his fight-or-flight instinct was screaming at him.

The man said something, though he didn't know what it was. He didn't speak this language, though he so dearly wanted to. He furrowed his eyebrows, though, because the man had a certain accent that he could recognize anywhere. The man waited a few more seconds before speaking again, though his tone wasn't nearly as gentle as it had been before. His eyes were narrowed dangerously, and his throat seemed to radiate a heat that he could feel from where he was. Before he could stop himself, his mouth opened and he spoke.

"I-I'm sorry," he whispered, "I don't k-know what you are saying."

The man blinked in surprise before the anger melted away from his features. "You speak Japanese?"

He didn't respond, instead pulling his scratchy blanket tighter around his shoulders and trying to make himself as small as possible. The man seemed to understand, however, and he continued to speak.

"My name is Midoriya Hisashi." The accent seemed so much more fitting now. The shaking in his hands started to calm at the strange familiarity to it. The man looked him over again before nodding to himself. "I want to help you. Do you have a name?"

He blinked, wracking his brain for an answer before slowly shaking his head. "No," he said quietly. He tensed as the cold air grew thicker, a faint smell permeating the oxygen he breathed in. Immediately, his nerves were tingling and his mind shot warnings to the rest of his body. He wanted nothing more than to run but those yellow eyes that reminded him so much of a snake's kept him still.

Hisashi hummed. He grabbed something from the pocket of his suit, which happened to be a clear, curved piece of glass outlined by a thick piece of plastic and a rubber band. It took him several seconds to realize what it was.

"I'm sure we'll find some name for you another time, then," Hisashi said as he pulled the mask over his face. "I apologize for doing this to you."

It didn't take him but two seconds to jump to his feet, a hand over his mouth and nose to block out the contaminated air, and he turn around to make a break for it. He ran face-first into the chest of the other man Hisashi had spoken to, whose broad shoulders and bulging muscles kept his collision from fazing him. The male grabbed him by his thin wrists, holding him in place, even as he kicked weakly at his strong legs.
The air grew thicker, and he tried not to breathe in the fumes as his vision slowly grew darker. It was a lost cause, and soon he felt his head loll against something warm. Big arms held him close to a chest, and with the last slips of consciousness he heard a name that would be burned into his mind for years to come.

"Ignition."

======

His new name was Izuku. That's what his caretaker, Midoriya Inko, said anyway. Inko was a gentle woman who carried with her a terrible amount of anxiety and stress. She fretted over him many, many times, and she was the one who cleaned him up of all dirt and grime while he was still unconscious. She was the one who taught him because he was behind in his education. She was the one who let him watch television and dissect heroes and villains. She was the one who demonstrated how to make different arts and crafts. She was the one who let him be a little kid.

She was also the one who left for weeks on end for him to take care of himself because she couldn't take Hisashi's screaming.

Midoriya was hiding in his bedroom, listening quietly as the argument from downstairs continued to get louder. He was currently drawing the R-Rated Hero: Midnight in one of his notebooks, trying to fix her waist which didn't seem to cooperate with him. He finally managed to get it just right when a loud booming sound echoed throughout the house, and he flinched, his fingers trembling. He didn't like it when Hisashi used his quirk—especially when it was aimed at him. The way that his stomach churned and his nerves spiked in pain would always be burned into his memory as his skin was charred.

He took in a few deep breaths before continuing his notes, jotting down the advantages and disadvantages of revealing so much skin and cleavage. The heroine was a bit of an enigma to him—just the thought of showing off so much of one's body made him shudder—but she was definitely capable despite all the criticisms she received. While her quirk was no doubt capable and extremely useful in many cases, Midoriya mostly admired her for her ability to essentially fight quirkless in cases where using her quirk was detrimental. And while she was, in many situations, viewed as sadistic and unsuitable for hero work around kids, he could see the way her smirks would melt into sweet and gentle smiles as she helped those around her.

He replayed the video in front of him, analyzing her swift and fluid movements that worked well with her whip. Sure, most of her popularity and fan base were made up of sexual individuals, but he could see the love and care in her eyes as she saved others. While she seemed to be a hero mainly for the fame, Midoriya could see right through the facade.

And then, faintly, he wondered why she would even wear that facade in the first place. He tapped the end of the pencil against his lip, bringing up a video from when she was in her early twenties. Perhaps she used to be fame-driven when she first started her hero career, but as she grew older she grew out of her alias? It would explain why she was acting. Maybe she wanted to instill the idea into villains that she was still fearsome and powerful despite the fact that time affected her too and her age continued to climb?

Of course, this wasn't to say that she didn't like the fame that she earned through perfectly-timed poses and revealing costumes. She just seemed to have matured in her hero career in the most recent years, and while Midoriya wasn't a hardcore fan by all means, he could find it in himself to respect her.

He should've known better than to click on more than one Midnight-centered video, though. For
weeks to come, he would be suffering from video recommendations with thumbnails of female heroes who flaunted their bodies. And for a ten-year-old that was the last thing he wanted.

He quietly shut his notebook after finishing his last note, rubbing his hands together as if to ease the pain that radiated through them. He loved taking notes and drawing, and it helped him understand more of what was happening around him, but the soreness in his hands were a grim reminder that he was still a little kid.

"Shh, you're going to be okay, my little echo."

He ended up hiding his notebook beneath his covers before withdrawing a different one. While the other notebook had been labeled *Hero Analysis for the Future No. 4*, this one was a little bit different. He didn't label these ones with anything but a number in fear that anyone found them.

In fear that Hisashi found them.

His hands were shaking as he opened the book, fingers trailing over the words that he had written down. He glanced up to the picture above the words he had written, something he had spent hours on making sure every detail was drawn. He flinched as another loud bang reached his ears, and he quickly closed the book before slipping out of his bed, his bare feet touching the cool wood of his bedroom floor. He padded over to his door, opening it as quickly as possible to prevent it from squeaking. He quietly moved down the hall, now able to clearly hear Inko and Hisashi fighting. He curled up into a ball near the top of the staircase, listening in to the argument.

"He's just a *child*, Hisashi."

"And? Inko, I've finally figured out his quirk!" Midoriya's stomach dropped down to his feet. "I don't think you *realize* how much potential he has."

"So what if he has your so-called potential? He's only ten, and I doubt he wants anything to do with your organization."

"I don't need you to defend him. He's not even yours."

"Well, he might as well be! I've taken care of him for two years now after you decided to bring a random, homeless, eight-year-old kid from Brazil here of all places!"

"Inko, you know as well as I do that there's more to him than what he seems. He had these energy levels-""

"*Enough*, Hisashi."

"What? Don't you think that it's suspicious that a kid who can speak Japanese is all the way in Brazil? He didn't even understand Portuguese for crying out loud!"

"So? He might have gotten in an accident with someone who has a teleportation quirk or something."

"So why doesn't he have a name, huh? Why hasn't anyone been looking for him? *Why doesn't he have a family, Inko?*"

Midoriya held his hands over his ears, trying his best to block out the sound. The whimper that escaped him was the closest you could get to silent, thank goodness, but he wished that he could block out what he just heard. He curled tighter into himself, pressing his hands harder against his ears, but even that could only do so much. As the yelling continued to grow louder, the words
became more clear until—

"You'll traumatize him, and I won't stand for it."

He stood up and rushed back into his room, shutting the door and curling back into bed. He grabbed the seven-year-old laptop Inko planned on throwing away and pulled it into his lap, typing in a simple phrase and clicking on the first video that popped up. He had to pause it for a second to grab and untangle his headphones, which took a while from the shaking in his hands and fingers (and his continuous flinching as the fight below refused to peter out) before he was finally able to put in his earbuds and insert the cord. He quickly pressed the play button, letting the tenseness in his shoulders unwind.

"Can you see that?" It was a voice full of desperation, but also hope, and Midoriya couldn't help but close his eyes and think about the faith that sparked in the man's eyes. "He's already saved a hundred people!"

He tried to think about that. Tried to think about the masses of people he saved. Tried to imagine All Might, someone so amazing and strong and capable. He felt his heart flutter at the images he saw, and a deep longing in him grew to be almost unbearable.

"That's crazy! It hasn't even been ten minutes!"

Midoriya's face scrunched up, and it pained him to hear all of the praise. "That's crazy!"

Laughter echoed in his ears, a palliative sound that drowned out the happenings below.

"He's laughing!" came the voice of the dumbstruck man. His fingers, which were tightly gripping the sides of the laptop, loosened considerably as he listened to the voice that followed.

"It's fine now. Why?"

Midoriya closed his eyes. "Because I am here," he mouthed in time with the recording. He leaned his head against the top of the laptop screen, listening as the last of the recording finished. He grabbed the two notebooks on his bed without looking, pulling the one with a single number on its cover open. He looked at the drawing of Hisashi, with his narrowed, snake-like eyes and inky black hair.

Because you never were.

=====Midoriya was sitting on his desk, leaning the side of his head against the cool surface of the glass window. He watched as his neighbor, a boy with spiky blonde hair and blood red eyes, stomped out of his house and down the sidewalk to go to school. The boy's hands sent out small pops and crackles, which Midoriya had long since recorded as explosions.

He hadn't slept in a while—a most recent villain's attack encouraged an entire riot from several bands of underground thugs, and it took two days for the siege on the city to be put down. There were a lot of casualties, but more than that, several high-ranked heroes were put in the hospital with how bad it had gotten. Because of it, he had stayed up for as long as he physically could to record everything that was happening and to make sure that things were going to end up okay. They did, and it left behind a tired eleven-year-old who wanted nothing more than to take a nap.

After he watched his neighbor disappear from view, he closed his eyes. Sleep started to crawl into his consciousness, and while he knew that he would have to make up his self-teaching later, he needed to rest. As his eyes fluttered shut, he thought about the sinking feeling in his stomach that
alerted him of deep dread.

He appeared in a hallway. The lights were off and the shadows dark, and he could feel the silence worming beneath his skin. He took in a deep breath, releasing it shortly afterward, only to find that it was cold enough that he could see it. A chill burrowed into his small frame, hovering over him as he looked at his surroundings. He felt it, though—a gentle tug pulling him along.

He reached out to the wall beside him, resting his fingers against the smooth surface as he walked forward. The friction warmed his fingers the slightest bit as he came across a door, cracked open just enough to let light out. He looked inside, the sliver of light pressing a perfect line down his face and neck before it hugged the folds of his clothing. He heard the sounds of a woman groaning and gentle reassurances that followed.

"You see so much."

He didn't respond to that, waiting until he heard the sound of wailing—to which he pressed gentle fingers to the door, opening it just a crack more, and just a little more until he could let himself in. None of the inhabitants of the room noticed him—they never did. He focused his gaze on the woman, who was sweating and panting on the hospital bed. Her eyes were squinted as she stared at the bundle being handed to her by the whispering doctors.

"Am I hallucinating?"

"What kind of freak mutation is that?"

"I've never seen anything like that."

The woman with curly red hair and dark eyes stared at the child in her arms in shock before a loving expression passed over her. Her eyes watered with happy tears as she pressed a kiss to the newborn’s glowing body.

The Shining Baby.

"Such a domestic scene,“ the voice whispered again, "for a beginning like this. For this to lead to something so tragic."

Midoriya walked forward as the baby started crying, and he pressed gentle fingers against his forehead. His expression could only be described as forlorn and at peace. The child couldn't feel him, of course, nor could anyone see him, but he felt at home here. He felt like he could live this moment and truly belong.

Though he didn't. He didn't belong anywhere.

He turned to the person standing in the hallway. The man also didn't belong here, though he could if he wanted to. He looked at the man's lithe figure and gentle eyes. He felt his eyes burn as he looked at him.

"Can I?" he whispered. "Can I save them?"

The man looked up at him and smiled. "You'll find a way."

He woke up to find that the glass has frozen over and that it was snowing out. His neck had a crick in it, and his arms and legs were sore and refused to move. That's what you get for falling asleep on your desk, he supposed, but he didn't regret it. He popped his joints and picked up his books before curling up under the covers of his bed. He started his online course and worked his way through
teaching himself more about European history before the time of quirks and how the Reformation affected religious power.

He got about halfway through when Hisashi knocked on the door.

The man opened it seconds later, and he raised his eyebrow when he noticed the specific book that was in his lap. "I thought that you were going to finish that class this morning," he drawled, looking at Midoriya with narrowed eyes.

He flinched and hunched his shoulders, still not used to talking with Hisashi one-on-one. Not that he would ever get used to it, but the man carried with him a dark sense of foreboding that sent off warning signals in his head. It was a little better when Inko was around, even if he couldn't see her, but she had left a few days ago to take a break and wouldn't be back for another few days or so.

"I slept in," he said quietly, diverting his gaze as he looked down to the thick textbook he was reading. It was terribly difficult to dissect already—English was hard enough, but the vocabulary usage and grammar was kicking his behind—and with what little sleep he got plus the time limit forced on his shoulders, he was struggling immensely. He'd have to work extra hard to make up the time he lost both this morning and the previous days.

He frowned as he realized that he was behind schedule in a lot of ways. His hands itched to create a list of sorts as he suddenly became conscious that he hadn't stretched in a while either, nor had he looked at any new hero debuts, and he still hadn't finished researching more into that underground hero....

Crap. He really was behind.

Hisashi shrugged, not seeming to care about the wave of panic that internally seized Midoriya. Instead he jerked his head to motion into the hallway, where Midoriya was first starting to notice the sounds of men laughing. "Put your contacts in. We have guests."

Midoriya immediately felt a surge of curiosity and fear go through him. He grabbed his left hand with his right, gently cradling it to hide the trembling of his hands as he slipped out of bed. Hisashi scrutinized him for a second before speaking again.

"I change my mind. Take a shower and then get dressed into something reasonable. They're gonna be here for a while." His tone, which was firm but gentle, turned into a hiss. "But don't you dare forget the contacts."

Midoriya nodded quickly, shuffling into the bathroom in the hallway and locking the door behind him as Hisashi walked down the staircase. It took him a few moments of fumbling with the knobs before he could get the water the right temperature, but he eventually got it right. He didn't dare take long, even if Hisashi said that the guests were going to stay for a while.

And then came the contacts.

"Izuku?"

*It was Hisashi, with his gentle smile and his welcoming eyes. He grabbed him by the waist, pulling him closer. "Daddy got you a present."*

*He felt his lower lip quiver as he stared at the small box. "What's the present?" he asked, quiet and scared and in a voice so small Hisashi could barely hear him even though they were right beside one another.*
The man smiled, and his eyes practically glowed. "Something very, very special," he promised. He nudged the wooden box, a deep brown that had worn edges and was smooth from years of use, into the boy's small hands. He took it, and with careful guidance from Hisashi, he opened the lid.

He was confused by what he saw.

"Why are there eyes looking back at me?" he whispered, but he had a deep, sinking feeling that he knew what they were.

"They're called contacts, baby," Hisashi replied, pulling one of them out of the silk confines. "They're colored ones, specifically made just for you." He placed it in his free palm. "They look just like your mother's, don't they?"

He nodded, unsure of what he was supposed to do with these Inko-colored eyes.

"You put these on your eyes," he explained, ignoring the way he seemed to flinch and stared at him. "They don't hurt, but they feel a little weird. Though, you'll get used to them in time, I promise you that." He plucked the contact from his hand and placed it back into the box before closing the lid. He took his smaller hands and wrapped them around the box, which he then covered with his larger, warmer hands.

He never felt more intimidated in his life as Hisashi smiled adoringly at him.

"Whenever someone comes over, you can wear those, all right? That way when people look at you they'll go, "Hey, look at that kid, doesn't he look just like his sweet mother?" They'll love you if you wear them." When he didn't receive any feedback from the silent eight-year-old, who was still staring at the box wearily, his grip on his hands tightened considerably. His voice remained sweet as the spoke, but his tone hid venomous snakes and poisoned apples waiting to be fed and preyyed on. "Right, Izuku? They'll love you, won't they?"

He let out a small whimper before nodding.

Hisashi chuckled before ruffling his hair.

"You're so cute, Izuku."

He didn't want to wear them. He practiced using and wearing the contacts for days, for weeks, just to get comfortable with using them. He forced himself to use them for a few hours a couple times a week, but he hated it. He hated seeing green eyes in the mirror compared to his natural eye color. It was like Hisashi was trying to form him into someone else, and he wanted nothing to do with those physical changes that distracted him from who he was.

(That was a lie—seeing himself in a different way in the mirror made him feel almost giddy, and that terrified him more than anything else.)

He took in a few deep breaths before opening the small wooden box that laid innocently on the desk he fell asleep on that morning. Taking the left one of the pair first, he pressed the contact along his eye. It took a couple tries but he ultimately succeeded, and he managed to get the right one in within one go.

He stared at himself in the small mirror that sat across his bed.

He looked just like Inko.

He made his way downstairs shortly afterward, suddenly feeling self-conscious about his
appearance. He was wearing small cargo shorts and a simple white t-shirt, and he eventually decided
to grab a hoodie two sizes too big (it enveloped him like a warm hug) last minute. He brought a hand
up to the right side of his neck, the tips of his fingers ghosting over the marred and bumpy skin. The
nerves had been damaged severely, so he couldn't feel the fingers on his neck, but that didn't make
much a difference in his life. He had it for a long time, and it didn't really bother him anymore.

But he couldn't say the same about it while he was participating in social activities.

Keeping his hand glued to his neck, he peered around the bottom of the staircase, the full blast of the
raucous laughter hitting him. He wanted to shrink into himself by instinct, but Hisashi had already
made eye contact with him and curling up on the floor like a cat was probably the worst thing for
him to do at this moment. The man himself shot a charismatic smile to the man beside him before
standing up, instantly appearing at his side. His hand was gentle on his back, welcoming in all sense
of the word, though he gently peeled his own hand from his neck.

"Don't be shy," he whispered in Midoriya's ear. He carefully pushed him forward to the men and
women at the table, who each already had a bit of alcohol in their systems.

"Eh, who's this cutie, Midoriya-san?" the only woman there drawled, her lips curled into a gentle
smile. She was looking attentively at him, and he froze, wondering if he was supposed to speak. It
took him a second to realize that she was speaking to Hisashi.

"Izuku," said man responded. He pushed Midoriya even further into the spotlight, and he hunched
his shoulders. "He's my son."

There was a gasp of utter delight from the woman, who immediately stepped out of her chair to stand
across from Midoriya. She took his hands into her own as she crouched so they were eye level.
(Midoriya didn't like to admit it, but he was small, and she was a giant in comparison. She had to be,
at the very least, a foot taller than Hisashi, and he was tall enough as it was.)

"You're such a precious Schätzchen," she cooed. She kissed the top of his head before turning to
Hisashi. "You've raised him so well."

Midoriya didn't know what to think about that. Hisashi wasn't around that often, and he rarely told
him anything except that he had to stand still and let people do whatever they wanted with him
unless Hisashi said otherwise. Was there something he was missing?

Hisashi seemed to get it though, and he chuckled as he placed a hand on his head. Midoriya looked
up at him, blinking his wide eyes as he nervously grabbed onto Hisashi's pant leg. He didn't do much
more than that, even as much as he wanted to hide behind him, and he knew that he was already
pushing his luck as it was. But Hisashi didn't seem to mind at all, and just seemed to soak up with
attention and squeals that accompanied such action.

It was then that he noticed that he recognized these voices. He had seen these people before, heard
them, but he never got to meet them. Then again, they were usually whispering in hushed voices and
serious tones, not drinking and having fun. Perhaps something good had happened, and Hisashi
decided that now was a good time as ever for his colleagues to meet him?

He was so lost in thought, he didn't notice that everyone got up from their spots and were chatting
happily with Hisashi. He glanced to each of their faces, taking in their loopy smiles and slurred
words as they expressed themselves heavily. Their scars were out in the open for the world to see,
and Midoriya's eyes were glued to each and every one of them, the puzzle starting to piece together
for him.
They had gotten into quite a few fights. And partying?

Midoriya remembered the riot that had just taken place not too far from here. He remembered the news articles warning people to be careful of any high-ranked criminals that were trying to start up trouble. He remembered a police officer saying in an interview that the uprising wasn't just a coincidence, and that there were people pulling the strings in the background.

He remembered All Might punching a man with a deep purple mask in the face.

The man standing next to Hisashi had a dark bruise forming in the exact same spot.

He paled.

Suddenly, there was a hand on his shoulder. He instinctively flinched, his grip tightening on Hisashi's pants as he whipped around to face the owner of the hand. It was a male with bright, pale eyes and dark skin. He was attractive and a little older than Hisashi, it seemed, though not by much.

Midoriya didn't like it. He didn't like him.

The man, whose name he would later find out was Disaya, trailed his fingers against the damaged side of his neck, mumbling quietly. "That's quiet the scar you have, Izuku." He seemed deep in thought as his hands wandered, gentle cupping his face and running the pad of his thumb over his cheekbone. "And freckles, too," he mused to himself.

He was being too soft. He was being too ambitious. Midoriya didn't like the way that the man was touching him and inspecting him, almost as if he was a small mouse being stalked by a snake. The man's hand moved away from his face to the collar of his jacket, and he shuddered as the male reached his fingers underneath the warm layer and his shirt. His fingers were cold as ice, like metal that had yet to encounter any warmth. His grip on the fabric of Hisashi's pants tightened even further as he froze. He scrunched his eyes shut as memories started to overcome him of deep chuckles and whispers of you're alright, echo, you're alright, you're alright, you're alright, I'll take care of you, and he felt himself shudder.

The hand was suddenly gone, and Midoriya peeked his eyes open to find that Hisashi was no longer smiling. All conversation ceased as everyone stared at the attractive man. Hisashi's yellow eyes were staring at the man's, his mouth set into a firm line.

Silence followed, and for a tense ten seconds no one said anything. The gigantic woman took his arm and brought him to her chest as she stepped away from the two men. The man with the bruise on his face brought his hand to his waist, and Midoriya realized with wide eyes and a jump that he had a holster on his belt.

The dark black sheen of a gun caught the light as he stared at it. He was sure that his face was ashen white as Hisashi spoke up.

His voice was quiet.

"What did you think you were doing?"

Disaya flinched as Hisashi clenched his wrist harder. His smile was awkward and wobbly at best as he spoke up. "Just admiring."

Hisashi's throat gained an orange hue as he growled. Small sparks erupted from between his lips, and a deep orange-red infiltrated his yellow irises. "Admiring," he repeated. "You decided to admire my son like an object."
Disaya spluttered and tried to come up with some excuse, but the hatred that oozed from Hisashi’s pores was unrelenting. Midoriya made a small noise of fear at the man who called himself his father, and he buried himself deeper into the woman's giant form. Sure, Disaya wasn't someone he recognized as well as the others, but Hisashi had still known him for at least a year.

Hisashi would turn on someone who he had been close allies with for over a year if it meant shielding him.

Midoriya didn't know what to think of that.

=====

They locked him in the basement.

Midoriya liked to hang out with all the other men and women—or woman, for that matter—and though they were a little scary at first, they were nice. But the threatening aura they held around themselves and the hint of alcohol that was in their breaths and on their clothes was enough for him to be wary.

The worst of it was when they decided to finally get to work, however. Hisashi gently sat him down on one of their couches, a few rooms away from the entrance to the basement. Midoriya was never allowed down there, but he really didn't mind. It was creepy enough to keep him from doing any exploring.

Now he was starting to realize why they prohibited him from it in the first place.

He and the female giant were watching TV. She had one of her large hands on his back as he tried to finish his portfolio on a new hero debut around two days ago. She seemed to take a deep interest in his notes, and when he asked her why she said, "You're going to grow up to be someone one day."

He didn't understand, exactly. His mind was still frazzled from hearing the tortured screams of the man below. After almost ten minutes of the same horrid sound, he was shaking like a leaf. He could barely still his hand enough to continue his notes on a hero named Present Mic (he had finally finished the other hero's who he was supposed to do long before he got distracted) whose radio show was just starting to hit a peak in its popularity.

A particularly bad cry for help shot through the tense atmosphere, and Midoriya actually jumped and twisted his head around. His notebook and pencil hit the floor as he shuddered, holding his arms around his body. He couldn't take it anymore, couldn't take the screams for help. He wanted to help, he wanted to save the man that was suffering even if he did something wrong. He wanted the pain to stop.

There were tears in his eyes as he took in a deep, shuddering breath. The woman from before (he was pretty sure she was German, now that he thought about it) grabbed his forearm and pulled him back onto the couch. She ran a hand through his hair and pulled him closer. "Shh, shh," she said as she wrapped her large arms around him. He was curled into a tight ball, arms around his folded legs as he tried to escape the horrific reality that was happening just a little bit away. "Don't worry, everything's going to be fine, Kindlein."

*Everything’s going to be fine, echo, don't worry. I'll be here to protect you.*

It wasn't.

He ended up bursting into tears as the minutes trickled on, and the woman pressed her large hands
over his ears and rocked him side to side. He watched through blurry vision as the Number 04. Hero, Best Jeanist, smoothly took out each and every villain on the screen. The reporter on screen was smiling as she spoke golden words about him.

"He's saved so many people!" came the muffled voice from the TV screen.

He's saved so many.

So why can't he save me?

Midoriya felt his chest heave as another wave of sobs broke through.

Why can't any of them save me?

======

He was sleeping on the couch when he heard the voices grow louder. They had been there for a while, just barely buzzing at the edge of his hearing. His contacts were sitting on the coffee table not too far away, and the television had been cut a while ago, as had the screams, leaving Midoriya with nothing to do but fall into a fitful sleep. As footsteps neared him, he shot up, but a large hand on his back gently pushed him right back down.

Hisashi, he realized. It was Hisashi.

Everyone else was either out of range or had left, but all that Midoriya knew was that they couldn't help him now.

Shaking underneath Hisashi's steady palm, he let out a small whimper as Hisashi brought a hand to the side of his face. "You've been crying," he noted quietly, touching the skin where tear tracks remained.

Don't touch me, is what he wanted to say, but all he could force out was a small, choked whine. There was blood on Hisashi's face, and on his clothes, and on his wrists, and on his neck, and there was so much of it get away from him—

There was a groaning sound from the ground in front of him, and he flinched. It sounded so familiar, and the sinking feeling in his gut sent a tumble of memories flooding back to him. Hisashi made a motion with his hands, but Midoriya couldn't tell what he meant. He squeezed his eyes shut as tears threatened to leak out of his eyes.

"Give it to him," Hisashi ended up growling to the man on the floor. "Give it to him, Disaya."

The man on the floor hesitated, and Hisashi kicked him in his stomach. Disaya yelped and went into a coughing fit as he shakily got on his hands and knees. Hisashi held Midoriya down by his hip with one hand as he forced one of his arms out. The limb was shaking as the tortured man grabbed his outstretched hand.

Midoriya's vision turned white.

He didn't scream. Pain had been a faint memory for him his whole life.

But it hurt so, so badly.

"What are you doing!? He doesn't belong here—"

"He gave you everything—"
"This child will be our downfall—"

"This is what happened. You're only alive to—"

"You look nothing like him, don't listen to them—"

"Vas a estar bien, mi eco pequeño."

He found himself sitting on a bench. A small breeze gently tugged at his hair. The bench was mostly overgrown with vines, but it escaped the heat and scorching rays of the sun by sitting under the canopy of leaves of the tree. The small height he was given allowed him the view over the small beach below. The glistening waters calmly rose and fell along the sand.

Prevent it, prevent it, prevent it, prevent it, preventit, preventit, preventit, preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit preventit—

"You have to save them."

Flashes of fire and flames cross his mind, burning his skin and making his eyes water.

He was probably there for hours, not that he minded. Clouds slowly formed over the sea, one after the other until the entire sky was covered in a light gray. He watched as the calm breeze grew stronger into harsh winds, and then as lightning started to dance between points in the sky. Thunder rolled against the harsh waves of the sea and echoed up to his perch.

As large droplets started to fall and hit the leaves of his canopy, lightning began to strike closer and closer. A part of him was terrified, but another part of him welcomed it. Puddles formed at his feet, the water rippling as it grew bigger. He watched silently, shoulders hunched, as the beach was swallowed by bigger and bigger waves.

A large flash of light swallowed his vision for a moment as a boom rang in his ears. The lightning's getting closer, closer, closer—

He felt his toes grow cold, and he looked down to see that the puddle reached his feet. He flinched as he saw his marred reflection staring back at him. His eyes bore into him, bright without his contacts.

Lightning flashed again, just briefly, though it was dull. The thunder that accompanied it was muffled. He brought a shaky hand to the side of his neck, watching the skin move and pulsate underneath his fingers. He retracted them immediately as they came into contact, the skin burning the tips of his fingers.

But no, that wasn't right...

He flinched as his neck smarted from his fingers’ touch. They both ached, though it was different for his hands. It felt like they were being heated up continuously, growing hotter and hotter with each passing second. It burned, and he felt his eyes water as his palms started to release waves of heat, turning more orange by the second.

A stray droplet of rain hit his hand, and it hissed before steaming. It provided little relief to the ache in his hands that was growing by the second.

He looked back into his reflection in the puddle, watching as his mirror image faded in and out of view before disappearing altogether. A small lull in the storm followed as he tried to find himself but
Lightning struck the tree beside him, sending a loud clap that sent his hearing into silence except for a faint ringing sound. He jumped up, pushing off the bench with his melting hands, scorching the wood as he tripped over himself and fell. He curled into a tight ball as the ground trembled, the tree falling opposite his direction and rolling down the hill. He smelled burning wood and swamped grass as he trembled. He flinched as another lightning strike hit the bench, and he cried out in shock as splinters flew at him. Getting his hands and feet underneath him, he tried to move only to find them sinking into the dirt. Steam rose as he burned his way further and deeper, trapping himself.

He coughed as he struggled to get himself free. He had to get away, he had to save himself, he had to leave before the lightning struck him too—

A fire burned deeply through him, sending painful shocks against his skin. His palms and feet felt like they were melting as his lungs constricted.

He screamed.

"A high fever," came a gentle voice. "He's sick."

Midoriya recognized it. He couldn't quite place from where, though, but it was real and he needed them to be right by him. Whispers followed their declaration, though he couldn't decipher what they were saying. He caught certain phrases, such as "fever dream" and "screaming", but everything else faded and blurred together. He felt a drop of sweat roll off his neck, and he shuddered as his face grew hot and nausea crawled up his stomach and squeezed it in a strong grip. His throat felt tight, and he worried as his eyelids flickered that he was going to puke.

He managed to swallow the bile that entered his mouth, but the action hurt. His tonsils felt like they were swollen, which were probably the cause of it.

He managed to fall back into a fitful sleep afterward to the sounds of near-silent conversation, surfing between wakefulness and unconsciousness. He wasn't sure how much time had passed; by the time he was coherent enough to comprehend what was happening around him, he had been moved to his bedroom and moonlight poured through his blinds. Groaning softly as he pushed himself up, his thick covers slipped off his shoulder before resting at his waist. He clumsily pulled it down the rest of the way, swinging his legs off the mattress and onto the cool floor. His short height forced him to stretch his legs so he wouldn't fall flat on his face, and he had to grab onto his nightstand to help with his balance.

His legs wobbled as he walked down the hallway, a headache pounding through his head. He was about to head downstairs when he heard voices, and he paused. Straining his ears to hear what was going on, he felt elation go through him as he realized Inko was home.

It turned to dread a second later.

"I told you I wouldn't stand for this," she hissed. "I told you you'd traumatize him. Never again, Hisashi. I'm never dealing with this again."

Midoriya pressed himself against the wall, leaning his weight into the immovable fortification. Did that mean that the torturing would stop? Did that mean Inko was going to stop Hisashi from bringing those terrible people to this house?

By chance or by an unlucky streak, Hisashi looked up at that moment to where he was standing. His
scowl turned into a sugary smile as he waved Midoriya down. "Oh hey, Izuku! Are you finally feeling better?"

Midoriya pursed his lips as he walked downstairs. He nodded, since he probably was feeling better, though he'd be lying if he said that he was feeling okay. Hisashi didn't seem to question his answer though, too concentrated on glaring at Inko. He waved Midoriya over, and though he didn't know why, he listened to the silent command. Once he was in arm's reach, he pulled him forward, squeezing him to his side. Inko, who had been sitting on one of their armchairs, stood up as if to stop him, but she froze as Hisashi glowered at her.

Sending another fake smile to Midoriya, he dropped to one knee so they were around the same height. The man was carrying most of his weight since he was still feeling awful, but he didn't acknowledge it. "Izuku, my son—" Midoriya flinched. "—don't you love me?"

"Love."

Midoriya had heard that word so many times he felt like he could throw up. He instead remained silent until Hisashi's smile cracked and his eyes flickered with orange and his throat glowed and no his hands were burning and the lightning was going to hit him and he would be in so much pain and stop it stop it stop it make it stop—

"Yes," Midoriya blurted out. And then, seeing an indescribable expression cross Inko's face, he added, "I love both of you."

Wrong answer.

Hisashi's eyes turned red. Inko's hands were trembling. A thick silence fell over them, coating every surface and wiggling itself into every crevice available. Hisashi's grip on him loosened before increasing tenfold, the urge for Midoriya to squirm accompanying it. Inko saw this and shot forward, resting a hand on Midoriya's shoulder.

"You should go to bed," she said through clenched teeth, her furious stare locked on Hisashi. Midoriya felt like he would catch on fire if it was aimed at him. "It's late."

Hisashi glowered right back at her before releasing Midoriya. "Yes," he growled. "She's right. It was your bedtime a long while ago."

Midoriya didn't question the sudden, intense hatred that seeped from the two. He turned around and zipped his way back upstairs, crawling into bed.

That was the last time he ever eavesdropped on them.

=====*

He was sitting in Inko's lap, paying half of his attention to the news that playing on the television. (For some reason, his father and all of his colleagues liked to constantly have the news playing, as if they were waiting for something. He wasn't quite sure what.) The other half of his attention was focused on finishing the drawing he started.

Hisashi had left that morning, leaving the two to do as they pleased. It had been a tense week, and school did little to ease the painful knot in his chest. (He was enrolled into a private school not too far away two years ago, around a year after being in Inko's care. However, Hisashi was odd about him being there—he was absent almost as many days as he was present, which led to a lot of questions from his teachers and the principal. They had long grown used to setting aside a set of notes for him to learn from, though, and they didn't seem to mind as much since he always brought back
assignments before or when they were due. Sure, it was a little bit of a hassle to deal with at times, the principal learned the hard way that Hisashi and his "son" weren't to be questioned or messed with.)

Midoriya wished he could go outside and do something, even if it was as little as laying in the grass or making snow angels. Hisashi made it clear that he wasn't allowed to, however, and the last thing that he wanted was for him to get mad. (Oh, but how he wished to go and play with the other kids. The kid with the blonde hair and the red eyes seemed mean, but maybe it was a facade. Maybe they could be friends too. All the students at his school ignored him or purposely avoided being around him, and he was lonely, so so lonely.)

He stretched his sore fingers as he switched his pencil from one side to the other. He started shading the picture, careful to make sure he didn't smear anything. Inko continued to run her hand through his hair as she hummed to herself. Midoriya was happy with the contact, glad that she wasn't as hesitant and skittish when it came to physical touch.

When he finally finished the picture, he turned and showed it to her. Her eyes, heavy with sorrow, lightened as she saw it. "It looks amazing, Izuku," she said softly. "I love it."

Midoriya tried not to flinch as she said the word. It sounded too wrong. He looked back at the picture to distract himself. Sure, it wasn't his best work—landscapes weren't his forte—but he hadn't thought that it would look as good as it did when he first started.

Inko smiled and kissed his forehead. "You should add yourself to the picture," she whispered teasingly to him, as if she was sharing a funny secret.

Midoriya blinked. "Why's that?"

Inko giggled as she tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. "Because you'll be out there too one day."

Midoriya looked back to the picture, imagining himself leaving behind footprints in the snow. He imagined the cold, fluffy substance that would melt in his hands. Maybe he could build a snowman, and give him stick arms and a carrot nose with buttons for eyes. Or maybe he could make a snow angel.

Someday, maybe.

He was brought back to real life as a loud bang came from the television. Inko reached for the remote to mute it, but Midoriya was concentrated on something else.

All Might.

In all his glory he stood, fierce with a calming smile weak weak, weakened by him, weakened by him, weakened as he saved the day once more. He didn't waste a single moment to save all the civilians in the park and defeat the villain who was shaking in his boots because he knew that he was screwed.

"Inko?" It was him that asked that, he realized too late.

"Hm?" Her arms wrapped around him loosely, her chin resting on his head. "Something the matter?"

He hesitated. "Do you think I can help people someday?"

Inko fell silent. She pulled herself away from him to look him in the eye. The small spark in her eyes
sputtered and disappeared. Her lips pursed before she abruptly stood.

"Inko—" Midoriya started, only to get cut off by the woman in question.

"It's time for bed, Izuku."

Midoriya frowned. "But Inko—"

"No buts," she snapped, and Midoriya reeled back. All of his complaints died on his tongue as he remembered what position he was in. He ducked his head as he quickly walked behind her, letting her lead him to his bedroom. He still hadn't had his shower or brushed his teeth either, and he felt totally unprepared as she shut the door behind him. He sighed, a deep feeling of misery blooming somewhere close to his heart.

He ended up staying up most of the night watching a few documentaries on the beginnings of quirks and about the Underground to distract himself, a platform where horrific villains roamed and schemed.

The Underground.

Every bit of what he heard stuck with him. It was fascinating, without a doubt, and he recorded what stood out to him and what he already knew about several underground heroes. A part of him wondered if he would ever get to meet one, and then a thought hit him. He blinked as the urge to suddenly search up a specific person's hero name shot through him. He didn't, and instead forced himself to finish that stupid European History course (with so many distractions and setbacks, it took him that long to catch up.)

By the time he finally slept and woke up again, it was ten in the morning and the house was very, very quiet.

He walked down to Inko's and Hisashi's bedroom. The bed was empty, signalling to him that Hisashi was still doing business. But... Inko?

He walked downstairs, roaming every room. Fear gripped him as he moved faster and faster.

"Inko?" he called. He pursed his lips as he moved to the living room, looking for their home phone. He noticed as he walked past their coffee table that his drawing was gone, though he was pretty sure he left it there last night. He punched in Inko's number when he finally found the phone and waited for the rings to sound, but...

"I'm sorry, this phone number has been disabled at this time. Please call again another time. If you would like to leave a message—"

Midoriya hung up.

"Inko?" he called out again, though silence was the only thing that greeted him in return.

Something was wrong, terribly wrong. Inko would never leave if Hisashi was already gone. So why?...

"I told you I wouldn't stand for this. I told you you'd traumatize him. Never again, Hisashi. I'm never dealing with this again."

"Mom?" he whispered.
Silence.

He'd wait another day for her to come back. Hisashi had arrived home by then. He asked him where
Inko was, but he didn't have an answer. Hisashi cussed, muttering angrily about how one of their
cars was gone. Midoriya flinched at every movement that Hisashi made toward him.

He waited for her yet another day. And then two. And then four.

And then a week.

And then a month.

He waited a long, long time for her to come back to their almost-home.

(She never did.)

=====

He wore his contacts more often after that. He got used to seeing viridian green eyes staring back at
him in the mirror.

=====

Some days he forgot they weren't his at all.

Chapter End Notes

Hey, so this is a note coming from me way after this was written. (I think I'm on chapter
seventeen, at this point.) The fact of the matter is, I just wanted to apologize to all of you
who may be confused or whatever, but I'm not the kind of author who reveals
everything in one chapter. So if you're confused about his quirk, what happened to him,
etc., then you're going to have to be patient. I apologize sincerely.

I also want to be blatantly honest with you—it is not possible for me to develop
everything in one or two chapters. It has taken me a very, very long time and many
chapters. Now, I'm not saying that it takes forever to get to the point (because it doesn't
—I just have a lot of material to work with), but please stop leaving comments where
you say "I'm confused???" unless if it's not about what his quirk is and you legitimately
don't understand what the heck my word vomit was trying to say. It can get kind of
discouraging when I get notifications of people saying this when they're only on the first
chapter. If this isn't your type of story, I encourage you to kindly take your leave,
because it does affect me too. (And sorry if I sound mean, I really don't mean to be.
Maybe I'm just being too sensitive about these comments.)

But if you are willing to continue reading, I wish you the best of luck. And those who
left, thank you for at least trying this out!
- Owl
Slivers of Dawn

Chapter Notes

Readers: Hey, the first chapter was really good!
Me: Well, now I have to spend several sleepless nights working on the second chapter.
*Finishes it.*
Me: Welp. This isn't nearly as good as the first.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Midoriya was cradling his left hand, keeping it close to his chest as he struggled to bring his chest to the ground. He was a couple inches off, and though it was better progress than the previous month, he was still frustrated with himself. Mumbling quietly to himself, he face-planted himself, attempting to close the last bit of distance, only to find that his back curved on instinct.

Dang it.

He tried to straighten his back but was met with a sting of pain that reminded him to be patient. It was already great that he was flexible enough to do the splits both ways. So what if he couldn't bring his chest to the ground while doing said action?

But he couldn't help the pang of disappointment that welled through him. He wasn't making progress as quickly as he would have liked. He had been working on his flexibility for almost two years now, and though he would get distracted at times, he was still persistent in at least making progress. He sighed as he pushed himself back up after a minute of contemplating life (you know, wondering if forty-two truly was the answer, as usual.)

Off to the side, his old laptop (which was on the cusp of dying for good, mind you) was quietly playing the news for him to listen to. It was habit to keep it on low volume, even if Hisashi wasn't home. The man liked his peace and often would grow irritated if even the smallest creak interrupted his concentration. Midoriya didn't really know how to feel about the constant silence that stuffed the house, but it was better than Hisashi's flames, that was for sure.

He glanced over to the computer's screen, which was covered in dust particles that he was sure he'd wiped away just ten minutes ago. Small rays of sunshine filtered into his room, and he watched out his window as several birds with white underbellies and light grey feathers flew across the sky without a care in the world.

Oh, how he wished he could fly. He sighed again as he rolled onto his back, staring at the smooth surface of the ceiling in his room. Part of him wanted nothing than to take a nap, but another part of him reminded him that he wasn't tired at all and that it would serve to do nothing but make him grumpy and mess his sleep schedule up. (Internally, he asked himself what sleep schedule, since it didn't seem to exist at the moment.)

He rubbed his eyes tiredly and reached out for his notebook blindly, hands roaming until he managed to find it. He pulled himself up into a sitting position as he opened the cover, flipping through the
pages until he found an empty one through squinted eyes. It was nearing the back, he noted, and he realized he was going to have to start a new one soon.

Which meant another entry on Hisashi.

It was routine, really. Every new notebook he started, the first entry was Hisashi. It was easier than trying to cram all the information he gathered into his first and second notebook. He frowned as he realized that he wasn’t any more knowledgeable about Hisashi than he was when he first started the notebook in his hands. He was a little at a standstill at the moment. A part of him was discontented at his lack of progress, while another part of him tried to encourage himself. He had only started this notebook a couple weeks ago, and he just happened to fill it up really quickly because there was more going on at the moment.

And yet a faint bubbling insecurity hissed underneath his skin as he stared at his journal in melancholy silence. He was being unreasonable, he knew that, but it didn't help how despondent he felt. You can save them, you can save them whispered in his ear, though he wasn't sure just how true that was.

He closed his eyes and waited for the moment to pass, taking in a shuddering breath.

"—olice finally have a lead on the group that has been causing troubles under the radar for years now. Several large groups of high-ranked heroes, including the Number 01. Hero All Might and Number 02. Hero Endeavor, have jumped on the chance to finally defeat this organization of villains. Fierce battles have been fought today, and several will follow. As a warning to everyone, please be careful and wary, and please stay out of the crossfire."

Midoriya's eyes cracked open as he glanced over to his laptop. They narrowed, and all exhaustion and tiredness disappeared as he shot up and threw his notebook to the side. He scrambled to get closer to the electronic device, and he turned up the volume just slightly so he could hear it better.

He watched as a rerun of the events that happened just a few hours ago (how had Midoriya not noticed sooner?) was played on the screen. A hero, one that Midoriya recognized as Alienation, trapped two men who had little experience with his mental wavelengths, freezing them to the spot. There was another video, one with a woman called Fiendash and her companion—Colonel Sparrow—as they stood back-to-back, surrounded by eight different villains. (The former had a smirk on, her sharp canines on full display as a smokescreen started to ooze from the openings of her costume; Colonel Sparrow's expression was nothing short of blank as his blind eyes wandered to the figures around him, his lethally sharp talons on full display as his suit flickered ominously.) It was followed by a scene with the Nineteenth Grain, (their organic body constantly rebuilding themselves as they decimated groups of people), Monolith (who constructed huge pillars to form her arms and legs as she threw people into the sides of buildings and far away), and Gymnast (who could control his center of gravity to the point where he could never trip or become unbalanced enough to fall.) Then followed Sequence, who could take any word written and transfer it into real life under his command. (No, that did not mean that he could summon another All Might. He could summon, however, the words All Might to strangle someone. It was a little awkward to be squashed by the literal word little, though it had happened once.)

Midoriya watched as clip after clip was shown, and he was barely able to comprehend the words that accompanied it.

"The alliance continues to fight back, but we are pushing them back. As of today, one of the biggest figures of the organization, Horror's Dove, has been captured and is going through interrogation at this moment.” A picture of a man with a purple mask and a holster at his belt was put on the screen. His pale blue hair was pulled into a low ponytail as his light gray eyes and navy blue irises peered
behind the openings of his cover. "As you know, this man faced off against All Might several months ago, escaping with nothing short of a few scratches, even as the No. 1 Hero used his full power. From what blood testing has told us, his quirk allows him to transfer his injuries and pain to any doves he is linked to, hence his code name. Of course, there are only so many doves you can have, and so the fight was cut short by Horror's Dove's escape. However, his capture shows us this organization isn't as indestructible as it seems. As All Might says himself, do not fear: we will reach the end of this group's reign of terror."

Midoriya simply stared at his computer screen as it shut off, completely out of battery. He didn't make any move to plug it into its charger, however, and sat there in loss.

He thought about the man with his hand by his waist as he stared down Disaya, the man who "admired" him, a dark bruise forming along his jaw. He thought about the giant woman who held him carefully to her chest as she whispered gentle words to him.

Why can't any of them save me? he had thought.

He bit his lower lip.

Could they... could they...?

He thought about Inko's face after he asked her if he could help her. He remembered how the light in her eyes died and buried itself deep under years of sorrow.

He realized, belatedly, that even if Hisashi was gone and he didn't have to be with them anymore, he still wouldn't be saved.

Hisashi was the least of his problems.

He sighed and opened his notebook, flipping back to the page where Horror's Dove's description was. He rested his chin in his hand as he added details about his quirk and fixed his status.

It was just one more disappointment, he supposed.

======

"Another day has passed, and another battle fought. However, we are nearing the end. Finally, after years of searching, the police have figured out the name of this organization's leader.

"He goes by Ignition."

Midoriya felt his stomach sink so, so low until he felt like he could float away.

======

It wasn't something he liked to think about, really. But it was there, and he knew it was always there. Actually using it was a totally different story, something that he never thought would happen.

It was a backpack. Simple as that.

Except, not so simple in context.

He remembered Hisashi always demanding he had it, ready to go. Hidden in his closet, ready to be used.

And it was being used.
It held spare chargers, several pairs of clothes, some dry snacks that wouldn't go stale, several books (and journals) he hadn't yet touched to entertain him, and all his previous notebooks that he had already filled to the brim with hero and... other analysis.

Simple as that.

Except it wasn't.

Hisashi knew where it was. He checked up on it periodically. As Midoriya grew, he swapped the contents, too.

But he never thought he would ever use it.

Hisashi and him were cooking dinner, and though he was eleven and probably shouldn't have been trusted with burning pots and boiling water and knives to chop up food, Hisashi showed him how to use them and let him do it anyway. There weren't any accidents, which Midoriya was thankful for, but something seemed odd about the entire thing. Sure, Hisashi wasn't one for cooking or anything, but he was okay at it and told Midoriya that he was going to cook for the two of them for a while now.

So it was a little odd for Hisashi to try and teach him the past week or so. And it was also a little odd for Hisashi to sneak into his room late at night and add two recipe books into that backpack when he thought he was sleeping. Not that he minded, really—he knew that a warm meal was something not to be taken granted for, and being taught how to cook wasn't really that bad. Odd, but not bad.

But odd.

Very, very odd.

Midoriya frowned as Hisashi asked him to go wash his hands. Also something he knew not to take for granted—running water. But still, it was an odd request. Hisashi wasn't usually this picky, and he had just watched Midoriya wash his hands right before they started cooking. Of course, he'd rather do as the man said and take but a minute to do so rather than get on his bad side. That was something he really, really didn't want.

Midoriya padded back to the dining room to find that Hisashi had also poured him a glass of... juice.

Warning bells rang through him. *Don't trust him,* something deep inside him said. *Flee, run, don't trust him, get away—*

Hisashi gestured to the seat across from him, smiling gently. "Sit."

*Don't trust him, don't trust him, don't trust him—*

Midoriya slowly sat across from him. He could feel Hisashi's eyes burning into him as he picked up his chopsticks and started to eat. Hisashi wasn't eating, he noticed, and he had half a mind to ask him why. However, he kept his mouth shut and continued making his way through his meal.

But something was wrong. His conscience continuously nagged at him, and his hands' shaking got worse as he ate more and more. *Anxiety,* his mind supplied. His grip on his chopsticks slipped, and they clattered into his plate. He flinched at the noise, immediately trying to recover himself. Hisashi's hand was on his a moment later. His smile was so gentle, as was his hands, and *no no nonononononono please no not again not again please I swear, I'll listen this time, I'll listen this time—*
"It's okay," Hisashi said as he rubbed his hand. "You don't have to eat anymore. You don't usually eat this much anyway." He tilted his head to the side before standing up, his plate and food untouched. He pulled Midoriya toward the living room, snatching the cup of juice off the table and bringing it with him last second. He placed it on the coffee table in front of Midoriya before sitting next to the trembling boy, leaning back on the couch.

This is wrong, Midoriya couldn't help but think as Hisashi grabbed the remote and turned the TV on. Instead of watching the news, however, as he always did, he turned it to a cooking show. This is wrong. He glanced at Hisashi whose face was illuminated by the light coming from the television screen. His throat felt dry, and he (hesitantly) reached for the glass in front of him to take a sip of the drink. It alleviated some of the pain, at least.

This is wrong.

Hisashi's arm wrapped around the back of his couch and around his shoulders. It made Midoriya flinch as the feeling of being trapped escalated, but he breathed through his anxiety and pretended he wasn't feeling like crap. He blinked away his exhaustion as he tried to settle his spiraling thoughts.

Horror's Dove and Hisashi got along incredibly well.

This is wrong.

They were incredibly good friends.

So why?

Why?

He goes by Ignition.

He blinked slowly again as the television's sounds became white noise. His gaze flitted at his surroundings. Something felt... off.

He rubbed his eyes as a sudden wave of fatigue hit him. He takes a large gulp from his drink and sets the glass between his legs. The juice was supposed to help with energy, so why was he so...

So...

Shit.

He slammed the cup down on the table, infuriated with himself. Hisashi made the drink, he put a drug in it, that's why he brought it over, that's why he wanted you to drink it—

He was so stupid. He was so, so stupid. He should have known to let his guard down, he knew better, so why was he so stupid?

Hisashi is immediately there, holding him close to his chest. "What's the matter, Izuku?" he murmured into his hair as he kissed the top of his head.

Midoriya didn't answer. He didn't want to. Instead, he narrowed his eyes and tried to fight back the sleepy haze that was threatening to take over him. He hadn't finished the entire drink, so he was fine. He could just bear through it until the effects wore off. That was it. Simple as could be.

Yeah, he was fine.

He was...
He was...

He...

*Echo, hm? How cute. It fits you so well.*

=====

"I-I... no. No, I c-can't. I... Not you too. I can't let you become him. I can't. I can't. I'm sorry, I'm so... I'm s-so s-s-sorry."

Crying. He was lost.

"Wha-what's wrong? What did I do wro—"

"No!" She tripped and caught herself on a counter, and a container left on the surface rattled. It should have been put away hours ago. "No, no, no!" She grabbed it in a fit of tears and deep sobs and threw it at him. He twisted to his side, as if to protect himself, but the contents inside the container were little to none, and it only hit the side of his neck.

*It only hit the side of his neck.*

*It only...*

She lit a flame.

"I'm so, so sorry."

Kerosene, read the sticker on the container.

=====

She left him to die.

She left him to *burn.*

=====

Sometimes he wished he did.

=====

His vision was blurry, and he couldn't make out many details when consciousness started to leak back into his slumbering form. His let out a breathy groan as he tried to adjust himself, and he hissed quietly when he was bumped upward for a moment.

*What...?*

Faint flashes of light passed through the open windows in the back. He blinked as he recognized the inside of a car, Hisashi's to be specific, and he curled tighter into himself as cold air rushed into the car, undeterred without the windows rolled up. He had been sleeping along the back seats, and his emergency backpack rested not too far from his feet.

He blinked again as his exhaustion spiked, and he tried to push himself up. It didn't work very well—the medication was still in full force, and he found himself collapsing back into the leather as his vision swam. He couldn't have been awake for more than a minute before he passed out again.
So short, in fact, that he didn't remember it when he woke up again, placed carefully and lovingly underneath warm fluffy covers with an equally comfortable mattress. It came with watery eyes and a choked sob as he tried to ease the phantom pain that gripped the side of his neck with vigor, and he tried to massage the pain away with shaking fingers. There was a small clock on the wall opposite that ticked away in the background until Midoriya noticed it, and he shivered as he took in what time it was.

Two thirty-seven. Probably in the morning, since it seemed to be dark out.

He had no idea where he was, though memories of the previous night (was it the previous night?) came to him in shifts until it struck him that he was in a foreign place in who-knew-where without any idea of why or how or when. It took him a second to will himself to get out of bed, but he managed to successfully without falling over. (It was an achievement, really. He felt like he could transform into a zombie and there wouldn't be any difference.)

He hesitated when he reached the closed door, but he pushed through and twisted the doorknob carefully. The door unlatched at the movement, and it slowly creaked open. He slipped through the small opening and found himself in a short hallway. It wasn't that long compared to his hom—house, and as he explored, he found that the entire thing was simply more small and quaint.

It was... refreshing, almost. More homey. Less intimidating.

It took him a couple minutes of trying to absorb all of the information surrounding him to spot his backpack and a note lying right beside it. Of course, the small island was tall, and he was short, so he was forced to climb on top of it. He hoped that Hisashi wasn't around. He'd kill him if he saw him like this.

The note was simple. Short(ish). Sweet.

I made Midoriya want to puke.

I'm afraid that Daddy has to go. But don't worry, I've set up everything so all the bills are paid for and you don't have to worry about any expenses. There's also a card in the box off to the side that holds a phone and a credit card already set up for you. Be wise with what you do. I already left a letter with your neighbor, and she'll help take care of you. Just try not to be so conspicuous around her, okay?

Love,
Dad

Pure panic settled in as a drop of sweat rolled down the side of his face. He immediately dropped down from the counter (and he stuck the landing, surprisingly) before scrambling out of what he assumed was the front door. He was greeted with a floor of other apartments beside his. Judging by his surroundings, he was around the second to third floor up. The town was unfamiliar, and judging by how much time had passed, he was definitely a ways away from where he was living before (though he couldn't tell just how much since he was never let outside.)

Terror struck him repeatedly as he looked down the hallways. No letter was visible.

He cursed outwardly in English, which sounded alien on his tongue. Hisashi didn't say which neighbor it was, but he took a gamble and moved to the left, peering under the crack of the door. And then the next one, and then the next one. And then he backtracked, and he moved to the right,
and he was two doors down when he found it.

A shadow underneath the sliver of what was visible to him.

One part of him, far back into the recesses of his mind, noted that it was going to be extremely cold in the winter, and he would have to watch out for any stray bugs trying to crawl under the crack of his door to escape the chill or heat. *Be careful of anything that might be poisonous*, a friendly, soft voice reminded him. *Maybe you should put something there to prevent it from happening in the first place.*

Midoriya, for the most part, ignored it as he reached his thin fingers underneath the door and snatched the letter back out. (His knuckles caught on it several times before he managed to get it out, and he was sure that they would be slightly bruised after. He didn't care. It was nothing. Nothing compared to the burning in his lungs and the tears that dried the minute they escaped his tear ducts. Nothing compared to the dry ache in his vocal cords as he screamed and cried and bawled for help. Nothing compared to the pain of fire digging into the side of his neck, growing and growing and getting hotter and hotter.

At least it was just his neck.)

He looked down at the innocent white envelope, and he pried it open with careful hands. The last thing he wanted was to rip it open only to find that it was the wrong thing. He pulled out the letter and was relieved to see Hisashi's handwriting.

He was also disappointed. Afraid. Guilty. He had basically stolen a letter that didn't belong to him. And why shouldn't he receive help from someone else? It wasn't as if they would know the whole truth. Hisashi would have fed the neighbor with white lies and would have guilt-tripped them to no end to help him.

He was good with words, Midoriya found.

And then a memory poked him in the side, one of a woman with metal-infused gloves and knee-high leather boots.

Wavy short hair. A full, blinding smile.

The guilt remained. The disappointment didn't.

=====

When he scuttled back into his quaint little apartment, the first thing he did was burn the two letters. It was a little difficult without a fireplace.

Or anything to actually start a fire.

He organized himself. Found that Hisashi bought quite a few clothes for him and put it in the dresser of his bedroom. He also found a scarf that brought back plenty of repressed memories. It had been crammed into his backpack, the thick blue and green material used to be Horror's Dove before he was captured. He left it behind in their old house.

Huh.

He bought himself some groceries from a small corner store nearby. (And if he nearly had a meltdown spending that much time outside and checking up all his items, no one bothered to single
him out. The cashier gave him a pitying glance when he flinched; it had happened by accident, their hands brushing as he passed over the credit card that was now technically his.) He checked all his recipe books and decided on what he was going to eat that night. And he was endlessly relieved that Hisashi had already stocked the place with all the utensils he needed, because he totally forgot about all of those requirements.

Making dinner was... eventful. It wasn't bad. He didn't burn it, at the very least.

He found a long, plastic stopper that had to be cut to put on the bottom of the door, but it helped. Slightly. Maybe. Hopefully.

Midoriya adapted. It was his job to. But, as his stomach churned, uncomfortable with what it had been given for lunch, he came to the realization that he really wasn't prepared for this.

But that was okay. He would learn along the way.

(He'd look back on it one day and realize that, even as an eleven-year-old, halfway to twelve, relief was nonexistent.)

=====

Later, he'll find his notebook that he almost finished before Hisashi drugged him. He'll be pretty sure that he hadn't left it in his backpack before they moved, though, and when he'll open the cover there'll be a post-it note pasted on the first page.

He will pale and try not to throw up.

Amazing analysis! it will read. I knew you had some talent in you. Keep up the good work!

It'll almost be enough to convince him not to continue that specific analysis. But then he'll remember the saying that has prevailed through so much time since its beginning.

Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.

He'll continue his hero analysis. But the only way to be a hero is to know what makes a villain. And so he fills up the last bit of #8. No "Villain Analysis for the Future." No fancy name. It's safer that way.

And he'll move on to #9. He's only on #5 for hero analysis, and if he'll be honest with himself, he'll have no idea just how he should feel about that.

=====

Midoriya could go outside. It didn't really hit him for a while, and when it did, it terrified him. What would it be like? Would he meet any heroes? Any villains?

It took forty-eight hours of tense, anxious internal debate (and not so internal at times when he tried to yell out all the cons of leaving the apartment for reasons other than what was necessity) before he came to a decision. And it was more-or-less "Okay, I'm going to go out there and not have a panic attack because I also need to find some school to enroll in before break is over; if something strange happens I'll just come right back!"

He was trying to reassure himself. Bait himself, even.

He was halfway out the door when he remembered the scar that covered the one side of his neck. It
faded as it reached his shoulder, though faint marks could still be seen down to his collar bone.

"That's quite the scar there, Izuku."

He remembered the way the stranger, Disaya, had trailed his fingers along his bare skin. He remembered the way he had said that he was admiring him. And yeah, maybe he was just a creep, but that didn't stop him from grabbing Horror's Dove's scarf and wrapping it around his neck for safekeeping. (The fabric was really pretty anyway.)

He closed the door behind him and locked it, though he struggled for a minute to actually accomplish said action. The doors overall seemed out of date with the rest of the apartments; they were cheap, and while the rest of the place wasn't much to begin with, at least it was more functional.

A part of him mused that those in charge of maintaining the apartments probably bought the cheapest doors because they had to continuously replace them, whether that was by the misuse of quirks or crimes that involved knocking the doors off their hinges and demanding payment or ransom. And then, the small rational piece of himself, chided that they were most likely bought because they saved money. Nothing more, nothing less.

He pocketed his keys before pulling out his phone, looking at the different maps he had already set up. He was determined not to search up anything dangerous on his phone that could be tracked or incriminating—because who knew what kind of bugs and viruses Hisashi put in that thing—but he was assured that searching up different local schools nearby and maps wasn't very compromising.

... Did normal eleven-year-old kids worry about this stuff? How was he even supposed to know this stuff? Gosh, he had the human interaction skills of a slug.

No, wait, slugs were miles better than him at this stuff. See, there was one on the pavement right now, just watching its surroundings and fellow biotic organisms that walked past it. All the children and adults that walked a large circle around it made disgusted faces at it, which was certainly more attention than they gave him, another human being.

Wait. The pavement was baking. The poor slug, was it roasting? Oh crap, was he just going to have to let it die? What was he even supposed to do in this situation?

He ended up shooting forward and picking up the poor thing, almost falling over in the process. And yeah, he got a few weird looks. But he didn't care. And sure, the slug's texture had to be the most horrifying thing he'd touched to date, but it was also horrifyingly adorable and what the heck was wrong with him.

The slug liked him though. At least there was that. Because he'd like to have his hands free of slimy creatures, though, he placed the small thing in the folds of his scarf where it could still breathe but wouldn't get burnt to death by the flaming rays of the sun. "No worries, buddy," he whispered to the thing, hoping to any god that can hear him that the slug won't fall out or crawl onto his bare skin. "The sun's out to get me too."

Yeah. He was officially insane.

(Someday, in the far future, he would introduce it to a man that he's known almost his whole life, though the same couldn't be said in reversal. And the man would stare at it. And then a small, eerie chuckle would escape him while he grinned.)

The slug (who he eventually decided to call Juni) accompanied him silently as he made his way through town. He walked through a few parks and decided on his favorites, marking them down on
a notepad he brought with him. He paused at one when he saw three children walking through slowly. The two youngest ones were excited, constantly barraging and dragging around what was obviously their older sister. She had darker hair and wide eyes, and Midoriya had to hold himself steady against a lonely bench as they called "Tsu! Tsu! Look at this, look at this!"

He felt like he could cry. He didn't.

Progress on local schools were a little iffier. He tried his best to judge on the exterior and what he could see inside. He looked at students from the windows and tried to see if any of them looked miserable for reasons beyond just having to go to school. He watched as they left to see if any of them immediately jumped up and cheered or if they grabbed a box of cigarettes the second they were off campus grounds and pulled one out to smoke.

And really, he didn't want to judge a school based on a few individuals and only a few minutes of researching, but it was his only choice. It wasn't as if he could stroll right in and ask to look around the place. He let out a small sigh as he watched a group of kids a few years older talking about drugs (which eliminated that school they came from in a jiffy.) Overall though, most of the schools seemed pretty nice, and though some of them he marked through because he was unhappy with the student body (that he could see of), most of the ones struck through were because of their locations and how extravagant the schools were themselves. It wasn't like he had anything wrong with them, but prestigious schools weren't what he was looking for.

He stopped in front of the school that he had just ruled out, taking in the neatly trimmed bushes out front and the sort of welcoming feel it had. He was half tempted to put it back on the list, but drugs, whether or not they were related to him, were not something he wanted as a part of his life. And he didn't want to get dragged into anything that made him uncomfortable, for that matter...

He was muttering quietly under his breath, not realizing that he wasn't speaking Japanese until a hand came down on his shoulder. He whipped around to face a woman with hallowed-out cheeks and pale gray eyes. She was looking at him pityingly, and her grip tightened on his shoulder. His heart froze in his throat, a cold rush of panic seizing him as he tried to move away from her ever-tightening grasp.

"—you okay? You look a little pale, are you lost—" was what he heard before he jerked away and sprinted, ducking his head as he slinked between people in the crowd walking the opposite way. His chest shuddered as he tried to get the feeling of cold, dead hands on his arms and a splintered smile out of his head. "Why don't we add yours to the collection? It would go so well with the rest of them, and I'm sure my apprentice would be very, very happy..."

He ducked into an alleyway, barely holding his restraint as he puked up what little breakfast he ate that morning. He heaved a few more times, hands over his stomach as his body shook, but nothing came out beyond a few strands of saliva.

He leaned against the cold stone wall next to him, trying to regulate his breathing as he got his act together. He gripped his left hand tightly, holding it close to his chest as if to protect it. It took him a few minutes to compose himself, and his first thought was oh my gosh did Juni get thrown out with how crazy I was running around—?

The answer was no. He found her just where he put her, and he stared at the small creature that barely made up the size of the end of his finger. It was a little... unnerving, the feeling of the slug on him, but he wasn't lying when he said that it was kind of cute. It had a little circle body and two antennae that held the darkest, emptiest black eyes that stared into his soul.

... Yeah, it was definitely unnerving.
Sighing, he gently placed the acorn-looking slug back into the folds of his scarf before scampering out of the alleyway and away from the school he had come across. He couldn't bear the thought of looking at any more schools, and he still felt a little queasy at the thought of doing anything more that could put his stomach at risk. However, the sun was already starting to make its way down, and though he had a couple more hours until sunset, he really needed something to eat, even if it made him nauseous just thinking about it.

He hadn't eaten much all day despite the strenuous exploration he had, and the last thing he wanted (or needed) was for his health to decline. He rubbed his face as he brought his phone back out, looking up local restaurants and cafes. He noticed movement in his peripheral vision and saw Juni sitting on the very end of his shoulder. "You have any idea what we're going to eat for a late lunch?"

She remained silent, though her head bobbed slightly. She seemed to be smiling at his pain.

He sighed for the umpteenth time that day. "Yeah, me neither." After a moment of silence, he slid his phone into his jacket's pocket and decided that instead of becoming a crazy lunatic that talked to slugs for the rest of his life, he was actually going to do something useful. Like head home (on an empty stomach) and decide which school he was going to actually go to.

Which would require paperwork. And parental/guardian confirmation.

... Looks like he was going to have to forge some emails. Would they believe him if he said that he lived alone with his dad and that he worked overseas for long periods of time? Probably, yeah?

He asked Juni. She just continued to smile.

.... Spoiled slug.

He had just finished narrowing all of his options (which didn't take long, mind you, seeing how he didn't have a very broad selection) to two different schools when Juni twitched on his shoulder. He caught the movement immediately and stopped in his tracks, looking up as he did so.

He was face-to-face with a small cafe that had a little outdoor area in the front and a quaint inside, warm lighting brightening the inside as waiters and waitresses chatted with their customers as if they were good friends. He glanced warily to the slug on his shoulder. Juni simply looked right back at him, and he swore she looked smug.

Spoiled Smug Slug. Or the SSS. Either way, that was her official title from then on, Midoriya decided.

He quietly entered through the front entryway and promptly flinched when the bell above the door tinkled merrily. It... wasn't something he was entirely used to seeing, but he was sure he would be able to get used to it soon. No one spared him a glance, which he greatly appreciated. He made his way to the counter and gripped the small amount of money he brought with him as he looked at all the pastries and sweets and things written on a board behind the cashier. He glanced around him to make sure that no one was going to try and touch him out of nowhere like the woman did before when the woman working behind the counter noticed him.

"Oh! Hello sweetie!" Midoriya blinked up at her. Usually, a phrase like that would make him flinch, but in all honesty... He appreciated that she didn't speak in a higher voice just because he was smaller and younger. Sure, he didn't know how many people this woman would call "sweetie" if they were her age, but it was the slight tone of her voice that counted. "What can I help you with today?"
She also didn't ask questions, which was nice.

He rubbed the back of his head as he tried to push down his nerves for being put on the spot. Honestly, he had no idea what he wanted, and he bit his lower lip as he looked at the various items on the menu. Luckily, the woman seemed to sense his hesitation and chuckled. "Yeah, there's a lot of stuff up there. It can get kind of overwhelming, can't it?"

Midoriya could definitely agree with that.

"Is there anything you're specifically looking for?" she asked, and Midoriya debated his options before finally responding verbally.

"Do you... have anything easy to stomach?"

The woman blinked in surprise, but she nodded sagely. "Oh yeah, I can see why that'd be a problem." She hummed for a second before her eyes lit up. "We have a couple of soups for you, if you'd like. These two—" She pointed to two specific ones on the board. "—are nutritional and they're easy to get down and digest. We have a couple of teas as well that help settle the stomach..." She trailed off, her brows furrowing as she tried to solve whatever was going through her mind. She grabbed a hand menu that was laminated from underneath the counter and pushed it toward him. She pointed to the first soup. "This is a favorite, but I don't think they go very well with any of the teas we're selling here. Or the teas that help with stomach problems, anyway. So, I suggest going with this soup and one of these three teas." She hummed again. "Are you lactose intolerant?"

Midoriya shook his head, which seemed to narrow it down for her. She nodded again. "I would go with this one then. It's a littler on the soft side and doesn't pack as much of a punch as the others do. Of course, the flavor's a bit diluted, but it's super easy on the digestive system as long as you can handle dairy products. Then it's a nightmare and a half."

Midoriya nodded, muttering a small "That sounds good" before falling silent. He couldn't help the small smile that twitched on his face, though. He... liked her. It was definitely a change of pace, and he handed her the money she asked for. She sent him a smile and pointed him to a small table not too far away, telling him that his order would be out in a minute.

(He wasn't lying, but Midoriya hadn't realized that she was being literal at the time.)

Aside from his soup and tea, a small plate the size of his palm was set out with just the slightest bit of water in the indented middle. He had no idea why it was there until Juni started to crawl down his arm, to which he grabbed her (the poor thing was only halfway there) and placed her in the water. She was happy. And definitely smug.

=====

He placed Juni outside in the shade as he walked back home. "Don't get killed," he whispered to her before arriving at his apartment. His stomach was full and was feeling better thanks to the woman's recommendations. He sighed lightly as he stretched. He took a quick shower and wrapped himself in his blankets before looking at his list of schools. On his phone, reviews that he managed to scrounge up from them were listed.

He found the school he wanted pretty easily.

And it was just a bonus that they seemed to take his email and explanation without too much suspicion.
He fell asleep late despite the fact that he got home around four-thirty. He skipped dinner, too afraid that anything he made wouldn't be as effective as the little cafe he came across. (Though, he was improving a little bit in his cooking skills, which was enough for him.) He had managed to finally get his chest to lie flat on the ground, and he was working on his balance and overall klutziness before he finally stopped and rested.

He woke up early, bleary eyes taking in the patterns on his ceiling. He listened to the birds chirping and singing, letting it ease some of the tension before he rubbed his eyes and sat up. He glanced over at his clock, which read six forty-five. He blinked, noticing the light chill that made him shiver as he tried to pull his covers back up to his shoulders. And holy cow where was that breeze coming from? He looked back at his clock and then noticed the acorn-like shape on his nightstand.

Midoriya stared.

Juni stared back.

Midoriya glanced up at the window, which was open just a crack (just enough for a slug to slink through), and then back to the slug. "Did you...?" He opened and closed his mouth, trying to come up with words to describe just how bizarre this was. "Wha..." He pointed to the scene of the crime. Eventually he choked out, "How did you open my window?" His voice continuously got higher and cracked on the last syllable.

Juni just complacently looked at him.

Spoiled-Smug-Snail-that-could-officially-open-windows was her new title, and anyone who said otherwise could take it away from his cold, dead hands if they wanted to.

So. Juni had a quirk. Which wasn't unreasonable, really, because Midoriya knew plenty about animals having them before. In fact, the world's most prestigious hero school, U.A., was run by an animal-like creature. Who was literally smarter than about a hundred people put together.

So what if Juni had god-like powers? It wasn't like she was invincible or anything.

="=

"What."

He took everything back.

Juni stared back at him innocently. He was pretty sure she was immortal. She hadn't eaten anything as of recent, was dry as all heck, and he pretty much stepped on her eight times by accident. And don't even get him started on the fact that a frying pan that should have cut her in half (you know, because clumsy him dropped the thing) bounced harmlessly off of her.

And then his backpack crushed her. Like, right in front of him. And yet she was perfectly fine.

_I thought slugs were supposed to have really weak bodies, he couldn't help but think. All I feel is like she's toying with my very existence and disobeying every rule of physics imaginable._

And to make all matters worse, _she wouldn't blink._

He sighed and rubbed his face tiredly before he turned from her and headed to his bedroom, looking for his shoes. When he got in the doorway, Juni was right back to sitting on his nightstand. He blinked at her once before looking behind him. The place where she had just been sitting was gone.
"You know what?" he said, partly to himself and partly to the disgusting creature in front of him. "I give up. I'm not going to question you. Do as you please. I really don't care." He crouched as he put his shoes on, untangling the laces so he could retie them. It didn't take long, and soon he had his scarf in hand and was ready to go—

He turned around to see that the slug was taking his word and had already grown eight times in size and steadily continuing.

"Oh god, Juni, no! I was being sarcastic—!"

======

He explored a little further the same day (after convincing Juni that, no, he didn't want a slime hug, thank you very much), taking it easy after yesterday's... incident. He kept his eyes peeled for anything that might appeal to him, though. While it was nice to be out of Hisashi's hair, it also meant that he was alone with too much time on his hands. And no, Juni didn't really count as something to really do, though he supposed her little distractions from how much alone time he had was something he could appreciate.

But still, recording and analyzing heroes and villains wasn't something he could occupy himself with forever. And while taking extra academic classes and lessons on top of the work he usually got in school helped a little bit, he wanted something that would focus on the physical side of him. A part of him that he never really got to develop, except for the stretches and flexibility he did. There was a part of him that longed to go out and be fit and physical, but it had been restrained since Hisashi had taken him in.

And... it left a little hole in his heart that grew and grew as time passed. Not that he had been in the best of shape before he was found by Hisashi, but...

He sighed before stopping in the middle of the street. He... he couldn't keep doing this. Midoriya knew who Hisashi was, knew what he was capable of... That kind of information was dangerous. He was dangerous. And if he continuously brought up memories of him, he was bound to slip up sometime, and the aftermath couldn't be pretty.

He thought about the eight entries he had on Hisashi.

*People who deal with trauma tend to suppress their memories of it as a way of not having to relive it,* an article he read had said. But he wasn't traumatized, right? He was just... trying to keep his secret safe.

Yeah.

Juni looked at him, and if slugs could look sad, Midoriya would think that she would be too.

=====

"A gymnastics class?" he said aloud as he stared at the poster. Juni looked excited. (While, if a slug could be excited.) "Maybe I should do that," he muttered. "I'm already pretty flexible, so I have some of that down. And maybe they could help me with my balance? That would be pretty helpful." Especially because he was a klutz at heart and soul.

And so he found himself in the large warehouse-converted-gymnasium sort of building, awkwardly watching as several instructors ordered for different people to do different things. Beginners, it
seemed like, were being pushed into their stretches and basic cartwheels. Those taking a more challenging course were running off a sort of ramp before doing several tricks—front flips, back flips, intricate body movements and twists—and landing. Some didn't stick it, and their instructor told them to do it again, while others made it first try, eloquently landing in a pose of grace. Advanced gymnasts were on a balance beam, always one small movement from falling and maybe injuring themselves completely, though they performed without fear. Others were doing whole choreographed dances on the trampolines.

Overall, he was a little overwhelmed. And slightly, very terrified. Because he was way out of his league. He was about to back away and leave when a voice called him out.

"Ah, are you here for lessons, by chance?"

Midoriya flinched but prepared himself for contact. All he had to do was make sure he didn't puke all over the floor. That was all. Easy. He turned to the man that was easing his way up to him, a natural smile on his face. Midoriya tried to return one, though he was sure it was weak at best. "A-ah, well, I seem to be a bit behind," he said, trying to scramble for an excuse. "So maybe I'll just join next year." Yeah. That wasn't rude. And if he didn't actually show up next year, well, that was okay too.

The man laughed, and he seemed a bit embarrassed. "Yeah, our classes usually start together. We began a month ago or so on our newest batch of kids." His embarrassment faded though, and he rested his hands on his hips. "But you shouldn't worry about that. In fact, usually there's a whole group of kids who join in a little late. I'm their instructor until I see that they're at the spot they need to be, and then I let them join the other classes."

"Oh!" Oh. Oh no. "Well, that's pretty fascinating...? But I-I don't see your class anywhere." Please don't tell me, please don't tell me, please don't—

"Ah, you make a good point. But actually, I only had four students this year start late. Two of them are already in our intermediate class, and the other two had to leave due to their family moving overseas." The man's smile seemed to only get brighter. Midoriya wondered if he was going to have to buy sunglasses to protect his eyes. "If you want to join, it would just be us two working on your skills. One-on-one practice, as much or as many times as you need it. Of course," the man hastily added, "don't feel pressured if you don't want to do it. I know for some people it's just really not their thing."

Well, great. The guy just made him feel really guilty. And his smile made it hard to even consider refusing. Plus, this was what he wanted: something to distract himself and a good way to stay in shape. It was a double plus, right?

The hairs on the end of his neck stood up and he instinctively ducked his head as someone neared by. It was one of the louder instructors, a female with hair that could tie itself. She was grinning as she came up, saying something about how the guy in front of him would finally have a student to occupy himself with when she made to clap her hand on his back.

Midoriya flinched and cowered, though a hand swiftly intervened and grabbed her by the wrist. The man was still smiling, though there was a hidden warning in his gaze, and he looked back to Midoriya. "Sorry," he apologized, and Midoriya kind of hated that he sounded sincere, "she's a bit unconscious of other people's boundaries at times."

Midoriya stared at the man and the way he was keeping the other instructor from doing anything to scare him off, as if he knew that he had a few problems with touch. And then he took in the man's stance, welcoming and comfortable, with broad shoulders and lean form that he didn't use to make himself more formidable.
"It's—" He swallowed the lump in his throat. "It's fine. Really."

The man shot him a sad, small smile. "We have practice two days from now, from two to four. If you want to join us then, don't hesitate to come. You're always welcome." He finally let go of his colleague's wrist, and she seemed to understand. She sent a small wave to him as she mouthed 'sorry' before walking back to her group of intermediate students.

"Anyway," the man said as he walked over to the front of the warehouse, Midoriya falling behind his heels, "I have a small schedule for the month." He pulled a sheet of paper from a stack that sat in an unused chair alongside several other mounds and folders of paperwork. He handed it back to Midoriya, who took it with hesitant hands.

"Before you leave, unless you'd like to stay, my name is Hiroji Chikara." The man smiled his perfect, bright smile at him. "Though you may call me just by Chikara. I don't believe that mentor and mentee, should we have that relationship, should have the barrier of formalities." He suddenly paused and glanced around before whispering to Midoriya, "Though don't tell the old man over there I said that. He would gut me."

And, honestly? Midoriya couldn't help it. A small giggle escaped him as he smiled. "My name is Midoriya Izuku, and..." He paused, and his small smile turned a little hesitant. "I'll definitely think about it."

Hiroji's face had to have brightened by six notches. "That's very brave of you, Midoriya-kun!"

As Midoriya left, Juni still curiously watching on his shoulder, Hiroji's smile slowly faded. He sighed heavily.

"Some days, I wish I could never see a person's mental state," he murmured to himself. "Maybe it would spare me the pain."

He wasn't expecting Midoriya to ever come back.

======

Midoriya mumbled to himself as he walked out of the martial arts building. It was definitely funded better than the gymnastics place had, and it had all sorts of equipment and air conditioning, but the warehouse was a little bit more like home. Then again, self defense was one of the biggest things he wanted to work on, and so he'd have to focus more on that than Hiroji's class.

He honestly... wasn't expecting it to go so well, though. The martial arts teacher was definitely demanding, and he was a lot more rough around the edges than Hijori, but he still had that same spark of kindness in his eyes an a charismatic smile. The man seemed to be a little disappointed when Midoriya pointed out that he wouldn't be able to join on a few days, but he lightened up when he explained the schedule overlaps.

"My fiancee was actually friends with the guy when they were in college. Really smart dude, but has the heart of gold." And then, "Sure, I don't see what the problem with that is. He's going to push you pretty hard too, so it's not like you're slacking off anyway."

Midoriya was a little lost when it came to which style he wanted to actually practice in and use, but the man (who simply went by Master Splinter, for whatever reason) pointed out a few techniques that could go well with something gymnastics-related. Most of what he suggested was flowing and dodging his opponent's movements while making quick and sharp retaliations.

In fact, it all went smoothly until "Master Splinter" asked him what his quirk was. The only thing he
could manage was a dry throat and the clenching of his fists as he tried to choke out a few words. The man seemed to understand and simply changed the direction of the conversation.

Hugging his arms close to his body, he looked both ways down the street. He felt a little relieved, happy that things went as well as they did. He looked to Juni and asked her if she wanted to go back to the little cafe they ate at yesterday.

He took her silence as a confirmation, and halfway through his phone buzzed. He was half tempted to ignore it (because honestly, why should he interrupt his conversation with Juni) but decided he'd rather know what was going on than what wasn't.

It was an email from the school he had chosen. It was basic, short, and to the point. He had to fill out a few forms, and then he was to tour the school, and then take an exam to see where he stood.

(The principal, who Midoriya would soon meet, would be nice. Ish. But he would take one look at Midoriya's final test score and accept him in without questioning the reliability of the personal files Midoriya gave him. It would make Midoriya wary, and a little bit suspicious, not that he showed it.)

Midoriya had just finished reading it when Juni reached her small body upward. It was a signal, Midoriya quickly learned, that meant that she wanted him to stop. He peered upward to find a small bookshop. It had a few beanbags in the corners—which were taken up by a few people with their noses in their books—and large, wide windows made up most of its front, letting light in freely.

He was about to question how his little friend even knew all of these places but decided otherwise when he realized that he would probably look insane. Sighing, he noted it down on his notepad and moved on. He was sure that he was going to come back to it, but he had more important things to think about; that, and he wasn't sure he'd be able to stop himself from checking out so many books that he would get distracted from what his priorities were.

He had another wonderful dinner at the little cafe. The woman was still there, gentle smile and deep voice and wonderful suggestions leaving him just a little warmer when he left.

He didn't bother setting Juni outside and brought her to his apartment. Just as he was unlocking the door, one of his neighbors began to leave. She was a woman that seemed to be in her forties or fifties, and her hair was tied into a loose bun, loose strands sticking out and sweeping across her forehead. She smiled, her wrinkles stretching pleasantly as she waved at him.

She was the one supposed to take care of him. He felt a little less guilty that such a sweet-looking woman wouldn't have to be burdened with taking care of a kid with issues that had nothing to do with her.

Midoriya's shoulders were hunched, not that he was aware of it. His scarf bunched up loosely around his neck as he send a timid smile in return before promptly shoving himself inside, breathing heavily and heart beating rapidly. He slid down the door and curled up at the bottom, leaning the back of his head against the cool wood.

Five days. It had only been five days, and in only one he had actually participated in any real human interaction. He thought about the barely-there composure he had and the quiver in his hands. He ran a hand through his hair before standing up on shaky legs. He turned on the TV after a moment of hesitation and listened to the news reporters talk about Endeavor's latest achievements as he made himself a cup of tea with trembling hands. He almost slipped up once, but he managed to keep his grip on it. When he turned around with a cup of hot tea in his hands, he found his notebook and a pencil sitting innocently on the small island. Juni was sitting next to it, and he shook his head fondly as he dragged a chair up to the counter.
He quietly opened the notebook (Hero Analysis for the Future #5) and flipped to the page where Endeavor was already drawn. He had left quite a few pages blank that he had yet to fill in, though he was a little disappointed when he had a lot of complaints and criticisms of the hero than he did praises. It wasn't as if he had anything to hold against the man, but his ego and general inability to work efficiently without causing much harm to others and his surroundings made it a little hard to favor him. Though it was true that he worked constantly and dealt with more cases than almost anyone else, something about him screamed the word "facade." He tried to remain unbiased, but he could think of many different heroes who could be better suited to the job.

Sighing before closing his notebook, he reached for the remote controller to the TV and shut it off. He pulled out his phone, hesitated, and then pulled up a website that allowed him to listen to Hero Present Mic's radio show. Hopefully, if Hisashi did leave some sort of bug he would think that Midoriya was just trying to... stake out the competition? Or maybe something like that.

He allowed himself to relax under Present Mic's voice, listening to him answer his viewers' questions about hero life and mundane things. He said a few inspirational things that made his listeners happy and then moved on to the next topic. Midoriya stared at the small schedule in his hand as he thought about his choices.

He didn't have to do this, a part of him said.

Midoriya thought about the man with the kind smile and the bright eyes. He looked down at himself, at his small, frail form.

"Can I? Can I save them?"

The man smiled. "You'll find a way."

And, when it came down to it, it didn't really matter what he wanted. He had to do something, and the gymnastics and martial arts class was the closest chance he got. He really shouldn't have a choice. There was none.

"And if there is anyone out there shooting for a hero school, I want you all to remember our motto!"

Midoriya glanced to Juni, who was curled up with her eyes wandering, like she was watching out for him. He closed his eyes and rubbed his eyes before shooting the paper in his hands and small, hesitant grimace.

Plus Ultra it was, then.

===== 

Hiroji was watching over the other instructors start to warm up and call out for their specific groups. He was half tempted to just help his colleagues instead of just throwing out pointers and practicing with those falling a little behind. His friend—the one who he was pretty sure scared off his only hope—was bubbly rambling on about how her niece was doing beside him. He wasn't paying that much attention, to be honest. There were only so many times you could hear about the kid's first time eating ice cream before you clawed your own eyes out.

He was watching as the old man (that was what everyone called him) started yelling at his students to get in line when he received a blow to his ribs. He coughed and held his arms protectively around him as he whipped toward his friend. "What was that for?" he hissed, only to find her grinning as she pointed somewhere over his shoulder. He followed her, mouth open in surprise as he recognized the fluff of dark green hair and same colored eyes, freckles painfully contrasted against his pale skin.
He was wearing something a little more fitted to the occasion, and he was wearing athletic shorts and shirt with long sleeves. He still had his scarf around his neck, too (and Hiroji recognized that he probably wasn't going to take it off, seeing how he had purposefully wrapped it tightly around it before tucking the loose ends in.) He seemed a little hesitant, wary even, but a small bit of tension in his shoulders loosened when Hiroji approached him.

"I must say," he said before he could stop himself, "I really didn't think you were gonna come back. I mean, it's great that you did, and it's a real pleasure, but... well, you know what I mean."

He swore a little bit of light entered his eyes as he awkwardly coughed. "Yeah..." He scuffed the end of his shoe into the floor.

Hiroji brushed the awkwardness that came with the still-developing conversation. This was fine. Midoriya was still reciprocating his approach, which was enough progress in of itself. "Here, there's an empty cubbyhole over here where you can put your stuff before we begin. Do you have anything you want to ask before we start?"

Midoriya seemed to ponder as he placed his few belongings, which mainly included a water bottle, a key, and a slug(?). "Is this... going to require a lot of physical contact?"

Hiroji hummed. "I'll be honest with you, probably more than you might be comfortable with. I don't want you to accidentally break your neck or something else. However..." He tapped his chin. "I think we won't need any in the beginning. Once we get the basics down, that might change, but I don't think you have to worry about it. We can go at your pace."

Midoriya finally turned to him and looked him in the eye. "Okay."

"Okay," he echoed. "Ready to start?"

=====

Midoriya was walking down his street when his body suddenly tensed, and he immediately stopped himself from his walk home. He glanced around at his surroundings, quickly finding an alleyway to duck into. He felt a drop of sweat crawl down his neck as he crouched and held a hand over his mouth to muffle his breathing. He stilled as he looked out quietly, tensing as a figure wearing a dark hoodie walked past him.

The young man was eerily familiar. His unhealthy pallor made him look sickly as he shoved his hands in his pockets. He was muttering to himself as he clenched and unclenched his fists angrily, and Midoriya shook as he heard his footsteps slowly fade out of his range. Terror gripped at him as he struggled to remain aware of his surroundings. He had no idea that he was around here, so why? —

*There was a young woman with wavy, short hair and hazel eyes. She had knee-high boots and a great big smile. She tucked him into bed at night and kissed the pain away when the injury on the side of his neck hurt too much to bear.*

"You'll face him one day," she promised him.

Midoriya walked home, cautious of every hiding spot and dark figures, hoping that he would never run into him again until he was ready.

"Shigaraki."
Juni was literally a last-minute addition that just kind of stuck with me. If you're uncomfortable with the idea, just tell me. I don't think she has to be a permanent "character."

Also, sorry if this isn't as good a quality as the first chapter. I tried to add a little bit of humor because I find that, if you have a constant rate of angst it all kind of blends together. Plus, I can't really add much fluff until later, so you're going to have to deal with humor supporting Midoriya instead.

Also, thank you so much for your comments, kudos, and bookmarks! They all mean a lot to me! :D
Rising Sunbursts

Chapter Summary

Midoriya meets a new face, and he has a feeling that it's going to end up killing him.

Chapter Notes

Me: We don't have to keep Juni.

Readers: Hell no. We sTAn JuNI aND iF YoU KiLL HEr We'LL gUT YOu.

Me: ... Well then.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He got his freckles from his mother.

She was a beautiful woman. Not that he remembered much of her, nor were her features were ever permanent. Her face and hair color were constantly changing, and even now he wasn't quite sure what she really looked like. The one thing he did know, however, was that she had always kept her freckles. If he remembered correctly, his father liked them too.

His mother's quirk allowed her to morph her body into any way she wanted it to. *Shapeshift*, she called it. She changed her hair's color regularly. She slimmed her waist and curved her hips a bit, and she hid the thousands of long, jagged scars that covered her body. Cameras and recording devices all picked up the change. The only thing that kept her original form were mirrors. So, they simply didn't have mirrors in their house. She stayed away from any place that had them on the walls or reflective glass along skyscrapers.

She hated them. With a passion. His father, patient in all senses of the word, didn't argue. Or, he didn't think they argued. They had some debates, but they were all in kind words and gentle reassurances. His mother was always anxious. She was constantly looking over her shoulder the couple times he remembered going out with her.

He didn't remember his father very well. He was pretty sure he was quiet. Careful. Understanding. Other than a few select memories, he didn't recall anything about them.

There was a small memory, where he caught his mom in the mirror for the first time. She looked so, so sad as her scars made patterns in what skin she showed to the world. Her hair was a dark orange, and her eyes were dark black like that of an onyx. Her body was no longer hourglass-shaped and was sort of rigid, her flat chest almost too broad for the feminine clothing she wore.

She looked like a guy, to be honest. Perhaps she was one before she changed her body. Midoriya wasn't quite sure, but he wasn't really curious enough to find out.

Another recollection of his was when his mother and father were whispering quietly about Midoriya
long after he was supposed to be in bed. Most of the conversation had long since been lost in time, but he faintly recognized the flinch his mother made when his father mentioned the quirk that he would soon manifest when he came of age.

There had been uncertainty there. Neither of them knew just what kind of quirk Midoriya would end up inheriting.

And then, his favorite. The one he remembered the most. (Well, almost the most. But not quite. That was reserved for a different memory.)

“There’s always a balance. You don’t need to listen to people to know who you are. Just look in the mirror. But you don’t need to look in the mirror to know who you are. Listen to people. The best kind of person does both.”

His mother was experienced. Perhaps not a genius, or a philosopher, but she acquired skill and comprehension through the darkest corners of life. But everything came at a price, he supposed, and he still remembered the shrieks of terror that escaped her as he accidentally sent her into a panic attack.

Knowledge was power until the trauma came back to haunt you.

=====

Midoriya always had troubles with his dreams. It was a blessing if he didn't dream at all, though it only happened on rare occasions. Most nights involved waking up in the middle of the night in cold sweat and nausea, clenching the side of his bedside table with fingers that turned white with the amount of pressure on them. He would gasp for breath and stick his left hand under his shirt, resting it close to his heart to reassure himself.

Rarer nights included those memories of a man long since dead. The two chatted. They watched the world go by. The man would interlink their hands and reassure him that he would do things as they were meant to be. “You’ll find a way,” he always said, self-assured and confident in what he claimed was concrete. But he was also a little quiet, withdrawn on his best days.

Then there were his other dreams. The dreams that he couldn't tell whether he hated or was envious of.

He was warm in his dream, borderline hot. He was resting somewhat peacefully when dream-him opened his eyes blearily and squinted at the rays of light that peeked between the closed curtains. He had been sleeping on his side, and he could faintly feel another body pressing up behind him, their even breaths just loud enough that he could catch up on it.

He groaned as he turned onto his other side, pulling the covers higher up his shoulders. He sighed as he recognized the person in bed with him, and he grumbled something unintelligible before curling up into their chest. This wasn’t the first time this happened, but the least they could do was warn him before so he didn’t accidently throw them off his bed...

The person twitched and circled their arms around his body, pulling him even closer. They hummed noncommittally. A small, comfortable silence fell over the two of them.

"I hope you know that everyone’s going to act as if we’re a couple now for the rest of eternity thanks to you,” he said, no bite present in his words.

They hummed noncommittally. A small, comfortable silence fell over the two of them.
"Another nightmare?" he asked.

They hummed again. "Calamari 'sn't here. Didn't wan' wake you up. You don't get much sleep anyway, and you 'eemed peaceful."

"And so you risked getting your behind handed to you for a rude awakening," he said dryly. The other chuckled, and he sighed exasperatedly at their carelessness.

"You're a good snuggle partner, Mido."

He huffed, though he hid a smile. "Just go back to sleep."

"Mmm... I can do that." Suddenly, they stiffened. "Wait, no, I can't sleep. I gotta do my essay, Aizawa-sensei will kill me otherwise—"

"Sero."

"What?"

"Shut up. You already forced your way into my bedroom, you might as well stick around. I'll help you after."

Sero hugged him tighter. "Thanks, dude. You're the best friend in the world. Snuggles, educational help, and some sleep? Maybe I should just—"

"Sero, go to sleep."

He laughed softly before drifting off. And Midoriya joined him not too long after.

And then he woke up. Alone. Smaller.

No Sero Hanta in sight.

He stared at his hands for a long, long time, not in the mood to get up and go to his eighteenth day of school. Juni was there, though, her small body curled up between his hands. She looked at him with careful eyes, reminding him that he wasn't alone.

So he went to school.

=====

None of the other students talked to him. They weren't mean, but they weren't nice either, and some of them stared at him as he walked past. One of his classmate's nose wrinkled when he entered the classroom, blurting out "Oh great, the weird kid's here" by total accident. One of the other girls slapped him upside the head and tried to apologize for him, explaining that his quirk allowed him to see how many times a person had lied with a side effect that made him speak his mind without restraint. She couldn't look him in the eyes as she did, and Midoriya felt his heart clench as everyone averted their eyes.

He didn't know why they did. He wasn't creepy, right? Granted, he was a little rough around the edges when it came to expressing happy emotions, and his smile was always a little contrived, but he wasn't... creepy? There was literally a kid who sat two seats away from him whose skin was constantly decomposing, and often his cheeks had holes in them from it rotting.

So... what was wrong with him?
The answer was that he was too quiet, he would later learn from a sympathetic male who knew what was going on. He had nothing to say, his quirk wasn't visible, and he was grossly intelligent, and no one knew how to accept that. He explained that there simply wasn't much else other than that. They weren't trying to be mean, he amended, just weren't used to having new students join. The school was small, and most of them had grown up with each other since they were in preschool.

So he remained polite. He smiled persistently. It was a little easier to do, but he knew it still came out awkward and forced. He helped his classmates when he had to, and sometimes, if it seemed as if no one else was going to help, he helped when he didn't. And they were polite too.

The barrier between him and everyone else never cracked, though. It was firm, and as the days passed and the excitement of his entrance faded, it grew. It almost seemed to separate him from everyone else.

Which was fine. Juni slept in the folds of his scarf, and they sat together, alone, during lunch time. And that was also okay. He didn't need anyone else.

(Someday, lunch would be filled with laughter and deep conversations. Jokes, analyses, and sometimes food would bounce around to each person that surrounded him. And maybe a few "What a mad banquet of darkness"s too, which often sent him into a fit of giggles for no real reason.)

=====

"I'm going to grab your waist, okay?"

Hiroji always warned him when they were going to have physical contact before he did anything. It was something that Midoriya had an endless amount of appreciation for, even if it was something as simple as the man putting his hand on his shoulder or catching him when he was about to fall over. The man seemed to always know just what to say and how to react when he shied away from doing any activities that involved touching someone.

"That's okay," he would say. "We can just do something else in the meantime."

Midoriya remembered how, after a few practices, the two of them planned to finally start on branching out to things past basic rolls, cartwheels, and physical stretches. They had planned to start on front and back handsprings the week after, and he had actually been pretty excited.

He walked in that day for practice, ready to puke and cry. He had a particularly bad string of nightmares, and he accidentally bumped into someone which sent him to the ground. He panicked and found himself late to class, hiding in the bathrooms to wash away the taste of puke from his mouth with the grimy tap water. Almost immediately upon walking into the warehouse, Hiroji sat him down and gave him a little bit of water. They did a few stretches, and Hiroji showed him a few techniques to release the tension and soreness in his aching muscles that he hadn't yet picked on. Then the man asked him to walk across the balance beam several times, just enough so that he could grow a bit more comfortable before the got into it.

Midoriya asked him why he decided to put it off when the man dismissed him early. He simply smiled and said that he thought it would be best to wait another day.

He had gymnastics two days a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays were dedicated to his martial arts class. The weekends were left to him, which he did on purpose. It allowed him to have free time to settle himself and ease the tension the week continuously built up. He and Juni would often sit on the couch, a cup of tea in one hand and a pen in the other, recording any new hero debuts and updating information on both heroes and villains that he already made bios
It was pleasant.

Hiroji and Midoriya were standing on one of the trampolines already, and the latter was eyeing Hiroji carefully as he nodded to the man's hidden request. The man gave a reassuring nod before he was standing to Midoriya's side. They had been on the trampolines only three times now, though the two stayed long after most people did and worked sometimes three to four hours at a time, so the material wasn't too foreign underneath his feet. Midoriya felt a little guilty at that since he paid the organization by the amount of practices he went to (and so he was basically getting more than what he paid for with Hisashi's money), but the man waved him off.

He took a shaky breath, feeling Hiroji's fingers grazing his stomach and back before he jumped and used his momentum to flip backwards. Immediately, strong hands tightened around his middle and twisted him the rest of the way, landing him back on his feet. "Remember to jump upward, not back. That's how you end up head-first into the ground," Hiroji reminded him gently. "Again?"

Midoriya nodded, and he bounced back up, going through the exact same motion. He knew that he twisted a little bit too late, but Hiroji's arms saved him the pain of landing awkwardly on the ground. The man smiled. "Better," he said before gesturing for them to do it again. And again. And then they switched to front flips, which were marginally easier to do. And then they practiced some more, until Midoriya was sure that he was going to have the imprints of the special trampoline's cords permanently ingrained into the bottoms of his feet. He felt his thigh and calf muscles strain under the pressure of having to do any more jumps when Hiroji finally ceased practice, ending with a small collection of different stretches so he wouldn't be as sore for his martial arts training the next day. Before they parted ways, he brought up a little bit of a concern.

"I don't mind you wearing your scarf, Midoriya. But It scares me, what might happen if one of the ends comes undone and you end up really hurting yourself. Could you maybe think of something else to use that might make you comfortable?"

Midoriya blinked but nodded silently. He understood and turned to leave, slowly making his way home. He stopped by the grocery store before he arrived at the apartment, toeing off his shoes and leaving them by the entryway as he carried the bags in. Juni was sulking because she didn't get to be spoiled as she did when she was at that little cafe, but she soon cheered up a little bit and watched with fascination as he cooked himself something new from his recipe book. He was getting better, he knew that, and he could actually say that the meal was enjoyable.

But it had yet to reach the point of actually being impressive. (Of course, that could also just be the fact that he couldn't eat as much as he would have liked to, which also warped his vision.)

He sighed as he rinsed his plate, letting his hands stay under the warm water for a bit before he moved on to the pan beside him. Juni was sitting on top of the tap, occasionally dipping herself into the water when she thought he wasn't looking. Or maybe she knew he saw her, she was just unbothered about any consequences that he didn't have the heart to put on her.

Sassy-Spoiled-Smug-Slug-Can-Open-Windows, also known as the SSSSCOW, had him wrapped around her little antennae, and they had only known one another for a few weeks at most. Which was both disconcerting and partly a relief, since he was afraid that he wouldn't be able to trust anyone anymore. He sighed quietly as he placed the last fork into the dishwasher, pulling out some dish soap to pour into the container. He then capped the bottle and put it away, flipping the lid on the small box as he went before shutting the dishwasher with his foot. He reminded himself to put dish soap on his grocery list since he was running low as he picked up Juni in his hands.
Part of him wanted to go to sleep, but...

He sighed and placed Juni on his shoulder as he picked up his scarf from the back of his couch. He wrapped it around his neck loosely before slipping on a pair of shoes, heading outside. Immediately he shuddered at the cold wind, and he walked quickly back inside to grab his biggest hoodie and throw it on himself to keep him warm. His scarf was trapped underneath the big piece of clothing, but he supposed it could be worse. He grabbed his keys from the counter (of course he nearly forgot them) and placed them in his pockets before heading out, managing to lock the door behind him without too much problem.

Small, sparse droplets of rain hit his skin, and he winced as he realized that he had yet to actually buy an umbrella yet. He supposed that that was something he could do while he was out.

An eleven-year-old walking in the dark raised a few eyebrows at him, but he was happy to see that he was practically alone at every corner. His surroundings seemed to a nice mix of quiet but busy, which was helpful in cases where he needed to blend in. He hummed lightly to himself as he walked down another sidewalk. His hands were starting to grow incredibly cold, and his breath was visible in front of him. He shivered and picked up the pace as the wind grew stronger, flinging pellets of water at his face. He blinked them away as he finally found a small shop at the end of the block, and he welcomed himself in with a sigh of relief. He felt his scarf shift as Juni poked her head out before disappearing back inside.

The bell attached to the door rung, and he flinched. It was a deeper sound than the one in his favorite cafe's bell, though the sound was almost indistinguishable. The store was small, and one of the overhead lights was flickering, but overall it had nice quality items and a variety of things to choose from. He quickly walked over to one section of the store, finding different umbrellas, coats, and windbreakers lining the walls and racks. He held his hands together behind his back as he looked between all the different choices. Eventually, he turned to the small blob in his scarf and whispered to Juni.

"Anything you like?"

Juni popped her head back out, eyes wandering as she drank in her surroundings. Midoriya blinked, and she appeared on one of the racks holding a few copies of the same jacket. He nodded as he picked out one just a little bigger than his size (he wanted to grow in some of these) and ran the dark maroon fabric between his fingers. It was good quality, so it would last a while, which was good enough for him. He looked up to find that Juni was sitting patiently on another rack, one that held a dark gray windbreaker that had four thin lines running up the sides of the sleeves and down the shoulders, before ending in the middle of the neck. (He tried to ignore the fact that the colors were gold, red, blue, and white, otherwise known as All Might's colors.)

Juni didn't like any of the umbrellas though, which was a shame, because it seemed like it was really starting to rain harder outside. He sighed as he realized that he was probably going to have to make use of his windbreaker as the whistling sound of the air current against the windows grew louder. It took him half a minute to attract the attention of the woman who was supposed to be working behind the counter. She narrowed her yellow eyes at him, her droopy ears twitching angrily. He floundered a bit under her gaze, reminded of bright sunny eyes that, when clouded with rage, turn into a fiery orange.

He was quick to get out of there, to say the least, just barely remembering to rip off the tags before he left. He shrugged on his windbreaker, trying to ignore the freezing cold that seeped through his two layers. The small pocket of his shirt was soon filled as Juni burrowed herself inside to escape the cold; he had to scold her slightly because her slime was a job in of itself to get out of his clothes, but
he didn't pull her out. Lightning flashed silently as he ran further into the heart of the city, his one arm still tightly holding his jacket as his other hand—his left one—tried to regain some warmth by hiding in the pocket across his stomach.

He had to duck into an alleyway as a few shady-looking people walked the opposite way, toward him, and he heard a few of their slurred voices over the pounding of the rain on the asphalt. Mentions of burglary and Missionary Banks immediately drew his attention; he pulled his phone from outside his pocket and took a few pictures of them. He wasn't the definition of inconspicuous, but he was sneaky enough and they were tipsy anyway.

He narrowed his eyes at the pictures he took, a little disappointed that most of them were blurry when he settled on the final one. Lightning just flashed, giving his phone more lighting to pick up on as the group turned the corner, catching most of their features.

Bingo.

A soft, deep rumble echoed in the gray and black clouds, and he flinched. Instinctively, he pulled his arms over his head, shutting his eyes tightly as the sleeves of his jacket came loose from where they were neatly folded and hit his forehead.

Hope you had a nice week. It's been a little stormy up here. I would've come sooner to let you go, but...

Midoriya took in a few deep, desperate breaths before calming himself. He stood back up slowly, wincing at the pain that jolted from his knees before he slowly left the alley. He was getting closer to his destination, though, and he picked up the pace as he pocketed his phone. Lightning flashed, and a loud bang followed, and Midoriya couldn't keep the loud whimper that escaped him as he ducked his head. The wind was fierce in this direction, and it sent needles of cold, sharp pain through his cheeks that left his teeth chattering. He avoided the deep puddles that continued to grow as the rain filled them, though some were inescapable unless he wanted to run into the road, which sounded like an awful idea at best. He found his shoes and socks thoroughly wet by the time he was in front of the mall. He sighed as the automatic doors let him through, wincing at the feel of his shoes squelching as he walked. Immediately, a man by the entrance popped in front of him.

"Hello, young sir! Would you liked to be dried off?"

Immediately, Midoriya's eyes narrowed as he took a small step back. (Which may or may have not caused the automatic doors to open back up.) He looked at the man's attire and his work uniform, his name tag glinting in the overhead lights. So, presumably, he worked here, which was a great marketing technique, really. Just have the guy come in whenever it was cold or rainy, and people would be much more willing to go out to the mall for a bit.

"What do you mean by that?" His voice was quiet and a little bit scratchy.

The man sent a simple smile his direction. "My quirk allows people to warm up at a certain temperature that dries off all the water on them and their clothes," he explained in a high-pitched voice. Midoriya slightly perked up at that. That didn't seem so bad—

"I just have to touch you for that while!"

Midoriya felt his hopes shrivel up as his eyes darted around the man. Being soaked and uncomfortable sounded like a much better alternative than having any skin contact. But then he thought about the poor people who had to constantly clean up the messes from people with odd quirks, and a little flower of guilt bloomed, its colors waned and its petals dim. Would he really want
to add onto that?

And so he, hesitantly, held out his arm. The man smiled and gripped the limb without care, oblivious to the way that Midoriya flinched and shrank into himself. His grip was too tight, nothing like the careful and firm hold of Hiroji or the gentle, fleeting touches of the cashier at his favorite cafe.

He finally let go as a warmth grew underneath his skin and clothes and a cold hand dragged his stomach down to his feet. "There you go, buddy, all better," he said in a sugary voice. He quickly moved his attention from him to the next group of customers, and Midoriya bolted. He felt like bugs were crawling, itching their way across his skin. He shuddered as he tried to find his way through the mall without bumping into anyone else, his nerves jumpy and radiating with fear at the slightest noise.

He hated contact with strangers. Oh, how he hated it.

Somewhere or another, things blurred together until he was in the family bathroom, locking the one-stall room's door behind him as he crouched. He didn't sit down, knowing that the last thing he wanted to do was pick up all sorts of germs, but he leaned against the door nonetheless. Juni poked out from her place in his scarf, watching him silently as he brought himself farther and farther away from a frenzy.

Juni's calmness helped a little, too.

He was greeted when he opened the door with a woman who had a cigarette in her mouth. She looked up to him and tutted disappointingly as she puffed a bit of smoke from her mouth. "Great, another girl dressing up as a guy. I can't believe even the young kids are doing this now."

... The fuck?

"I'm a guy...?" he said after a moment of hesitation, though he knew it was more of a question than a statement. He also knew he could just ignore her and move on, and he was half-tempted to. However, the assumption was just so out of place that he was actually more curious about why she even thought that in the first place than his hatred to speaking.

The woman snorted. "Sure you are," she said in a tone that said the exact opposite. She wasn't even looking at him, instead scrolling through her phone. "Though your hair says otherwise."

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But oh my god when was the last time he actually had a haircut? And why hadn't he noticed it before? Oh shoot, short hair for men was the trend nowadays. How had he forgotten that?

A part of him just wanted to curl up and die of utter humiliation as his face flushed. Embarrassment wasn't a common emotion for him, but now he felt like just never existing. The woman rolled her eyes at his red cheeks. "God, you little girls are terrible liars."

Midoriya didn't correct her. He didn't really feel the need to.

As he hid his face in his scarf, Juni appeared by his shoulder. Ignoring her attempts at trying to make him feel better, he found himself in the winter isle once again. He sighed as he looked at the different
umbrellas, and Juni caught his eye before pointing(?!) at a dark blue one. It was small and portable, which was good enough for him, and he reached on his tippy-toes to grab it off the shelf. Holding it close to his chest, he was about to leave when something caught his eye.

He paused. Juni did, too.

And then, without thinking, he grabbed the pair of gloves with the leather outsides and pulled them on. They were thin but warm, and not clunky overall. He didn't have any need for them, but...

*Why don't we add yours to the collection?*

He shuddered and took them with him.

======

Later, while walking through one of the isles specified for quirks, he would find a small slip of fabric that was geared toward people who released pheromones at their neck. The fabric covered the entirety of his scar and then some, zipping up in the back. It reminded him a bit of a choker, to be honest, except it was too big for that.

After looking through the different options, he settled on a thin black one. It was stretchy but tight, meaning that it wouldn't come loose, and he added that to his pile as well.

He would miss his scarf, but it was more functional. (And if it made Hiroji smile, well, that made it all the better.)

======

Tsukauchi Naomasa wanted a normal day without weird happenings going on in his office.

For example, someone getting access into the camera footage of the building he worked in, looping said footage, getting inside without setting off any alarms or attracting the attention of anyone else, and then putting a letter on his desk.

And then leaving. Without a trace. Which really peeved off Tsukauchi, because he really wanted to give the person a piece of his mind. And it didn't help matters that, despite looking for any kinds of DNA left behind on the letter or the seal, they were left with nothing. No fingerprints. No saliva.

And it was driving him *insane.*

The contents of the letter wouldn't reveal anything either, except for a small note and a couple of pictures that happened to be laminated.

*Heard from these guys that they were planning on committing robbery at Missionary Bank. Thought I'd let you know, though be aware that that could just be the alcohol talking.*

He stared at the small handful of pictures that were left behind, most of them fuzzy except for the last one. Tsukauchi sighed as he recognized several men that he had already arrested on multiple occasions.

*Dang it.* This warning actually had some credibility.

He sighed again and tried to ease his headache by rubbing the bridge of his nose.

(Ten hours from then, after he called for patrol around the area to be doubled, a few heroes would catch the men in action. Standing alongside the crowd, his face hidden partially by his hoodie and his
"Do you think I should cut my hair?" is what Midoriya ended up blurting to Hiroji one day. The man blinked. He ran a hand through his hair as he exhaled sharply. "I dunno, kid. If I'm to be honest, I think it looks good on you. I mean, you might want to get it shorter than it is now if it's a hassle to deal with, but I think it's nice." He chuckled and gave him an honest smile. "But if you want to cut it really, really short, then you do you. I think anything would look good on you, really."

Midoriya pondered over it. "We'll see," he compromised, because he wasn't quite sure himself.

The hairdresser he went to said the same thing as Hiroji did. So he pursed his lips and made up his mind.

He left, his hair several inches shorter than before. It was just long enough that he could almost put his hair into a ponytail, but most of it would fall out seconds later.

Hiroji's eyes would light up and he'd ruffle his hair.

"It looks amazing," he'd said.

And that made him feel amazing, too.

It was two months later that Midoriya ducked under a roundhouse kick, sending the heel of his palm in a quick strike into his opponent's side. The girl hissed in pain before she attempted to punch him, her attacks clumsy at best.

Martial Arts was a little... unfulfilling when compared to real fights, but he chalked it up to him being younger than most. Still, he had been hoping for some serious progress before he joined—

The girl sent another kick at him, and he jumped over her, using her shoulders as a springboard as he twisted himself in the air to face her back. Landing smoothly on his feet, he swept his leg underneath hers and she tumbled to the ground, hitting hands and knees first onto the mats below. She winced and rolled onto her back, whining about something not being fair when "Master Splinter" called the end of the fight.

He felt a little bad for her, honestly, but he couldn't help himself. The only way he was able to convince himself to make any contact with another person was by imagining them as villain versus hero. It didn't necessarily matter who was villain or who was hero, just that one needed to defeat the other without hesitation. And often, in that mindset, he found himself not holding back as much as he would like to. Not that he was full-out beating the crap out of people, because one: he wasn't that strong, and two: because he was still coherent, dang it. He knew from all the whispering and rumors that people thought that he went into a fit of insanity and ruthlessness whenever he was against someone, but when it came down to it, his fights were the least messy. One of the older kids even kicked another kid's tooth out, for goodness sake.

Or maybe it was because of his age. He wasn't the youngest kid there, far from it, but he was younger than most of the people "Master Splinter" put him up against. He explained that he was a
quick learner, and that's why he was always against kids older than him, but those kids just despised him with a passion. Maybe it was a pride thing? Midoriya didn't quite understand.

He sighed internally and did his best to smile as he held out a hand to the girl, who looked up at him with a mix of barely held rage and humiliation. (He could tell. Her eyes changed color according to what emotion she was feeling, and they were a mix of lime green and lava red.) Something flickered, though, and they turned a soft blue (thankfulness) as he pulled her back up. They bowed to one another and then stepped off the mat, leaving it to the next pair of kids.

He felt a little out of place, honestly. It wasn't that the kids weren't putting effort into it, because they were, it was just... not their full effort. They weren't leaving class with sore muscles and a shattered pride, with a goal to beat something that was leagues above them. They weren't pushing themselves to use every minute available to overcome something that threw him into the ground.

And that was a little bit of a disappointment.

(The next day, Hiroji would patiently explain to him that most kids didn't have that drive. Didn't have that mindset. And Midoriya knew that, for sure, but that didn't make it any better.)

Class finished a few minutes late, and parents stood by the doorway, waiting to pick up their kids. Not for the first time, those with guardians coming late asked him where his were. He blinked and told them that his dad was running late. Kids whose parents always came a little late because of work raised an eyebrow at him or sent pitying glances. He pretended not to notice them.

He zipped up his backpack, pulling the strap over his shoulder before turning around. The last kid was finally hand-in-hand with his mother, and Midoriya was close behind.

"Hold up, Midoriya. I want to talk to you."

He froze, turning to Master Splinter. He hummed his question, unable to bring up a smile to match his curiosity.

The man was rolling up the mats as he seemed to ponder what he wanted to say. After a minute of silence, he finally spoke.

"You seem unhappy." An observation.

"I'm not," Midoriya replied. He wasn't. He knew what unhappiness felt like.

Master Splinter sighed and shook his head. "Fine. You're not unhappy. But you want something." He turned to Midoriya, the look in his eyes immediately shutting up anything Midoriya had to say. "You're a smart kid. Smarter than most I've ever met. Maybe even the smartest. You need to do something, and I'm not letting you do that. So tell me what you want."

And Midoriya didn't know how to think about that, except that he really, really liked him. He adapted. He made changes for a weird kid with a need to cover his neck because he was different from anyone else. He taught him how he knew best, letting him win time after time after time until he was stronger than before, until he was on his way to becoming the best in the class.

But...

"I want to lose, sir."

Master Splinter stared at him for a long, long time, eyes searching and mouth stretched into a thin line. Apparently, he found something, and he chuckled before shaking his head again.
"You're the craziest kid I have ever met. Sure, I can set that up for you."

=====

"The kid wants... to lose?" Eishun Akihito stared at his old Master.

Master Splinter laughed at his expression. "Yep."

Eishun blinked before rubbing the back of his head nervously. "I mean, that sounds like a terrible idea. The kid is, what, eleven? Are you sure he won't just leave after?"

Master Lee (Eishun's current master) looked at Master Splinter skeptically. "I know you said you had high hopes for the kid, but I'm not sure this is a good idea. My class is mostly made up of teenagers who've had a lot of experience. He'd be like a lamb thrown in to the wolves."

Master Splinter shrugged. "So? Best way to learn. And it seems as if the kid wants it." He turned to Akihito. "At least try to fight him, eh?"

Akihito felt his pride get attacked by the statement. "Try? Trust me, I'll wipe the floor with him."

He couldn't help the sinking feeling in his stomach as Master Splinter grinned at him devilishly.

=====

Master Lee stood at the front of his class. Next to him was a kid about half his height, who Akihito took to observing.

He had longer hair than most kids his age did, and its dark green curls shone in the light as the kid pulled it into a small ponytail low against his neck. His eyes were the same shade, but they seemed to hold worlds of knowledge, almost as if he had seen and knew more than any kid his age should have. He had a small piece of black fabric that fit tightly around his neck, and part of him wondered if it was a part of his quirk or if he thought it simply looked cool.

(And yeah, it did kind of look cool, but he didn't say that.)

There wasn't much to say about him. He was a little plain looking, and the only notable thing about his features was the freckles that dotted his cheeks and what was visible of his shoulders—the oversized shirt and the fabric on his neck did a good job of hiding them. Overall, Akihito was a bit let down. He was expecting someone that looked older than an eleven-year-old, someone with a quirk that let them build muscles faster than any man should. What he was greeted with was a kid that could pass for a tall nine-year-old if he wanted to.

He sighed. He really wanted a challenge from all of Master Splinter's bragging. Though he shouldn't have really expected much, since the guy told him he had only been practicing for three months.

Master Lee said a few words which ran right over his head, started their exercises—which left him surprised when the kid actually managed to keep up—and then set up the mats. He said something about being respectful as Midoriya and Akihito stood face-to-face.

It wasn't as if this wasn't common. Because it happened, at least four times a year. Master Splinter would find someone he thought that might have potential, and he'd ask them to fight against someone from Master Lee's class, who was technically superior by skill and age. Anyone that graduated from Master Splinter's class came here, which meant that if Master Splinter chose you to fight up against the upper class, you were guaranteed a place there.
The problem with that was that the kids weren't ready for it. All of them either thought that the entire thing was rigged and threw a fit, or they used the excuse that they couldn't learn anything from getting your behind whooped in order to save their pride. There was the occasional person who refused kindly because they were too nervous to join with people who were way older than them—or their parents didn't want them to because their "injuries" were more severe (the worst they had was a sprained ankle because someone thought they were a ninja and fell wrong)—so honestly, he wasn't expecting much. Maybe the kid would take the beating quietly.

So color him surprised when the kid ended up being faster than physically possible what the bloody heck.

Sure, the kid's attacks were a little off kilter, but he was fast and he was flexible. Balance was something the kid excelled in, and leaning at an almost impossible angle with only one foot made him really hard to hit. Plus, he had really strong legs...? Akihito pretty much sent a full-powered downward kick to his thigh and, while he faltered, he still stood.

So maybe he was starting to see why Master Splinter was bragging.

Akihito stepped back and panted. How long was this fight going on for? He wasn't quite sure. Not long, he knew, because he had been in fights much, much longer and harder than this. This was nothing. Taking in a deep breath, he looked down to see that Midoriya was also panting, his arms in a defensive position in front of him. If he were to be honest, Akihito had never seen the kind of movement and defensive position Midoriya was in. It was effective, and it allowed him to smoothly move from one hit to the other, but he had no idea where he learned it from. And yet it seemed like second nature to him.

Which was another weird thing. The kid was good, and yet he had only been training for three months?

Something about that... didn't exactly match up.

"He wants to lose."

Akihito clenched his jaw as he remembered Master Splinter's words.

Fine. I'll give you a loss.

Without thinking, he pounced forward, hand outstretched to hit him in the throat. Clearly that was the kid's weak point, more so than others. Something akin to fear flashed in his eyes, and his legs tensed.

The next thing Akihito knew, he was staring at the ceiling. He rolled back up to his feet, his vision swimming and his legs wavering. He stumbled on his feet but regained his balance.

Okay then. So the kid just threw me onto the ground Black Widow style by wrapping his legs around my neck and... swinging me to down?... which landed him in a crouch. Seems legit.

Welp, clearly I need to stop underestimating eleven-year-olds. Because they might just be the work of Satan and kiss my—

Midoriya aimed a high kick at his chin; he grabbed his ankle and twisted it, throwing him to his hands and knees before ending it with harsh knee to the back of his head. (It was something he'd apologize profusely later for, earning him a small smile that almost reached the kid's eyes.) He ended it with his leg around his neck, holding him tightly in his grip.
The kid coughed a few times before he finally called uncle, and Akihito released his hold on him. Midoriya would rub his neck a few times before facing Akihito, bowing to him. "Thank you," he said, his first words for the class to hear. Akihito bowed in response, and that was that. He couldn't help but shudder, though, at the knowing gleam in the boy's eyes and the way he seemed just that more knowledgeable. As if the entire thing just put him at a higher advantage than before, even if he had just lost.

The kid would stick with them for the rest of the practice. Akihito would suffer a little bit of teasing from his friends, who laughed at his failure at beating a kid three years younger than him with ease. "He was a difficult opponent," he tried to reason, but they just laughed some more.

At the end of class, the boy approached him again. And Akihito accepted.

And when Midoriya whooped his ass, well, that certainly stopped all the teasing.

======

Midoriya raised his arms high above his head and stretched as he walked, earning him a satisfying pop and an unintentional sound of happiness escaping him. Juni sat on his shoulder, happily sunbathing without care in the world. It was still a little chilly out, enough to wear his jacket, gloves, and scarf without too many weird looks, but the sun helped warm people up.

Perfect weather, in his opinion.

He relished in it as he walked, knowing that soon February would end and March would begin, letting him claim the title of a twelve-year-old. His birthday was on (July 15th) March 12th—or, that was what Hisashi claimed. Midoriya was almost positive that he just got an online randomizer and picked one that called out to him.

Whatever. It didn't really bother him anyway.

He found himself standing in front of the bookstore Juni pointed out a long time ago, and he made his way inside. There was no bell on this door, which Midoriya appreciated, and the door was well oiled that it barely made a sound. It made sense—college students and those who wanted a nice, quiet read probably didn't want to get interrupted all the time. He sighed before making his way to the front desk, pulling out the four books he finished reading and setting them on the table. A young girl, either in her late teens or early twenties, smiled at him with her metal teeth and rang them up. She nodded to herself.

"Anything you'd like to pick out today?"

Midoriya tapped his chin before nodding. "I think I wanted to read that English poetry book you showed me a while ago. Out of the Dust, I think you called it."

The young woman nodded before handing it to him. "Had it set out for you in case you wanted to check it out," she explained, seeing the questioning look he sent her. "You seemed a little bit interested last week, anyway. Anything else? This one is a quick read, seeing how fluent you can read in English."

Midoriya felt his face flush as he rubbed the back of his head. He muttered a small "thanks" before answering her question. "I was thinking of indulging myself in a bit of science. Anything on time travel or the beginning of quirks?"

A smirk made it onto her face. "I can get you both."
Midoriya returned her smile. "Well then, I guess I'll be checking out three books then."

She chuckled before disappearing into the back room, reassuring him that she'd be out in a moment.

He left with his bag just a little bit heavier and a curiosity a bit brighter. It wasn't even noon when he stopped by the cafe he always went to, picking out a simple tea to drink while he read.

"You sure you don't want a pastry?" the woman by the counter asked. "I can get you one. They're the best around."

Midoriya hesitated. "I'm really not supposed to eat that many sweets," he admitted.

"Bah!" she said. "One won't kill you."

He looked into her begging eyes and sighed. "You pick one out for me, and I'll eat it," he said.

She grinned at him, told him it was on the house—to which he protested profusely, though she refused anything else—and then shooed him to his favorite corner outside. It was set off from the rest of the tables, and it was half-hidden underneath the shade. It was also smaller, but he didn’t mind since he always sat alone.

The same woman approached him later, a nice cup of steaming tea and a fluffy pastry, baked and warm to the touch, on a plate that she sat on his table. He thanked her, and she just winked to him in response. "Of course, hun. Gotta spoil my favorite customer, you know?"

(Yes, he flushed and mumbled unintelligible things after. Leave him alone.)

He started *Out of the Dust* first. It was interesting. The main character, Billie Jo, was a talented piano player. She lived in the Midwestern area of the United States during the Great Depression. Nothing was growing on their farm, and they suffered from little food. It was a little depressing, to be honest. The poetry wasn’t complicated at all, though. He could easily read it like any other book.

And then Billie Jo's father left a pail of kerosene on the counter. Billie Jo's mom thought it was water, so she poured it to make coffee, and then fire struck. Billie Jo ran inside the house to stop their house from burning down, and, heroically, threw the pail out the window.

Right back onto her pregnant mom.

She was on fire.

Billie Jo suffered from third degree burns as she tried to put out the flames with her bare hands.

Billie Jo's mom died in childbirth not too long after. The baby died, too.

Billie Jo couldn't play the piano without her hands hurting her.

And Midoriya cried, because he could feel his neck burning from the kerosene, just like Billie Jo's hand's did.

And Midoriya cried, because he wondered if his mom felt so much despair when she burned him, too.

=====

Billie Jo got better, Midoriya thought as he finished the book.
She even got to play the piano again.

March the twelfth came a little too soon. He woke up to the smell of food, and he was surprised when he entered the kitchen to find a small plate of pancakes made just for him. Steam rose off them, and he looked to the small slug that was curled up on his alarm clock innocently.

Guess he was going to have to say thanks to her later.

The food was delicious, though he couldn't eat all of it. Which didn't seem to offend Juni, who appeared not much longer. In fact, she just bounced a little bit before poking at a letter he had been ignoring until she was there to see him open it. He was careful, trying not to rip the envelope as he pulled out the small piece of paper. A long note written in fancy calligraphy (Juni had really good handwriting) explained how happy Juni was to have met him and such, and he smiled and held her close. "Thank you," he whispered, and she seemed to croon under his touch.

School was nice. The vice principal told him happy birthday.

He arrived back into his apartment with little trouble, a bag of groceries in hand. He had about an hour until his lessons with Hiroji, so...

He set out the materials he needed. He had already practiced this a couple times on his own, so he knew what to do and was confident that he wasn't going to burn anything. Usually he did this when one of the people in his martial arts class had a birthday, but he never actually tried them out for himself, so he was just relying on the fact that they all claimed that they were really good.

But hey, it was nice to finally make them for his own birthday.

It wasn't long later that he pulled out several trays of cookies from the oven (though they looked a little too good, and he wondered if Juni did anything to them) and set them out on a cooling rack. He was going to have to wait a couple minutes for them to cool, so he'd be a bit late to gymnastics practice, but he was sure Hiroji wouldn't mind. He was usually early every day since there wasn't much else to distract himself with, so he could be late one day, right?

Apparently not. When he walked in, Hiroji was panicking and was squawking about how he had no idea what happened to him. The other instructors looked a little panicked at how to deal with him, and the one whose hair could tie itself immediately saw an out when she spotted him.

"Look, he's here now, so stop acting like a clingy bitch!"

Hiroji responded to her by sending her the middle finger and appearing right by Midoriya's side.

"Are you okay? I wasn't expecting you to be late. Are you sick? Did you run into a villain? Did something come up with your family and—"

Midoriya shook his head. "Chikara-senpai, please calm down." He wanted to raise his hands in a sign of surrender, but his hands were currently full with the tray of cookies. Tinfoil covered the surface to keep any bugs out, but overall, it was still warm. (Which may or may have not been done on purpose.)

"Eh? What's in your hands?" It was the woman with the hair-related quirk. There were a couple other instructors too, though most were getting back to their groups.

Midoriya sighed and pulled off the tinfoil, letting the cookies go on full view. "I made a batch," he
said tonelessly despite seeing the sparkles in their eyes. "I thought I'd give some of them away since I wasn't going to eat all of them."

"Oh my gosh you're my savior thank you so much—" was what the woman said before she stole one. "Oh fudge, they're still warm."

One of the older instructors, another woman with green bobbed hair, took a cookie and moaned. "God these are good."

"I know right? I feel like I'm getting spoiled."

"What's the occasion, anyway?" Hiroji said as he took a bite of one.

"Oh, it's my birthday today."

Everyone froze.

"Kid, what the heck. We're eating your birthday cookies. This is a crime."

Midoriya snorted. "Sure, whatever you say. But seriously, I don't mind. They probably would have just gone stale anyway, I don't eat many sweets." Hiroji opened his mouth to protest, but Midoriya cut him off. "And anyway, seeing you guys happy makes me happy. So... think of it as a birthday gift."

"Hiroji, how the hell did you of all people manage to pick up the cinnamon roll of the world?"

The man shrugged helplessly. "Don't ask me, I have no idea."

Everyone burst into laughter around Midoriya, who stood there, trying to figure out what the heck cinnamon roll meant in terms of people. Maybe he'd look it up later or something.

"Anyway, I'm buying you a present, and you can't stop me," Hiroji said. "If you're going to spoil us, I get to spoil you."

"Please don't." He had no idea what else to say, since that determined gleam in the man's eyes seemed to strengthen with every passing second.

=====

The next time he came for practice, Midoriya was handed a small metal bracelet. On its front, I AM ENOUGH was written carefully.

Midoriya liked it. A lot. (He had a sneaking suspicion that Hiroji's quirk was geared toward mental stability; neither of them brought it up, though, despite the curiosity each of them had for the other's mysterious quirk.)

And if he wore the bracelet every day, well, that was only for him and Juni to know.

===== 

"Problem Child."

Midoriya looked up into the man's tired eyes. The threat of tears in his eyes made his vision go fuzzy.

"Please. I want to help you, but I can't if I don't know what's going on."
He burst into tears. The man's eyes widened. "I can't," he said. "I can't, I can't, I can't." He hiccuped as he buried his head in his arms. "I can't," he said again, his voice muffled.

He felt a chair being pulled up next to him.

"Yes, you can," came his reassurance. There was a hand on his back, slowly rubbing circles with their thumb. "I know you can."

Midoriya woke up, vision swimming and cold sweat rolling down his neck. He rolled over and, in a burst of speed, made it to the bathroom. He managed to only knock into one wall before he was puking in the toilet, bile revolting his taste buds as he shuddered and another round of puke escaped his lips.

Juni was there, beside him, probably bigger than a dog and letting him lean up against her.

And he let himself hover in and out of consciousness before Juni finally woke him up again. He went to school, which was boring. Barely any real studies. Little to no homework.

Nothing to distract him with.

=====

Piano keys felt nice under his fingers, he decided one day when there was nothing else to do.

=====

He made a passport. He got a few suspicious looks out of it. He also knew that he was going to have to do it eventually, so better to do it then than later.

He also added more information and corrected a few things on his personal files of information. Hisashi had faked most of them—though he had forged sources to prove them from people that were indebted to him—and so he just picked up the rest. It wasn't hard, really.

He did leave the page for his quirk registration blank, though.

Walking home after that drained him of what little energy he had left, however. He decided to do all of it after another rough day of martial arts class—seriously, was Master Lee trying to kill him?—and so he was ready to go straight to bed and sleep. Halfway through, though, he felt his legs almost give out underneath him, and so he stopped by a park nearby and sat on the bench.

He sighed and let his head droop back, watching the stars overhead twinkle.

It was nice.

=====

He woke up to someone poking his side. He blinked and looked up, neck sore from the position he was sleeping in, to see a young girl no older than seven with glasses on her face. Her eyes literally glowed, like spotlights. She gestured something with her hands, though Midoriya had no idea what she was trying to say when he saw the devices on her ears.

*Deaf.*

He felt a pang of guilt go through him as he reached into his pocket for his notepad. He struggled to find a pen afterward, but eventually Juni handed him one and he, in turn, gave it to the girl in front of him. She seemed a bit surprised but took it, writing quickly with one hand.
You were sitting here out in the dark. That's dangerous. Momma told me to wake you up instead because she looks scary in the dark, but she wants you to be safe. Bad people come out in the dark.

Midoriya felt his chest warm up as he read it. He glanced to the side, seeing a dark figure with lines of neon red running up their body and shimmering slightly. He turned back to the girl and wrote his own response.

Thank you.

She smiled and made a gesture with his hands, which he assumed was your welcome before she hopped away.

Sign Language. Huh.

Looks like he had another thing to look forward to over the weekend alongside piano lessons.

=====

When Midoriya finally arrived home, it was around two in the morning. He sighed and ran a hand through his hair, grimacing at how long it was getting. Another haircut was in store for him, then.

He was about to open his door when his foot came in contact with something heavy. He looked down curiously and picked it up. In the faint light from the lamppost he saw that it was a box mailed to him.

He felt his stomach tie itself into knots. Few people knew his address, and only one of those would send something to him.

He unlocked his door and walked inside, double checking that the lock was turned all the way before he made his way to the living room. Juni turned on the lights for him as he took off his shoes, and he sat on one of the small couches with the package in his lap. Juni gave him a pair of scissors, which he handled with shaking hands as he cut through the tap and opened the flaps of the box.

Inside was a small wooden box, dark and worn around the edges from use. It looked so, so familiar, but this one had carvings in the wood, lined with silver that shone and glimmered in the faint light. He pulled the smaller box out and opened it with shaking hands, his eyes concentrating on the small note that was inside.

A little bit of an upgrade. Hope you like them!

MH

Tearing the note away, he was met with two green contacts sitting innocently on a velvet cushion.

They were a lot easier on the eyes than his last ones.

=====

He dreamed of a woman with short, wavy blonde hair and brown eyes. She liked headbands since they kept most of her hair out of her eyes, and she wore dark leather boots that came to her knees with buckles on each side. She was smart. She was sweet. She was strong.

She was also a really good liar.

Midoriya didn't know that, at the time. Not when she held him in her arms, not when she promised him everything would be alright, not when she told him that all the mean people who wanted him
dead were keeping him safe.

She was like a second mother to him. She would kiss his neck when it burned with phantom pains. She would tuck him into bed.

Sometimes, her and his mother's faces would overlap. Sometimes, they looked like the same person.

Because they were both meant to take care of him.

They both stabbed him in the back.

But he still loved his mother.

He still loved Maiko.

Sometimes, he would forget.

Sometimes, he would remember.

Those were the days where anything in his hands burned.

He wished he could burn them, too.

But then he would berate himself.

Because the only reason they did what they did was because he caused them to.

Because he existed.

And that really made it hard to get up in the morning.

=====

Summer break. Most kids were going to visit family, or relax at home, or do normal things.

Midoriya was taking a plane, by himself, to a place far from home. Adults questioned where his parents were. Guards were extra careful to check if he had anything on him that could warrant danger. They didn't find anything. And his passport matched up, too, which further cemented his identity.

His backpack didn't have much, but it was enough. He had several changes of clothes, his phone, a couple of books, his jacket and windbreaker, his umbrella, and his wallet. He brought his credit card with him, which also raised eyebrows, but damn it he was a capable twelve-year-old and he knew what he was doing.

It took him too long to get on the plane. He got a window seat, which both terrified and exhilarated him, and he watched for hours out the window, seeing the stars above him and the clouds below. He listened to music on his phone, let it settle him into a sense of rest even though he didn't actually sleep. The entire flight was over twenty-one hours, but it was worth it. He finished reading three new books he checked out just for this purpose, and two of the harder ones still lied, untouched, in his backpack. Which was great, because he wanted to read those on the way back.

By the time he landed, he was ready to jump out of his seat. He left the airport—but not before he converted his money into the new country he was in—and then waved down a taxi. The driver looked at him funny for being alone, but asked him where to go. (The only reason he knew this was because he taught himself a little bit of the language before he left for his trip.) He asked for the hotel
closest to a specific city, and the man nodded.

The drive was an hour, and he paid the man well for it before entering. The person at the desk also looked at him oddly, but he showed her the money and she gave in. He set down his backpack in the room he was assigned to and sighed in relief.

He wished Juni was here, but he left her at home. He knew she would get stressed out on the trip, and she was much more comfortable staying at the apartment and making sure nothing bad happened to it.

He slept for several hours before waking again. He wasn't fully rested, but it would have to do. He stood up, looked through his bag for his certain pair of shoes and clothes before leaving.

He ran several miles in the cold. People continued to give him odd looks until he finally reached the edge of the city. At the entrance of the abandoned park sat a small booth with pamphlets. He grabbed one and turned to the map section.

Sure, he couldn't speak Portuguese well, but he knew how to read it well enough. He was here for several months before Hisashi took him in, anyway, and the place smelled like home.

It also smelled like an illegal dumping spot, but that was beside the point.

It took him two hours of trekking before he found the bridge he lived under. Home sweet home, he thought sarcastically. Oh, but if only Hisashi had explored the area just a little bit more thoroughly before he took him. It wasn't just him that had those "strange wavelengths."

Midoriya jumped into the small creek, feeling his shoes start to soak up the water as he rested the palm of his hand against the rocks. He whispered something into the water, waiting quietly until something in the back of his mind twisted and the ground opened up beneath him. Little bits of water drained into the opening, and he reached inside to pull out a briefcase. He felt the tell-tale signs of distortion in his senses as the hole closed back up.

Traveling all the way across the world, just to get a case. It almost made Midoriya want to laugh, except it really wasn't funny.

A shower sounded nice after spending several hours walking around in a garbage dump. It was exactly what he did when he got back, and he sighed in relief at the clean clothes and socks he wore. He was about to take another nap before heading to the airport again when his phone vibrated. It was a random number, and he was about to ignore it when he noticed that the same number called him eight times already. His eyebrows raised, he answered it.

His blood turned cold when he heard a familiar voice.

"Why the fuck are you in Brazil?"

Midoriya's grip on his phone tightened. He had no idea what to say, or how to respond to that. Think with your feet, it always leads you somewhere, Hiroji had said.

"Business, dumbass," he told Hisashi before hanging up. He stared at his phone.

Well, that confirmed his theory that Hisashi had been stalking him. At least now he could say that all those months being cautious came into good use.

Without thinking about it, he went over to the small balcony that overlooked the streets. Seeing no one in sight, he dropped his phone over the railing, watching it shatter as it hit the ground. The
broken remains glinted in the setting sun.

Guess he had an excuse now to buy a new phone.

=====

Storms pounded the airplane that Midoriya took on his way back from Brazil. He was exhausted, the briefcase at his feet weighed him down by eight tons, and his body felt sore all over. The lightning and thunder wasn't helping any, either.

It wasn't like he hated them. They always fascinated him, really. But they were terrifying to be in, especially a bad one where you had no cover and you were left to hope you didn't get hit. It was the entire reason he sat under a bridge for several months at a time. It wasn’t the most glamorous place out of those that he chose, but it was enough to keep him safe.

He flinched as more lightning struck.

He wrapped his arms around his trembling figure.

He wanted Juni.

=====

Home was a small apartment with a slug and tea and the smell of baking cookies. Home was the warehouse or the martial arts building. Home was fighting, stretching, moving, burning. Home was the small bookstore with the big windows. Home was the big cafe with the woman and her deep voice.

Home was not Brazil.

Home was never Brazil.

"How was your trip?" Hiroji asked.

Midoriya looked to him. "I'm glad to be home," is what he said instead.

Even if Midoriya couldn't put it into words, even if he couldn't convey it, Hiroji understood.

He always did.

=====

Midoriya would never admit it, but Hiroji was becoming a sort of parental figure to him.

And that scared him so, so much. It was bone-deep terror. He had nightmares of Hiroji betraying him too, of him pouring kerosene on his face or selling him off to a group of villains.

Those were the only dreams he woke up screaming to.

=====

Midoriya had a small laptop in his bag and a new phone. It wasn't the incredibly expensive, newest models or anything, but they were functional and he appreciated that. Birds were chirping above him as he started drawing a new figure for Ragdoll, a hero who was a part of the Wild, Wild, Pussycats. She had just recently created a new outfit, and he decided that it was better to just create a new bio for her rather than erasing the old one since she had grown a lot.
He just finished when the waitress from before gave him another set of tea and a small plate of macaroons. He tried to protest since he hadn't paid for it, but she just patted him on the head before leaving, which was enough to shut him up.

And anyway, he appreciated the gesture. Hopefully it would take the edge off of depressing matters.

Ragdoll was great and all, and her quirk was really cool, but the only reason he did her first was because of the tragedy that happened not too long ago. The Water Hose Duo died protecting a bunch of civilians from a guy named Muscular. Midoriya had already finished the bio on Muscular, which sickened him to no end and left him with little to no appetite. The man was beyond a lunatic.

The Water Hose Duo had a son, though. Which made Midoriya want to punch the guy in the face even harder. Midoriya knew it had to be hard on the kid.

The Water Hose Duo were intelligent, attractive middle-aged heroes with hearts of gold and smiles of silver. Several times Midoriya had to distract himself with cat videos to finish their bios. He kind of wished that he did them earlier and didn't focus on them so much until after they died. Someday, though, he would be able to record all the heroes known and present to this date.

He sighed again before closing his notebook, looking up.

Only to come face-to-face with a girl with long, dark hair and fair skin.

... Okay then.

The girl seemed to notice him staring at her, because she flushed deeply in embarrassment. "I apologize, but apparently I came to eat at a very busy time. I was going to leave to go somewhere else, but the nice lady at the counter said that you wouldn't mind if I sat here. Of course, if this isn't true—"

"It's fine," he interrupted, feeling a little bad about it immediately after. He coughed awkwardly. "I haven't seen you around here...?" he prompted, and the girl's eyes lit up.

"Ah, well, my parents have some work to do in this city. They thought it would be good to get me to... ah, "explore" a bit," she said nervously. "I heard this cafe was the best of the best, so I thought I'd try it out... once again, I apologize for the intrusion."

Midoriya blinked and narrowed his eyes. Something about her seemed familiar... "No, you're fine, really. And I'm glad you stayed, this is the best cafe in the city." He tilted his head. "How long are you staying?"

The girl smiled. "A week. Maybe two if things take longer than expected."

Midoriya nodded to himself. "If you're a reader, there's this nice bookstore not too far from here." He pulled out his notepad and started writing down all the places he had been to. "There's a couple of nice parks as well. This place is the best for food, and they have the greatest variety, so I don't think you could get sick of this place. Especially since they continuously change and add to the menu. However, there are two other nice places, though the quality isn't as great and it's more expensive. There's also a gift shop on the other side of the city that's really nice. I don't know how much wealth you hold to your name, but there's plenty of stuff there, if only a little overpriced. If you want to go window shopping, there's this whole block—" He pulled out a map from his pocket (thank god for Juni) and laid it out on the table, circling with a red pen a certain area. "—that sells all sorts of really pretty things. It's mostly paintings and art, though there's also a few clothing and jewelry shops as well."
The girl looked a little overwhelmed, and he didn't blame her. He folded the map and ripped the slip of paper from his notepad, laying one on top of the other as he handed it to her. "I'd be careful, though. We don't get much crime, but you're pretty and guys can be really weird about stuff like that. Not saying that you can't take care of yourself, because you probably could if your parents are okay with you wandering around, but still."

The girl took the map and the paper from his hand, eyes roaming over the names of the places and the addresses. "Thank you," she said, though a nervous glint came to her eyes. "Though, I'm not sure I..." She seemed to struggle. "My parents are really protective over me," she explained, "and I haven't really been given many self-protection lessons..."

"I can come with you, if you'd like." He wants to hit himself the moment the words are out of his mouth, because seriously? He just met the girl and he had no experience with human interaction and what the heck was he getting into?

The girl's eyes lit up again. "That would be amazing! Though..." She rubbed the back of her head. "It's not a date, right? I mean, you called me pretty, but..."

Midoriya blinked. "I'm, like, eighty-three percent I'm aromantic. Or seventy-three percent, really. I haven't quite figured the whole thing out. But anyway, no offense, but I've just met you and I already have no human social skills, so getting into a date would probably end up being both of our worst nightmares."

The girl stared at him before bursting out into laughter. She took the notepad and wrote her number on it, sliding it back to him. "That's my number. Think we could go "exploring" tomorrow?"

"Sure," he agreed. After a moment of hesitation, he held out his hand. He hated touching strangers, and he'd rather die six times over, but...

Something about this just seemed a little bit different. A nice kind of different.

"My name's Midoriya Izuku," he said, and she smiled and took his hand.

It occurred to him a second after just who he was looking at before she even said her name.

"It's nice to meet you, Midoriya. My name is Yaoyorozu Momo."

Chapter End Notes

So... Anyone like the chapter? Any surprises? Hehe... he. I'm really sorry if it isn't as good as the other chapters, I'm doing my best but I know I'm not as good an author as some. But thank you for all your comments, they all really do inspire me and I respond to each and every one.
Chapter Notes

Readers: How do you get so much done in so little time?

Me: *looks into mirror, sees bloodshot eyes and bags*

Good question.

Also, I tried to edit the text messages so that specific users would go to a certain side, but it wouldn't work with me. I'm going to try to figure that out, but anyway, I'm sorry that you're going to have to suffer from that. :(

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yaoyorozu Momo:
I'm sorry, Midoriya, but I'm afraid that I'm going to have to move our meeting until the day after tomorrow.

Midoriya was surprised the girl was even awake, seeing as it was eleven at night—it was still the same day he had met her—but he supposed that he really shouldn't judge people's characters so soon.

Midoriya Izuku:
It's fine. Something come up?

Yaoyorozu Momo:
Do you remember when I told you that my parents are extra protective of my safety?

Midoriya Izuku:
Ah. So they've been looking into my personal files and have been trying to find a way to arrest me through suspicious activity.

Yaoyorozu Momo:
???

Yaoyorozu Momo:
I mean, yeah, but how'd you even know?

Midoriya Izuku:
I have my ways.

Yaoyorozu Momo:
Well that isn't ominous at all.

Yaoyorozu Momo:
But you aren't freaked out or anything? I was expecting even a little bit more of a reaction from you.
Midoriya Izuku:
I mean, they shouldn't find anything?

Midoriya Izuku:
And anyway, I guess that just means they care in their own, unconventional way.

Yaoyorozu Momo:
I... haven't thought about it like that?

Yaoyorozu Momo:
But thanks, I guess.

Yaoyorozu Momo:
What are your parents like?

Midoriya blinked. Hisashi and Inko weren't exactly the best of examples... But his real parents were criminals at the moment for trying to kill their own child.

Or, they would be, if they were even on record. Unfortunately, they didn't exist to anyone anymore.

Guess he was going to have to go with another white lie.

Midoriya Izuku:
I kind of live by myself. My mom travels a lot because she doesn't like staying in one place, and my dad works overseas. He doesn't come home often.

Yaoyorozu Momo:
Oh... I'm sorry.

Midoriya Izuku:
It's not your fault? I don't really mind it anymore.

Midoriya Izuku:
I'm sorry, I'm a little too honest sometimes. It makes things awkward.

Yaoyorozu Momo:
No no, you're fine. It kind of makes sense as to why you were out by yourself and didn't have any doubts about showing me around.

Yaoyorozu Momo:
Who takes care of you while your parents are gone?

... Oh. Uhm.

Midoriya Izuku:
My neighbor did for a while. I tried to learn to be self-sufficient though.

Yaoyorozu Momo:
That's cool.

Yaoyorozu Momo:
Heyyy, you play the piano?
Yaoyorozu Momo:
Wow, holy crap, that's actually a lot of hobbies. You take gymnastics too? And a martial arts class?

Midoriya Izuku:
I suddenly have the feeling that what your parents are doing isn't legal.

Midoriya Izuku:
But yeah, I do. It keeps my mind busy.

Yaoyorozu Momo:
Ehhh, that's so cool. Do you do any art clubs or anything? I saw your drawings of those heroes today, and they were really good.

Midoriya Izuku:
Thanks? But no, I don't. I couldn't handle paint if my life depended on it.

Yaoyorozu Momo:
That's too bad, we could've been art buddies. :/

Midoriya Izuku:
Yeah, I guess we could.

Yaoyorozu Momo:
:(

Midoriya Izuku:
rbaeukdiebwbpfueipw

Midoriya Izuku:
Eeeegghhhhhhh

Midoriya Izuku:
Please don't do that, you're making me feel guilty.

Yaoyorozu Momo:
(I^I)

Midoriya Izuku:
fueobfuepwqbewb

Midoriya Izuku:
rhioabflewbofubffu feuiqbueudpewbufewuipfewfoebwiqbyfbelqfe

Yaoyorozu Momo:
(T^T)

Midoriya Izuku:
Fine, fine, there's this place nearby the gift shop that does free art classes.

Midoriya Izuku:
We can be art buddies. But just this once.

Yaoyorozu Momo:
Yay!

Midoriya Izuku:
why do I get the feeling that there's literally sparkles surrounding you?

Yaoyorozu Momo:
It's my quirk. :D

Midoriya Izuku:
I thought your quirk was Creation.

Wait. Wait. WAIT. NO. ABORT MISSION. HE DID NOT JUST MISTAKENLY TYPE THAT.

Yaoyorozu Momo:
???

Yaoyorozu Momo:
Omg what the heck dude

Yaoyorozu Momo:
I swear you're an all-knowing god or some bullcrap

Midoriya Izuku:
It's my quirk. :D

Yaoyorozu Momo:
Are you for real tho or are you just mocking me

Midoriya Izuku:
Just mocking you.

Yaoyorozu Momo:
asdfghjkl

Yaoyorozu Momo:
You are one intelligent kid.

Yaoyorozu Momo:
How'd you even know, though?

Midoriya Izuku:
Those are my secrets to never tell. :)

Yaoyorozu Momo:
feubiqsofuiowq

Yaoyorozu Momo:
That practically seeps creepiness
Yaoyorozu Momo:
Hold up one sec

Yaoyorozu Momo has changed Midoriya Izuku to Knows Too Much

Yaoyorozu Momo:
Like it?

Knows Too Much:
I find it amusing.

Knows Too Much has changed Yaoyorozu Momo to Sparkle Emitter

Sparkle Emitter:
Fair enough. XD

Sparkle Emitter:
Anyway, I have to go. My parents have found enough information on you to deem you safe anyway.

Knows Too Much:
At least there's that.

Knows Too Much:
Thanks for texting me.

Sparkle Emitter:
:)

Sparkle Emitter has left the chat

Knows Too Much has left the chat

=====

Once upon a time, there was a Man. He was born with a strong power that gave him prestige among those that were scared of these abilities. He was intelligent, and he learned how to use his words wisely. They were deep and thick of knowledge, like honey, though his hands were leeches that sucked away a part of his victims.

"I will rule the world one day," said he. "And every person with a power at their fingertips will look to me for guidance."

Those that saw differently tried to go up against him.

"I will defeat you!" said his own sibling.

"We will destroy you."

"You will not cause any more damage to our society!"

"You scum! You won't live much longer!"

"This is for all the pain you've brought upon us."
"I hope you're ready to die now."

"You will rue the day that you ever thought to go against us!"

And yet the Man continued to thrive. He continued to grow more powerful, and his mind brighter, and his words more alluring. He was ready to do more, to take the first step toward his goal.

And then a man with lies in his smile stood up to him. And the Man lost.

"I must come back one day, though," said the Man. "I must complete my goal."

And the Man recovered, slowly but surely. Not entirely, never entirely. He raised and taught a boy that he looked at as his son. And he watched as the flower bloomed largely in the midnight moon.

The Man said, "Let me fight him again, let me fight against the man with lies in his smile."

His protege said, "But of course! You'll beat him, I know you will."

And the man with the lies in his smile and the Man fought once more.

The Man won.

"My enemy is gone. Now, I must rise," spoke the Man to his protege.

War followed his conquest. Years upon years of bloodshed took company with it.

And then the Man stood up from his throne, his fingers tinkling with his power. He looked over the sea of people around him, the sea of different cultures united under one empire.

"I am the ruler of the world," he said to himself. "But that is not enough. I must be God."

He watched, sitting on his throne, as the sea of people rose and fell. People died. People birthed. People murdered.

He watched under a calculating eye.

His reign never ended. His power grew stronger, as did his honeyed words.

One day, he met a fair, young lady with a beauty flaunted on her features. She had the power to heal, but only with shared love.

"If I can trick billions of men and women alike to dutifully call me their god, their religion, their salvation, then I surely can do the same to myself," said he. He hadn't realized his love had already been set in motion.

The Man and this woman fell into the deep, dark, cold of the abyss of love. And since they both loved one another, she could heal him whole again, and he faced his people as if he had never suffered an injury or scar in the first place.

The Man's wife grew a stomach so round and stretched as their child grew that she cried one night, "Oh, 'tis but an emperor at birth!"

The Man cried for the first time in his life when he was told that the love of his life had died during childbirth.

"Your son is all that remains, my sir."
The Man watched as his son grew up. When no powers were in sight, he took him by the hair and let his power run through his fingers, crackling like electricity. The son screamed as blood spattered.

The son, in defiance, would reject the title of emperor.

"If I cannot change my fate in succession, than at least I can become empress," said he. "That is the only good thing this power you forced on my shoulders can do for me."

The son ran away two years later, leaving the Man with nothing.

"I shall track her down and kill her," his protege said. "He always wanted to rip his sex from the mirrors. Your son will be she now."

"If her blood taints your hands, you may take the title of the world from my hands," said the Man. He watched the sea of people rise and fall. People died. People birthed. People murdered.

People saved.

"My wife, my child; their lights have flickered out of my life. They have no flame any longer. If only I could protect the fire that drove them to the living," said the Man. He watched under a calculating eye as the sea of people rose and fell.

Rose and fell, rise and fall, rose and fell, rise and fall, rose and rise, fell and fall, rise and fell, rose and fall, falling, falling, falling.

Over. And over. And over.

======

"Chikara-senpai, I need some help."

The man seemed surprised, his eyebrows raising in mix of concern and care. "Yeah, something up?"

Midoriya hesitated, wondering if what he was about to say was really a good idea, before he just let his question slip between his lips.

"So, I met this girl a couple days ago—" Hiroji's eyes got a mysterious glint in them. "—and she was new to the town, so I decided that I'd show her around. And, in all honesty, the whole conversing thing doesn't seem to be working out in my favor, and while I appreciate the whole "think with your feet, it always leads you somewhere" tip, that also leads to me with my foot in my mouth, and I really don't want to screw this up because she seems to be really nice and I kind of want her to be my friend, which isn't to say you aren't like my friend or anything, it's just that it would be nice to have a companion my age and all, and sure, the people in my martial arts class are closer to my age, but they're still older by a few years, and back to the point at hand, I really don't know how to do this human interacting stuff, I mean, I can barely talk to you and I've known you for almost six months now, and by the way have I ever told you that I'm really thankful for you being so nice, and you're the best, I really appreciate all you've done for me, and also I'm a little scared that you're going to put me with the rest of the students after you catch me up and could you please not do that because I really feel like that is a terrible idea—"

"Okay kid, breathe before you run out of oxygen and faint."

Midoriya immediately felt his face flush as he ducked his head. He hadn't meant to say that last bit, and that was definitely overstepping his boundaries. Sure, the two were close, but this was Hiroji's job. This wasn't something that he could just take advantage of just because he didn't want to
He flinched as large, warm hands were placed on his shoulders, but he didn't squirm out of the man's grip. It was the first time Hiroji touched him without a warning.

"Hey, Midoriya... look at me, please." Midoriya winced but did as he was told. Hiroji's eyes were soft as he leaned forward so their foreheads were touching. For a few seconds, they just listened to each other's breaths.

"You don't do well in crowds, but you can handle it reasonably well," he recited, almost as if he was stating that the sky was blue. "But things are different when the attention is on you, right?"

Midoriya fidgeted but gave a small nod in response. Hiroji's voice was soothing as he spoke. "Even if this is just a gymnastics class, I'm not going to force you into something that makes you uncomfortable. I will never make you join one of the other classes if it means that you can be happy. Alright?"

Midoriya nodded again. He sniffled slightly and wiped his nose on the sleeve of his shirt as he avoided looking at Hiroji. The man squeezed his shoulder with little force before he stood back up to his full height.

"Now then, what were you saying about this new girl? And can I be expecting a present? I've always wanted grandchildren."

=====

**Sparkle Emitter:**
**So, wait, can you do backflips??**

**Sparkle Emitter:**
**Because that would be so cool.**

Midoriya felt his face flush deeply as he thought about what Hiroji said. And though the man got it entirely wrong—he had no attraction to the female beyond being friends—he still couldn't help but hide his face as he tried to stamp out his blush with Hiroji smirking at him knowingly in the background.

=====

Midoriya put his charger in his phone, then setting it on the top of his dresser before he stumbled over to his bed. His shirt slipped over one of his shoulders, and he pulled it back up before he peeled back the covers on his mattress and sliding inside. Juni was already resting on his alarm clock, as she always did, keeping a close eye on his as he slept.

He yawned, the corner of his eyes watering before he turned the lamp off. He pulled all of his blankets up to his chin, closing his eyelids and letting a small period of quiet wash over him. It took him a while to get to sleep, it always did, but he made sure to at least get a few hours of rest, even if he wasn't technically sleeping.

Nights like this one were long, though.

Nightmares plagued him as he sifted in and out of consciousness, letting his mind wander into places that were filled with quicksand. By the time four-oh-eight rolled around, Midoriya felt like he would have done better if he hadn't slept at all. He turned over in his sleep, trying to make out Juni in the
darkness.

"Juni?"

Oh. There she was, those small antennae glowing in the light from his digital clock. He didn't know what compelled him to ask, though. Maybe it was the sleep deprivation, or maybe he was desperate for answers.

"What even is your quirk?"

Juni stared at him for a long, long time. Then she turned, almost as if telling him to wait until the morning.

===== 

There once was a man who turned himself to womanhood. She ran away from home, wanting nothing to do with her father.

One day, she met a man who could take and give memories. They fell in love.

"Oh," said she, "but I once was a man, my darling. You cannot love me. The mirrors say so as well."

"But you're a woman now, aren't you? That's what your powers do. What holds us from our love?"

"But the mirrors—"

"Then we'll get rid of the mirrors, my wife!" the Husband replied.

"But the Man, my father—"

"Do not worry about him. We can disguise ourselves. And we'll cover those horrific scars of yours."

And so they hid themselves in the sea of people, fading in between the waves.

===== 

My quirk allows me to alter reality. It was how I could "change size," how I could "teleport," and how I survived all those accidents miraculously. Because of my quirk, I have been able to gain the intelligence of that of a human as an effect of being able to live longer than any slug should. One downside of my quirk is that I remain a slug, no matter how much I try to change myself. Forever to be quiet with no voice to speak of.

In other words, I could save thousands of people. But people despise slugs. So I can't.

Using my quirk more than a couple times a day causes bouts of amnesia. (In fact, I'm only supposed to use it once or twice a week at most, even with little things like moving a few feet.) When first meeting you, I couldn't help myself, but by the end of the day I couldn't remember who you were or why I was sitting in your scarf. (In fact, the only reason I know now what I did was because you reminded me unknowingly.) Using it continuously sends me into a catatonic state in which all of my cognitive functions can't process for a period of time, usually anywhere from a week to a month.

That was the note Juni left on the counter when he finally got ready to go to school. He wasn't sure he had ever felt more guilty in his life.

"Guess we both have pretty messed-up quirks, huh?" he asked her quietly.
To say the least, Midoriya made sure she didn't use her quirk more than she had to from then on. There was a lot more attempted pointing rather than teleportation, and they played charades rather than her writing notes. A bunch of fun games where they could learn one another a little more thoroughly (like the minuscule differences in Juni's expressions) was used instead.

And it was effective, to say the least. Juni didn't have to use her quirk more than once every two months.

(But that progress hadn't happened quite just yet. Midoriya woke up that morning, read the note, and swore to himself that they'd be better about it. And then, Juni hidden in his scarf, he walked out into the warm sun, birds chirping and trees swaying in the slight breeze. And then Midoriya walked toward the cafe he always loved, his phone heavy in his pocket as he brainstormed the best way to say hi to his new friend.)

=====

Sparkle Emitter:
You almost here?

Knows Too Much:
Yeah.

Knows Too Much:
Gosh, I'm so nervous. Which doesn't make much sense, but that isn't the point.

Sparkle Emitter:
Pfft, nah, I understand.

Sparkle Emitter:
But don't worry about it, it's just me. We can be nervous buddies together.

Knows Too Much:
I thought you wanted to be art buddies.

Sparkle Emitter:
Shush, don't point out my flaws.

Knows Too Much:
:P

Knows Too Much:
Okay, I'm two minutes away.

Sparkle Emitter:
Yay! Where do you want to go first?

Knows Too Much:
This is your adventure, it'd probably be best if you decided; plus I live here already. Also, weird question, but is it weird that I have a pet slug?

Sparkle Emitter:
That's a good point. And yeah, it kind of is, but I can actually imagine you having one for
some strange reason.

Sparkle Emitter:
What's its name?

"Her name is Juni."

Yaoyorozu nearly spilled her cup of tea when she heard the voice come up right behind her. She whipped around to see Midoriya with the same scarf he wore the day before, the slightest tilt of a smile on his face. It was a bit odd to hear his voice—it was a little... stilted? He had the faintest accent, and though he spoke Japanese fluently and easily, there was something about his slight pronunciation that threw her off.

It took a moment for the statement to sink in, and when it did, she smiled. "That's a great name."

Midoriya's smile grew just a tiny bit bigger at that. "Thanks. It's good to know that an on-the-spot name didn't fail me now."

Yaoyorozu let out a snort as he took a seat in front of her. "I already ordered for you," she began to explain, hoping that he wouldn't be too upset. This kind of gesture was either well-received or hated. "The nice lady at the front said you had a few favorites, and so I just let her decide which one you would get."

Midoriya nodded. "She usually does that every time I order." His eyes narrowed shortly after. "Though, you didn't have to do that for me."

"I know I didn't," Yaoyorozu said in response. "And that's exactly why I did it."

When it came down to it, Yaoyorozu had no idea what to think of Midoriya. He was sweet, and he was actually pretty funny when it came down to his utter honesty, but moments like these reminded her that Midoriya was an unknown factor with a brilliance that almost scared her. His eyes bore into her as he rested his chin on interlaced fingers, and a calculating look trickled into his eyes, which was only broken by a waiter setting out their orders. "Thank you," he said quietly, wrapping his gloved hands around the cup of his tea. He lifted it up to his lips and took a small sip; a look of contentedness passed over his plain features as he drummed on the side of the porcelain cup with his fingers.

"Usually these kinds of actions are used as kind gestures, but—forgive any of my accusations if they may be inaccurate—I believe there's something more to this than simple kindness. Not that you aren't a kind person by definition, Yaoyorozu. I just find that the certain way you phrased your response was... intriguing."

Yaoyorozu had to keep herself from letting surprise melt into her expressions as she watched him carefully. She had no idea what he exactly meant by it, but his entire character changed in an instant... Immediately from a kid who talked about slugs for pets to someone much, much older.

"To not have to do something, and yet to do it anyway... It reminds me of the philosophy of a hero, just on a much, much smaller scale. I apologize if I'm wrong, Yaoyorozu, but the idea had been in my head for a while..."

Yaoyorozu thought about the notebook full of different bios of heroes. She thought about the title, which said that he was on his eleventh volume, and she imagined the other ten books full of hero knowledge and analysis.
He had an eye for those kinds of things, she realized.

She took a sip of her own tea as she tried to find a way to word what she wanted to say. "You enjoy thinking about heroes?"

He shrugged. "I enjoy thinking about those who save those in need."

Yaoyorozu smiled at him. She knew it was more genuine than before. "I've wanted to be one for a while now."

Midoriya nodded as he drummed on the side of his cup again. He seemed to ponder something, his lips pursed in thought, but they finished the rest of their meal in silence. And then, as they left the premises of the cafe, he finally spoke.

"I think we both know what it means to be a hero, Yaoyorozu." His eyes were very far away as he spoke. "It's a dark job. It's messy. It breaks people apart."

Yaoyorozu huffed, feeling a sharp pang of sadness go through her. "We're both twelve. Won't you at least let me dream at my age?"

Midoriya glanced sharply back at her. "Why dream when I know you'll be the real deal?"

And that changed Yaoyorozu's view of Midoriya forever. Because, yeah, his hair was a little longer than most boys', and his scarf and gloves were odd things to wear in the middle of summer break, and his plain appearance made him forgettable, but...

He was honest. And if the guy who seemed to know everything said she was going to be a hero, well, why couldn't she be?

"Is something the matter, Midoriya?" Yaoyorozu asked. He seemed a little off, and sometimes he would stare off into space if he wasn't focusing on something important.

"Hm?" he said, jolting out of his far-away look.

Yaoyorozu sheepishly smiled at him. "I dunno if this is normal, but you're getting a bit lost in your thoughts a lot. I was just wondering if you were okay."

Midoriya blinked his wide green eyes at her as the tips of his ears turned pink. "You want me to be honest, or do you want to save us the embarrassment of falling into an awkward silence that will probably last an eternity?"

Yaoyorozu blinked. "Honesty?" she said, hesitant.

Midoriya nodded, though she noted that his face was a little more flushed than before. "So, I have this instructor of mine... you know, for my gymnastics class?" At Yaoyorozu's nod, he continued. "Well, he's a bit... of an interesting character. He's nice and all, but he can say a few things that normally wouldn't come to people's minds? Anyway, he told me that..." At this, the flush of his cheeks grew deeper. "—well, that he'd like to see what our kids looked like."

Yaoyorozu stared at him, and then a snort escaped her. And then, suddenly, she was in a fit of uncontrollable giggles. "He thought—he said—but we're just friends—" Her face was getting increasingly red as she tried to keep her laughing to a minimum. However, she couldn't control it anymore, and with a snort she was laughing hard enough that they had to stop so that she could lean
on him. She held a hand over her stomach as she wheezed heavily.

Her laughter was contagious, and soon Midoriya found himself laughing as well.

When she wiped her eyes, getting the last of her giggles out, she glanced at him shyly. "You have a nice laugh."

Midoriya felt the corners of his lips twitch up higher. "Thanks," he replied as he pulled nervously at his scarf. "You do too."

They continued their way down the street after that, the flush still present on Yaoyorozu's cheeks from her boisterous laughter. She had quite a powerful voice, he noted internally. Without warning, a smile came across her face, and she grabbed his wrist (he flinched slightly, and his stomach lurched into his throat, but he kept himself from jerking away despite the million warnings ringing in his head) and pulled him down the street at a speed that made him stumble.

Yaoyorozu was half a head taller than him though, maybe more, and he struggled to keep up with her. His long legs helped pick up some of the slack, but it was still somewhat difficult as she dragged him up to the front of a building.

... Was she emitting sparkles?

"Look, Midoriya, it's the art place that you were talking about!" She was rocking back and forth on her feet, her smile brighter than the sun.

Maybe he could ask her to make him a pair of sunglasses.

He sighed through his nose and shook his head. "You're really excited about this," he said to her, watching as her eyes grew brighter.

"I love arts and crafts! Of course, reading is my favorite thing to do, since it helps with my quirk," she said.

Midoriya glanced at her with a raised eyebrow. "It does? I didn't know that."

Yaoyorozu blinked in confusion. "Eh? I thought you knew what my quirk was..." Her lips were in a small pout as she looked at him with bewilderment.

Midoriya rubbed the back of his head. "I know that your quirk is Creation, and that you can create objects, hence the name... though you have to know about them well enough? I don't know the exact specifics or the drawbacks of it."

Yaoyorozu looked at him curiously before nodding. "Yeah, that's exactly it. I have to know their molecular structure well enough to create it, and whatever I create comes from my fat cells. It's why I ate a lot more this morning than most people would."

Midoriya thought about the large meal she ordered while he was still making his way to the cafe, and then remembered her bashful smile. It explained a lot, really, and it filled in a lot of the holes that he previously had within his knowledge of her quirk.

"But..." Yaoyorozu was staring at him, her brows furrowed as she looked at him worriedly. "—how, exactly, did you know about my quirk? And the fact that you didn't know everything about it..."

Midoriya looked away from her pointed gaze as he turned to the front of the store. He pursed his lips as excuses ran through his head, before he finally rested on what Yaoyorozu said before.
"I didn't do anything illegal, if that's what you're wondering. And—" He paused at this, taking a shuddering breath before continuing. "And I'll tell you about it. I'll explain it to you in full, everything. One day."

Yaoyorozu's eyes searched him, trying to find any lie. Finally, a small smile made its way onto her face.

"One day," she echoed before grabbing onto his hand. He flinched, and his hand trembled as she slipped her hand into his and squeezed. It felt nice, though, and he let it stay there as she pulled him inside.

The bell tinkled above them.

=====

"I'm pretty sure this looks like a deformed duck."

"Eh... I was thinking it looked more like a dog with two heads, but that works too."

"I told you that I was terrible with paints. Look at me, I'm literally covered in it. There's more paint on me than on the canvas."

"I thought that if we both worked on the same painting, it would end up better, but I guess I just made the entire situation worse...?"

"Clearly."

"Okay, I'm sorry. But hey, we can still fix this. See, here, let's add a little paint here, wait, the green one dang it not the purple, and then we can add a black dot there..."

"..."

"..."

"It looks like a tree who stuck feathers on its bark and is trying to blend in with a pack of wolves."

"Wolves."

"Yeah, these things."

"Those are clouds."

"Am I the only one who is seeing this?"

"Midoriya, what the actual heck is wrong with you? Those are obviously clouds."

"Okay, maybe we should add lightning then."

"..."

"Oh my god we just made this so much worse, what have we done, Zuku."

"..."

"..."
"I like it."
"What, this mess?"
"No. Well, yes. But I meant the nickname."
"Oh. Oh, you do?"
"Yeah."
"... Can I keep on using it?"
"Mhm."
"... Then you can come up with a name for me."
"... Yaochan?"
"I like it."
"The painting, or the nickname?"
"Both."
And they shared a smile.

======

There once was a man that turned himself into a woman with a quirk that never belonged to her. She fell deeply into love with a man who protected her. His charming voice always calmed her when she sided with panic.

His quirk allowed him to receive and give memories.

"Let me understand your pain as my own," he asked her, and so she did.

He still did not leave her. And deeper in love they fell, when finally, a joyous day came.

"I'm pregnant," the woman said.

And he smiled.

"I cannot wait to see my child for the first time!" he exclaimed. "Oh, and how I hope he has those same freckles you do!"

And he did.

======

Midoriya was friends with Eishun Akihito.

He hoped they were, anyway. They seemed to be friends, at the very least.

Eishun teased him every now and then, but he was incredibly supportive and defended him from those that were much older than him.
"We're all family here," he said. "And I gotta protect my younger siblings, right?"

Eishun didn't mind that he was smaller, or that he wasn't the strongest opponent. In fact, physically, he was one of the weakest in his class. He made up for it in skill and tactics that, as Eishun claimed, was the equivalence to that of Black Widow and was totally unfair.

(Midoriya had to search up the character himself, and, after some searching, he found himself immersed in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Juni seemed to be more into the Hulk, which was an interesting choice, but he couldn't really blame her. It was just another thing that separated the two of them.)

He was about to leave said class when Master Lee asked him to stay and help push up the mats. He got a small sense of deja vu before he agreed. They worked in silence, as Master Lee always did. He was a silent, brooding man, much more serious than Master Splinter, who was always a little more happy and cheerful. He wasn't Hiroji happy, but he was self-confident and had an air of calm merriment that followed him wherever he went.

"Midoriya, where are your parents?"

Midoriya winced as he glanced up at Master Lee. The man was always straight to the point, never sugar-coating anything. When he wanted something, he got it.

"I'm sorry, could you say that again?" he asked politely.

"Your parents," Master Lee repeated. "You never talk about them. They never show up to pick you up after practice. You have no guardian. The only sign I have of them being around is that they signed your permission form to let you participate and sends their checks on the due date, via you. So where are they?"

Midoriya blinked. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

Master Lee shook his head. "Children without the guidance and/or without a parental figure in their life can go down roads that should have never been built. I take child abandonment seriously, Midoriya. So answer the question."

Midoriya glanced at him from the corner of his eye. "My father works overseas," he said. "And my mother travels a lot, as a mix between her job and because it's something she loves to do. She hates being cooped up for long periods of time."

"And so she doesn't bring you with her?" he asked.

Midoriya narrowed his eyes as he wracked his brain. "I don't know the full reasons myself, but she says that she wants to make sure that I grow up in a stable environment. She planned on taking me on a few vacations, though, so I could experience more life outside of Japan, but she wanted me to live somewhere quiet with a few constants. Her trips are also a part of her job, and me being there makes it a hassle and hampers her ability to do her work. She sends postcards all the time, though, as well as letters. My father works overseas, as I said, in a business firm. He comes home any time he can, though he's often tired. Usually when he arrives, he comes in around the morning, so we decided that he would sleep until school and practice were over. That way, when I came home, he would be well rested enough that we could actually hold a decent conversation and have a little family time until he had to go back. He checks in all the time, usually by phone calls, though sometimes he sends text messages."

Midoriya started to zip up his backpack and get all his stuff piled together. "I don't have to do much,
really. They set everything up so it's all done automatically, and my neighbors sometimes help me out. My parents encouraged me to sign up for a bunch of different hobbies to entertain myself and help me grow while they're gone; I still receive important lessons from adults and people older than me, even if they don't realize they're giving them to me. I'm fine, Master Lee, sir. My parents haven't abandoned me."

He thought about Inko, who practically disappeared off the face of the planet. He thought about Hisashi, with his goodbye note left behind. He thought about his mother, screaming and crying with large tears running down her face. He thought about his father, calm and collected, always and forever as he turned his back.

No. Not abandonment. They were just... trying to find better lives for themselves. That was all.

Midoriya bowed to Master Lee as he turned to leave. The man's scowl had lightened considerably, though the suspicion was still deeply embedded into his eyes.

"And the paint, Midoriya?" the man called.

Midoriya glanced to his gloves and arms, which were covered in flecks of dry paint.

"A friend, Master Lee," he responded.

(And yes, that was a small smile on the man's face, though he would deny it as such on any other occasion.)

=====

"I'm sorry, Yaochan, I'm afraid I have to leave soon."

"Oh yeah, martial arts practice, right?"

"On the dot."

"Well, I'll text you later, then. Maybe we should go to the bookstore tomorrow? That way I can rent a few books to read while you're off with all of your hobbies."

"Sounds good. And maybe we can drop by the gift shop later, and then the day after we can catch a train to explore that whole block dedicated to window-shopping?"

"Mmm, sounds like a plan. And then, maybe, we can go by those parks? I think that could be a pretty relaxing day."

"Gotcha. See you later."

=====

Midoriya was walking down the street when his phone buzzed in his pocket. He pulled out his phone to see a text message from Yaoyorozu.

**Sparkle Emitter:**

Ok, so why don't we get up extra early and go to the cafe around... let's say eight? And then we can eat some food then.

**Sparkle Emitter:**

Afterward, we can go to the gift shop and buy a couple of things there. Then we can head to
the window-shopping block and explore there for a while. You have to be back by around three-thirty, so the rest of the time we can use to head to the bookstore and pick out a couple of books.

**Sparkle Emitter:**
The day after that, I was thinking the parks. Maybe just a few calm hours of stuff. Perhaps we can drop by any other good places with food, and just eat, drink, and read there. In the sun.

**Knows Too Much:**
Sounds good to me. But what's with the changes in plans? I'm not sure we'd want to cram so much into one day unless we have something else to add in.

**Sparkle Emitter:**
There's this museum a couple hours away by train that I want to go to, if you're willing.

**Knows Too Much:**
.. Are you talking about the chocolate museum?

**Sparkle Emitter:**
...

**Sparkle Emitter:**
Maybe

**Knows Too Much:**
Eh, why not. Sure, we can go there.

He was about to add another text message when he heard a small noise. He froze, his fingers pausing over the screen of his phone. Glancing around warily, he listened out for any stray noises. There was a faint gurgling sound, but it didn't sound dangerous.

And yet...

Midoriya felt the hairs at the nape of his neck stand on end as he turned around in a full circle, eyes wandering for some kind of movement. He jumped six feet in the air when the metal cover of the manhole popped out of its place, and he stared with wide eyes at the object as it circled on its one side, around and around and around until it clattered to the ground. His head whipped from place to place as he tried to find something to spot.

What had caused that? Something in the sewers?

Another gurgling sound followed, louder this time, and he took a step back.

It occurred to him too late that he was entirely alone. He looked down to his phone and frantically pressed the call button on Yaoyorozu's contact. Immediately, she picked up.

"Something up, Zuku?"

He swallowed the lump in his throat as he tried to breathe evenly. "Yaochan—"

It happened without warning. His breath was taken away as something dangerously sticky and cold surrounded him, and he choked on the something that was keeping him from breathing. He felt the same solution start to trickle into his mouth and down his throat.
Faintly, he realized that Yaoyorozu was frantically calling his name from his phone, which was lying innocently a few feet away. His lungs burned, aching for oxygen that wasn't there. Tears shone in his eyes, and he clenched his eyelids tightly as one escaped and rolled down a freckled cheek.

He whimpered as he dug his fingers fruitlessly into the goop that covered him, though the sound was muffled through the slime crawling into his ears. His chest shuddered as he gasped, a large amount of slick muck crawling into his mouth and seeping under his tongue and along his gums. Something heavy slipped down his esophagus, and his stomach lurched as he attempted to puke up whatever it was in reflex.

"You're going to be a good body for me," a voice said. It was dark and bubbly, almost acidic as its muffed words reached his ears.

Dark splotches appeared in his vision as he tried to stumble forward. The slimed figure didn't seem to care, and so he took another step, closer, closer, closer.

He choked again, and he stumbled again his vision swam. His knees hit concrete as the slime continued to push itself into him.

"Why are you heading away from the street with the rest of civilization?" Midoriya didn't listen to the mocking voice, instead reaching out to the metal manhole cover. His fingers brushed it. He didn't know what to aim for, who was attacking him, but he clenched the piece of metal and hoped.

Oh, how he hoped.

Wavy blonde hair, hazel brown eyes, knee-high leather boots, and metal-infused gloves flashed in his memory. There was that lying smile on that face of that excellent woman.

Damn you, Maiko.

And then he felt the metal under his hands grow warm as his (h_e+)**r) quirk activated, a crawling sensation exploding under his skin.

And then the black splotches grew bigger and bigger until there was nothing left.

===== 

Back when he was still with his parents, Midoriya had a cat. The cat had a quirk that allowed it to jump extremely high when it was surprised. The cat hated the quirk, hated that it could jump high enough to hurt on landing whenever it was shocked.

It wasn't a rare quirk by any means, but it still annoyed the cat to no end. It wanted to get rid of it.

When Midoriya turned four, he could do just that.

His mother watched him do it. Her face paled considerably, her cheeks pallid as her lower lip trembled.

"Mom?" he asked. "Mom, what's wrong?"

"I-I... no. No, I c-can't. I..." Tears streaked down his mother's face as she mindlessly rambled. "Not you too. I can't let you become him. I can't. I can't. I'm sorry, I'm so... I'm s-so s-s-sorry."

He was so lost, unaware that his mother's thousands of scars were burning.

"Wha-what's wrong? What did I do wro—"
"No!" She shrieked as she tripped. She caught herself on a counter, and a container left on the surface rattled. It should have been put away hours ago. "No, no, no!" She grabbed it in a fit of tears and deep sobs and threw it at him. He twisted to his side, as if to protect himself, but the contents inside the container were little to none, and it only hit the side of his neck.

It only.

"I can't let you end up like him," she hissed, all of her humanity evaporating in her eyes. "I have to, I have to do this. I have no choice."

She lit a flame.

"I have to. I have to. I have to, I have to I have to I havetoIhavetoIhaveto—"

She burned him with the intent of killing him.

And then she tried to burn their house down, too.

Midoriya didn't judge her for it. She had her own problems.

She never should have had a child, though.

======

He woke up to a soft voice trying to wake him up. He blinked his eyes sluggishly as he pulled himself up. His vision swam—and something was terribly odd about it as a red, yellow, and blue hue took over—and he found himself coughing up the remnants of whatever was in his stomach off to the side. It took a few minutes for everything to settle, and he blinked up at the figure crouching beside him.

"Are you alright?" they asked. "That was a terrible villain there."

Midoriya rubbed at his eyes before he focused on the hero. He stared at his reflection in their helmet, their large, white suit making them appear bloated and almost like a teddy bear.

"Thirteen?" he blurted. They nodded in response.

"I'm sorry I didn't get to you sooner." They tapped the container on their leg. "I'll be taking him to the police station. Are you okay? Any injuries? Do you need me to take you to your hospital and wait for your parents to come pick you up?"

Midoriya let the questions sink into him before he responded. "I think I'm okay," he slurred. He stood up with some difficulty, though Thirteen had to help balance him. "My apartment's nearby. I can get home easily," he lied.

"Alright. Make sure to go and get help if you're feeling bad though, okay? Here's your phone," they said, and they handed it to him with care. "Oh, that was one impressive quirk back there. I hope to see you again someday, yeah?"

Thirteen turned to leave, and Midoriya watched as they went their separate ways. He looked down at his phone, seeing a bunch of missed calls and unread texts of Yaoyorozu. Shakily, he sent a text to her explaining that he got caught up with a villain, but was okay now.

Pocketing his phone shortly after, he slowly made his way home. He threw up twice more, completely emptying his stomach as he shakily made his way to his apartment. The first thing he did
was take off his contacts, and he sighed in relief as his vision returned to normal. He took a long shower, almost falling asleep in the scalding hot water as he scrubbed all the slime off his body. He managed to curl up into bed without too much trouble as he pulled the covers far above his head.

He slept for a long, long time.

=====

The first thing he did when he woke up was pick up his contacts from the counter he set them on. He twisted them in his hands, and he put one of them back in.

Yep. The red, orange, yellows, and blues were still there. Though he had no idea why.

Pursing his lips, he set the two beside one another before heading back into his room. He opened his closet, and he glanced around at all the stuff piled inside. He started to push things aside as he picked his way through until, finally, a familiar briefcase came into view. He had to stand on top of his tippy toes to grab it from off the shelf, but he pulled it into his arms. (He was thankful he had better balance, or he wasn’t sure he’d still be on his two feet.)

Sighing through his mouth as he tried to ease the headache that was starting to pound at his skull, he flipped the locks over and opened it with ease. He glanced at the rest of the items inside, carefully counting them to make sure everything was there before he grabbed one that was inside the zipper on the head of the case. Rolling the small object in his hands, he closed the case back up and stood.

In the corner of his eyes, he saw Juni (who was sitting in his scarf at the time of the attack—and was, luckily, unharmed—and now was on his alarm clock) looking at him curiously. He hesitated, wondering if showing anyone what he was about to do was a good idea, before he picked her up and held her in his other hand. Walking back into the kitchen, he placed Juni on the counter as he picked up one of the contacts. He rolled the small stylus-like object nervously between his fingers before he pressed a tiny, round button.

A red graph appeared as it scanned the contact, and he waited nervously. It processed for a second before beeping, and a small popup appeared.

He read through it quickly before waving it away. He sat down on one of the stools and ran his fingers through his hair, trying to ease his panic.

On the wall, the hands on the clock continued to tick away. It was four in the morning.

=====

Hisashi recorded his blinking patterns when they were together. He wasn’t quite sure how. Maybe he used his older contacts to record what he did.

But the man managed to find it out. And, in his newer contacts, he added an effect that would activate whenever he was in extreme panic.

Heat vision.

"Juni?" The snail looked up at him curiously.

"Should we move away?"

The snail blinked.
"... No. That would make more problems than it would solve."

Midoriya rubbed his eyes and breathed shakily.

"No. We shouldn't."

Why did Hisashi scare him all the time, even if he was never there?

======

Waking up in the wee hours of the morning left him exhausted. Yaoyorozu noticed it immediately when they met up again.

"You look terrible." She was frowning as she fixed a stray piece of hair out of his eyes. "You sure you don't want to take today off? We can change our schedule around a bit."

"It's fine," he replied as he tucked his hair behind his ear. He didn't look her in the eyes as he spoke. "The villain just scared me a little, that's all. It wasn't that bad."

He thought about the slime that choked him, attempting to drown him and take him over.

She looked at him suspiciously. "Alright," she eventually agreed. "I picked up our painting from yesterday. It finished drying, thankfully... Do you want it?"

Midoriya shook his head. "No, you should keep it for yourself."

Yaoyorozu narrowed her eyes but nodded. "Alright." A silence fell over them, but Yaoyorozu eventually changed the subject. "So, you said that you had a pet slug? I never got to see her."

Midoriya glanced up at her from where he was picking at his food. He nodded before reaching into the folds of his scarf, gently picking her up and setting her on the small table they were sitting at. It was raining outside, so they took a table inside that day.

Yaoyorozu blinked curiously. "She's a lot smaller than I thought she'd be. And cuter, too."

Midoriya breathed sharply from his nose, almost a laugh. "Yeah, most people don't think of a slug being cute. But—" He rubbed his index finger along her head. "—she's grown on me."

Yaoyorozu smiled. It was a little forced, he could tell, but she didn't seem to mind Juni that much, which was a win in his book.

"Now then," she said, clapping her hands together, "let's hurry up and eat! We can't be late if we want to fit everything we're doing today in!"

Midoriya smiled to himself as she started to shove whole spoonfuls of food into her mouth. He started to eat his own meal, and as the waiter came over he slipped him their payment. Yaoyorozu had paid for the last one, and he wanted to make it up to her.

They soon left, umbrellas drawn, and Yaoyorozu stayed close by his side. He was sure that she noticed by now his aversion to physical touch, and she rarely touched him aside from when they linked arms in crowded places so they wouldn't get lost. He appreciated it, and was glad that she could notice the signs quicker than others could.

They took a train to the other side of the city, and Yaoyorozu shared headphones with him to listen to music. It wasn't exactly his kind of thing, but it was catchy and he hummed along with her to the beat.
The station was warm, and leaving into the cold rain was a change that had him shivering, but he soon grew used to the freezing temperatures and walked with Yaoyorozu to the small gift shop. He stood by the doorway as she went further in to check out the items. It didn't take her long to find what she wanted, though he stared at her back suspiciously as she hid the items she bought.

Back outside and in the rain, she pulled one of them out and handed it to him. He took it from her with care, and he looked at its dark eyes.

"A bunny," he said, deadpan. He looked at the small green bunny keychain in his hands. It was really cute, he had to admit, but... "You really didn't have to do this, Yao-chan."

She was grinning at him. "Yeah, but I found one that I liked and I thought I could buy one that matched." She pulled out another keychain, though this one had a snowy owl on it.

"It matches you well," he commented as he looked into its yellow eyes. She giggled.

"Yeah, I thought so. Though yours just screamed "you." I couldn't pass the chance up."

He smiled lightly as he put it in his pocket for safekeeping. "Thanks. I'll keep it forever."

She turned her face away from him, though he could see the small blush on her face.

Yeah. Human interaction wasn't either of their forte, apparently. At least she was better than him at it.

They started their walk down to the metro station, and they waited quietly on the benches for their ride to roll in. As it did, they stood up simultaneously and watched as the doors opened back up. The cars were mostly empty since it was raining, and they both took seats that were beside the other. Conversation sprung upon them as Midoriya pulled up his phone and showed her a new hero debut.

They talked about his quirk and overall lack of other capabilities, which made him effective in only certain scenarios.

"I think that he's an amazing hero, no doubt. His quirk gives him a lot of power as a hero. He's a valuable ally," Yaoyorozu said.

"I agree, though he's bound to stay in the background until he gains a few more tricks up his sleeve. He isn't very strong physically, and since his quirk can be dangerous in many circumstances, I think that he can easily be taken advantage of by villains. I hope he'll grow, and sooner rather than later." He knew his hero nerd side was coming out, but he didn't mind. Yaoyorozu didn't seem to, either.

"Hmm. You make a lot of good points. But heroes always have time to learn." Something flashed in her eyes. "Correction: they have a lot of scenarios to learn from. They don't always have enough time."

Midoriya looked at her, head tilted, but he didn't say much otherwise.

A few minutes passed before Yaoyorozu broke the silence. "Hey Midoriya, you'll tell me if I'm doing something wrong, won't you?"

Midoriya rubbed his hands, gripping his left tightly (a habit she noticed he did often when he was nervous.) "Not sure what you mean by that."

She looked away from him for a second, instead focusing on her wet shoes. Sometimes, although rare, his green eyes unnerved her. They looked... wrong, almost. As if they didn't belong. "I want to be a hero too. I want people to tell me if I'm doing something wrong. If they don't... well, that means
they've given up on me, right? They don't think I can learn from my mistakes."

Midoriya stared at her, gears turning. "You're smart, Yao-chan. I'm sure you'll be great hero. Just have a little more confidence in yourself, you know?" He leaned back in his chair. "I haven't seen you in action, so I'm not sure how I can help in that way. Just... listen to yourself. Trust your decisions, even if they aren't thought-out. And don't let anyone else tell you what's wrong and what's right if you know better."

Yaoyorozu seemed to digest that information, and she breathed deeply. "Thanks."

He smiled at her before looking away, leaving her to her privacy to think.

That was when he noticed the guy looking at them curiously. He was pretending to look at the roof of the compartment they were sitting in, but Midoriya could tell that he was looking into the distorted mirrors that sat above them. He wasn't sure if he was looking at Yaoyorozu or him, but he was staring, and it made his skin crawl.

The rest of their time was spent in a thick silence, Yaoyorozu unaware of Midoriya sitting tense beside him.

The second that their stop was called, Yaoyorozu stood; Midoriya made sure to stay sitting.

The man stood up as well.

*Damn it. He wanted her.*

It would have been different if he was after him. He could tell Yaoyorozu to continue on and leave him behind for another stop so that he could lead the man away. Then they could text one another and then meet up later. Sure, the plan had holes, but Yaoyorozu could stay in a place with a bunch of people—witnesses—and he could relax knowing that she was safe.

Quickly making it to her side, he followed her outside. She was relaxed, which made Midoriya feel guilty. He knew he was going to have to break that tranquility.

"Could you make me a mirror?"

Yaoyorozu looked at him with raised eyebrows, but she nodded and created a small hand-held mirror from the palm of her hand. She handed it to him, and he took it before tilting it in the direction so that he could see behind him.

The man was following them, shouldering through crowds as he made his way toward them. Midoriya narrowed his eyes as he grabbed Yaoyorozu by the hand. She yelped as he pulled her into a direction that lead them further from the block they were heading toward. The rain fell harder against their umbrellas, and he quickened their gait. She was blubbering in surprise, not used to him first making contact—she was always the one to initiate it.

"Zuku, what's—"

"Someone's following us," he interrupted quietly, feeling bad that he had to cut in on her when she didn't know what was going on. "He'd been staring at you the entire ride."

Her eyes widened. "W-wha—I didn't notice that—" she stammered, her face growing pallid in concern.

"Look, don't freak out. The last thing we want to do is alert him that we know," he said to her in
what he hoped was a reassuring tone. He thanked the rain, glad that it made a good excuse to walk quickly and covered most of their conversation as long as they were quiet enough. "We're going to stick to the most crowded areas where there's enough people as we make it to the block we were supposed to be at. I want you to make something that can protect ourselves in the meantime. A net, stun gun, a flash bomb, I don't care."

She nodded, her expression growing determined as her hand glowed again. She hid whatever she created in her pocket, and the two continued down the streets. Several times they had to skip a street that was empty of all people, but they made pretty good progress as they finally arrived at the block they were supposed to be window shopping at. Midoriya looked back into his mirror again, expecting to see the man there. And he was, except...

There was suddenly a hand on Yaoyorozu's shoulder, and she jumped around in surprise. Midoriya noticed that she reached into her pocket, and he instinctively turned and wrapped an arm around her waist, pulling her closer to him. He was shorter than her, so the action was a little awkward, but he wasn't going to have any bastard try and manhandle her. Good luck trying to beat her after getting through him, though. (Seriously—the girl was someone not to mess with; if they went head-to-head, she could probably floor him with her brains and quirk alone. Now, if quirks were eliminated from the equation, he couldn't say the same about the result, but she'd probably still give him a hard time.)

The man refused to look at him. The stubble on his chin moved with his smile as he shone his brilliantly white teeth off to her. "You need some help getting around? You seem to be lost."

Yaoyorozu's eyes flashed with fear before they hardened considerably. Her grip on her umbrella handle tightened until her knuckles turned white. "We're right where he need to be, thanks." Her voice was cold, and Midoriya was thankful that she was strong even as someone as young as she was.

The man's smile falterled. "Really? You're supposed to be here?"

"Yes," Yaoyorozu replied shortly.

The man opened his mouth, but Midoriya cut him off. "As she said, we're fine. We know what we're doing. So, unless you want me to call the police, I'd suggest you get your hand off her shoulder and leave us alone."

Something flashed in the man's eyes, and his smile disappeared altogether. "I'm sorry, but don't you think that's a little extreme for someone just trying to help?"

Yaoyorozu was about to spit fire. It wasn't an expression Midoriya was used to seeing. "If you don't leave us alone, I will get my parents to reign hell on you. And if you don't know who they are, then you need to pick your victims better."

The man stumbled backward, his eyes wide, sweat rolling down the side of his face. "I-I don't know what you're talking about," he defended. "But whatever. I'm gone." He held his hands up for emphasis, and he scurried away. When he was out of sight, Yaoyorozu breathed a sigh of relief as Midoriya looked at her.

"How'd you manage to do that?"

Yaoyorozu shot him a shaky smile. "I recognized him. He used to work for my parents, though he was fired because they found him doing drugs. We have zero tolerance policy for that, so he was gone, stuff thrown out to the curb and locked out..." Her smile became strained. "Guess he was aiming for me because of my parents' business."
Midoriya huffed. "Bastard." He moved his arm away from her, shaking his head. "You were great back there, though. Nice job, thinking on the spot."

Yaoyorozu nodded. "Thanks. I... never thought I'd actually have to get your help when you said that there'd be weird guys here."

Midoriya, after a moment of hesitation, pressed his hand against hers, linking their fingers. "And that's exactly why I didn't leave you behind this morning." Her squeezed her hand. "I'm not going to let anything happen to you, Yao-chan."

There were tears in the corners of her eyes, and she was sniffling, but she nodded. "Thank you," she murmured.

Midoriya let silence hang over them for a moment before he opened his arms wide. "Hug?"

Yaoyorozu's smile shook as she pulled him against her. She was awkwardly holding the umbrella above them as he rubbed her back, her shoulders shaking lightly. "Th-thank you for being such a great friend, Zuku."

Midoriya didn't respond. He had no idea how to.

"That took a lot shorter than we thought it would." Yaoyorozu was holding a stack of books under her arms.

Midoriya nodded. "I guess so." He looked at his phone, which said that it was only one in the afternoon. They were supposed to get back at least by three-thirty so that Midoriya would have time to get ready for his gymnastics practice, but being followed by a man made it so they hadn't wanted to be out in the open for too long in unfamiliar territory.

"Wonder what we're supposed to do in the meantime," Yaoyorozu mused. "Maybe we should just end it early?"

Midoriya was about to respond when his phone went off. He blinked in surprise, not used to getting any notifications or calls from his phone. He pulled it out of his pocket, surprised to see that it was an alarm that he had set.

Oh.

Oh.

"What is it?" Yaoyorozu asked, looking concerned.

Midoriya shrugged. "I have a hair appointment. In half an hour."

Yaoyorozu's eyes lit up. "Can I come?"

... Gosh, he would feel so bad to reject her when she was making that face. He sighed before nodding. "Yeah, come on."

"You should cut it like this." Yaoyorozu had a certain hairstyle pulled up on her phone and shoved it in his face. He took it from her, glancing over the details.
It was layered a bit more, and it had more bangs, though it wasn't that much different from the hairstyle he usually got. "Sure. Don't see why not."

She squealed and skipped ahead of him as they approached the barber shop. They entered a few minutes before his appointment, and the woman at the desk gave them a heartfelt welcome as they were ushered in. The specific hairstylist he requested was waiting for them as they approached.

"Ah! Midoriya, it's good to see you again. Did you like the last style we did?"

He nodded, and the woman smiled at him. "Are your parents busy again? I would love to meet them, you know. They raised such a fine gentleman."

Midoriya was half-tempted to curl into himself and clam up while the other half of him was blushing to the tips of his ears. "They're busy with work. Maybe next time, though," he said quietly. Then he gestured to Yaoyorozu, who was still emitting sparkles. "This is my friend, though."

"Aw, that's so sweet!"

Yaoyorozu showed her the picture that she wanted, and the woman nodded, fiddling with a pair of scissors. "Looks great! It'll look amazing on you."

Yaoyorozu was smiling and waving at him like a giddy child on Christmas day.

They fooled around for a little bit, and Midoriya was frazzled when he arrived at his gymnastics class two minutes late, wearing clothes Yaoyorozu made for him.

"It looks amazing on you," Hiroji said.

Midoriya smiled.

Midoriya trudged home, looking over his shoulder periodically to make sure no villains were out about. That was the last time he was going to go out and about without being careful. He let out a sigh of relief as he arrived at his apartment, and he reached into his pocket to unlock it.

His brows furrowed when he realized that it was unlocked. He was sure that he locked it before he left early that morning, so why...?

He opened the door cautiously, and he prepared himself for some kind of attack when he found that the lights were on.

Nothing. He closed the door silently behind him, balling his fists as he quietly moved around the corner of the hallway and into the living room.

He paled.

There was a man sitting in his kitchen, sitting by the island. He had a cup of coffee in one hand as he read a stray magazine. Midoriya's movement caught his eye almost immediately, and he looked up, tilting his head to the side. He placed the ceramic cup on the counter languidly, taking in a deep breath as he looked him up and down.

"You've aged."
Midoriya didn't humor him with a response. Instead he bowed his head and looked at his shoes, clearing his throat and pulling at his scarf nervously. He could feel his heart beat frantically in his ears as his mouth went dry.

The man sighed heavily before standing up, the legs of the chair making a loud screeching sound as it scraped across the floor. His footsteps were heavy as he made his way over to him, and he stared at Midoriya with a piercing gaze.

"I wish you'd look at me, Izuku."

Midoriya flinched. A large hand ran through his hair, and he shuddered as a small whimper escaped him. Before he could ease away from the touch, the hand gripped his head tightly, and he let out a short cry as it started to pound at his skull. Instinctively, his hands flung up to try and pry the hand off his head as tears sprung in his eyes, though the grip was relentless.

"Did you really think that I would leave you to do as you pleased, 'Zuku'?"

Midoriya let out a small, shuddering moan as the fingers digging into his skull only increased in force, sending tears from his eyes. Leave him to drown and get taken over by a slime creature, fine—but not this. Anything but this.

Suddenly, the hand receded, though a pounding headache remained as he fell to the ground, shivering with his arms over his head. A boot crashed into the back of his neck, forcing his face into the ground as he cried out in pain. The pressure was increased, and he sobbed as his oxygen intake was reduced dramatically.

"You will never be able to change what's coming," he hissed. "I hope you remember that."

Midoriya wasn't sure how long he was there for, curled into a ball and trying to ward off the panic attack that he was bound to fall into. Juni was sitting by his side, but she couldn't do much to help him.

He let his tears hit the floorboards.

_Why do you always do this? Why do you always haunt me, Hisashi?_

=====

He checked the briefcase he opened not too long ago, pulling it open with shaking hands.

Everything was there. Even the suit.

=====

Yaoyorozu and Midoriya met up again. They took an easy day, and they walked through the parks slowly. Around noon they found a quiet place in the sun and laid down to look at the clouds. The two of them made several shapes out of the fluffy, white material before Yaoyorozu grew bored and they continued exploring. The two talked about a few flowers they found in patches, and Yaoyorozu explained a few of them and their history. Midoriya wasn't the type to be incredibly interested in the subjects for long periods of time, so they found themselves moving quickly.

Yaoyorozu seemed to notice that he was on edge, though.

"I'm fine," he reassured her for the millionth time.
She sighed heavily, and Midoriya flinched as he remembered Hisashi sighing before he stood to greet him. She raised her hand, as if to place it on his shoulder, but he moved away frantically before she had the chance. Her lips pursed, and a flash of pain and sadness crossed her features as she moved her arm back to her side.

"Zuku..."

"Please," he pleaded, his eyes watering as he looked away from her, "just leave it alone. I-I can't..."

After a moment of silence, they moved on. Yaoyorozu ushered him back to their favorite cafe after—she looked incredibly guilty for all the times he flinched when a person spoke too loud or when a fellow customer bumped into him—and they ate in relative silence. Finally, Yaoyorozu suggested that they end their day early, explaining that she wanted to finish those books she checked out before she left so that she could return them. Midoriya nodded along with her, relieved to escape any sort of human contact.

"Just... remember you can talk to me, Izuku," she said quietly. "No matter what happens, I won't judge you."

He nodded before scurrying away.

And he hated it. Hated the hurt look on her face. Hated that he was so upset over something that wasn't her fault. Hated that the day before he was content with hugging her, and yet now he couldn't stand the thought of her even touching him.

He hated Hisashi, so, so much.

And he couldn't stomach any of those thoughts, nor could he stomach any food; he grew to hate mirrors as they revealed the bags under his eyes and the scars on his neck, and soon his undernourishment to boot.

Juni tried to get him to eat. But he couldn't.

He shivered in the middle of the night, pulling his covers tighter around him.

And he cried.

=====

Midoriya was at another gymnastics practice with Hiroji. The man seemed to notice his relapse, and he made sure not to touch him at all without warning him several times. Even then, Midoriya still squirmed under the exposure.

Hiroji watched him as he walked across the balance beam once again. Months upon months of walking across the beam allowed him to do it with ease, and the continuous practice guaranteed that he'd soon be able to do actual tricks on it aside from simple walking. Midoriya knew his mind wasn't in the right place as it wandered from topic to topic, until finally settling on one thing.

*You have a lot of hobbies.*

"Can I ask you something?"

Hiroji seemed surprised, but he nodded. "Sure, what's up?"

Midoriya thought about what he was about to say carefully before he let it out loud. "Is it... is it bad if
someone were to take up a bunch of hobbies to, say, distract themselves? To kind of... detach them from a situation?"

Hiroji blinked, and suddenly his expression grew solemn. "That depends."

"On?"

"Whether those hobbies are allowing the person to not get help." There was a pause as the man got his words together, and he crossed his arms over his chest. "Hobbies are a great way to help someone who is suffering from trauma to... keep their mind from wandering. To give them something to do. But," his tone grew sharp, "using those hobbies to ignore their problem is detrimental to that person's help. They're refusing to acknowledge the cause of their pain, and nothing good can from that."

"I see," Midoriya said monotonously.

"Why ask me of all people?" Hiroji asked, hands moving to his hips.

Midoriya shrugged. "Correct me if I'm wrong, but you have a... mental quirk, right?" His eyes zeroed onto the man's expression, which revealed nothing. "Something that deals with a person's psychological being."

Hiroji hummed noncommittally. "And if I did? It doesn't make me a professional."

"You're the only person I have."

Hiroji looked at him for a long time, face unreadable. And then, finally:

"My quirk allows me to see a person's mental state." His statement was unusually blunt. "You've been getting extremely worse these past few days. Is there a reason why?"

"No." There were two reasons, not one; the slime villain and Hisashi.

Hiroji sighed. Midoriya flinched.

"Okay," he said, though Midoriya knew that he didn't believe him.

Midoriya looked down at his hands. He thought about the slime around him, going down his throat and into his ears and choking him to death. He thought about the metal underneath his skin, and the way his quirk exploded into hot bursts.

"My quirk can only activate when I have skin contact with metal," he lied. "It allows me to summon an infinite amount of chains, which I can control as long as that contact remains."

Hiroji seemed surprised. "That's... not a quirk I expected from you."

An image flashed in Midoriya's eyes. Wavy blonde hair, hazel eyes, knee-high leather boots with buckles and metal-infused gloves on her hands; that was what described Maiko. She had a smile that always lied and a heart that should have never pumped blood.

"You're right," Midoriya said. "It shouldn't be mine."

And it's not.

Or, it wasn't.
There was once a woman with bright onyx eyes and dark black hair.

"Look at him," she told the Husband.

"He's beautiful," he responded.

And they both smiled.

Midoriya was sitting by the piano at a music store not too far away from his apartment. Technically, he shouldn't be playing it like it was his own, but the store was selling it and they didn't mind if he used it, so he grabbed his piano sheets and brought them with him.

He sat down on the small, wooden stool and took in a deep breath.

All Might won another battle today. Of course he did. He always did.

He rested his fingers on the keys a bit, pressing lightly on a couple as he adjusted himself to the sounds. He flinched as lightning struck, and the rain hit the glass harder.

He started to press down on the keys, letting his hands glide over them as the notes came together, weakly strewn together to form a soft music. The lightning faded out into nothingness as the music grew louder, and he forgot the stinging of his neck and the soreness in his eyes from crying.

It was nice. Really nice.

A few lone customers watched him for a few minutes, though they never stayed too long; they all had places to be. He wasn't sure how much time passed until the tight knot in his chest eased, letting him breathe easier. Maybe it was just a few minutes, maybe an hour. He couldn't tell anyone if they asked.

He thought about the blonde man with the powerful muscles and the height that put him at twice Midoriya's height, maybe even three. He thought about that endless smile full of white lies and fearless expressions that hid the anxiety roiling in his electric blue eyes.

He thought about the small bit of blood that escaped his clenched teeth.

_You will never be able to change what's coming._

And Hisashi was right. How was he supposed to save _them_ if even All Might, the strongest person known to man, couldn't?

_You can save them_, the man from before said.

Midoriya stopped pressing on the piano keys, letting the music come to an abrupt stop. How, though?

How was he supposed to save Eraserhead's Class 1-A?

The woman born by the Man, All for One, looked to her Husband. A newborn child rested in her arms, his freckles shining in the overhead light.
"His name should be Daizō."

=====

Midoriya had a real name.
It was Kimoto Daizō.
And he hated it.

Chapter End Notes

I'm going to regret putting so many answers here. Ah well.
Enter left stage: Maiko.

She may not ever come back, but she'll still haunt Midoriya for the rest of his life.

Enter right stage:

The U.A. entrance exams. It may just kill someone.

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**Chapter Notes**

**WARNING: THEMES OF SUICIDE IN THIS CHAPTER.**

Also, I apologize for the huge time skip. I had nothing more of importance to write about, and trying to drag it on any longer would have just made the entire thing boring, in my opinion. I'm sorry if you don't like it, but it is what it is. I also jumped around a lot in this chapter? A lot of this is small scenes put together because, while I wanted to include them, I didn't want to overdo it. My philosophy: If I get bored while writing it, you'll get bored while reading it. That's why they're so short—it's because I feel like I only need the core of the concept.

---

**Knows Too Much:**

Do you have any allergies?

**Sparkle Emitter:**

No, why?

**Knows Too Much:**

No reason.

**Sparkle Emitter:**

???

**Sparkle Emitter:**

Should I be scared?

**Knows Too Much:**

Depends.

**Sparkle Emitter:**

Oookkkaaayyy
Sparkle Emitter:
I'm just going to hope that you don't try to poison me.

Knows Too Much:
:

Sparkle Emitter:
fyeialfbyiewbqpfuehfueabbewpfbupbgugup9o hp2nf hhpn

"Here." Midoriya shoved a box into her hands, and he twitched nervously. "I thought you'd like them, Yaochan, but you don't have to have them if you don't want."

Yaoyorozu blinked as she took the box into her hands. She smiled as she noticed the small bunny keychain on his backpack from the corner of her eye, but her curiosity overshadowed her happiness. She had no idea what was in the box...

It was sweets. And baked goods. Oh my god.

"I love you," Yaoyorozu blurted out. "I am adopting you and we will be family forever and you can't escape me."

Midoriya stared at her. And then, much to her surprise, he nodded. "If it makes you happy, Yaochan."

And Yaoyorozu smiled brightly.

"So the chocolate museum was a bust," Yaoyorozu lamented as they walked away from said building, "but it could have been worse, right? And at least we got free chocolate."

"Mhm," Midoriya said, moving not too far away from her.

Yaoyorozu skipped along before suddenly, a thought occurred to her. "Hey, what lessons do you have today?"

"Japanese Sign Language," he responded. "Not sure you'd want to be there, though. It's a useful thing to learn, but it's kind of boring if you don't know what's going on."

"True," Yaoyorozu admitted. "But you play the piano, right? Do you have one at your house?"

Midoriya shook his head. "It's too expensive. I'm saving up a little bit each month to buy one, but it'll probably take me a couple years until I can actually get the one I want."

Yaoyorozu hummed a cheerful tune. "And if I could get you one today?"

Midoriya paled. "What do you mean by that?"

Yaoyorozu sent him a Cheshire grin as she winked at him. "My treat."

"I am almost positive that this is illegal."
"Quirks aren't allowed to be used on public property; private property is free game. And don't worry about it, I'm not messing up the economy or anything too much."

"Not messing with it too much?"

"Yeah. Now, if I was giving several people a free piano, that would be different."

"Oh my god, Yaochan, are you sure we should even be doing this?"

"Yep! Now help me out—it's gonna take a while to assemble all these parts. And then we're going to have to tune it as well after we're done, and we want to get it finished in time for your sign lessons!"

=====

"It's very beautiful," Midoriya admitted.

Yaoyorozu let a small smile light up her face. "I'm glad." She looked down to her feet, scuffing her toe on the floors. "I wanted to give you something nice, for helping me out this week..."

Midoriya turned to her, suddenly aware of the day. There was a sinking feeling in his gut, and he tried not to let his disappointment show as he suppressed a dark feeling of regret. She hadn't been here for long, so why? Why did it have to be so soon? "You're leaving soon?" he asked, his mouth dry, though he already knew the answer.

Yaoyorozu flinched. He sounded like a kicked puppy, and she felt guilt bloom in her chest. "Tonight," she said. "That was... that was why I wanted to do this for you."

Midoriya frowned. "I wish you didn't have to go," he said. He meant it, deep down in his heart. It didn't matter that he was uncomfortable with people, it didn't matter that he hated physical contact. He wanted her here, where he knew she would be safe and where they could talk face-to-face.

Yaoyorozu nodded, and she wiped her nose on the back of her sleeve. "Yeah," she laughed sadly, "me neither. But we'll meet again sometime, right?"

"Yeah... yeah, of course we will," Midoriya said, trying not to let the toxic feeling in his chest grip him too tightly.

Yaoyorozu sent him another smile that shook as she struggled to keep her tears at bay. "Yeah. I'm going to go to U.A. and become a hero." Another small chuckle escaped her. "And then you can see me on TV and stuff, and you can reach out to me and we'll meet again. And then you can help me out and give me a bunch of pointers and crap, because you're amazing at it, you know?" She sniffled again, and her voice was thick with tears. "And then I can show you off to all my friends, and we can trade stories about all the stuff we've done and act like little kids again."

"Of course," Midoriya said softly. "And I'll get you a box of sweets when we do."

Yaoyorozu exhaled shakily in what he assumed was meant to be a laugh before she held her arms wide open. "Hug?" she asked, and there was something desperate in her eyes.

Midoriya thought about Hisashi's hand in his hair, gripping him tightly. And though bile rose into his throat, he fell into her arms.

"Hug," he echoed.

And they stayed like that for a long, long time.
He played her a song on the piano. He slipped up twice, but she didn't even notice.

He wished she did. Maybe she'd stay a little longer to hear him play it until he got it right.

"Come on now, Daizō," All for One said to him.

Midoriya trembled as he gently tussled his hair. He was sitting on his hands and knees, tears and blood covering his face. He felt his body pang with a deep ache, the wounds in his shoulders and back stinging relentlessly. Chains were wrapped around his ankles and wrists, digging into the skin and leaving him with what he knew were blisters.

"Daizō, Daizō, Daizō," All for One tutted. "Did you really think that you could defy me?" The man was whispering to him, and Midoriya whimpered as he patted his head. "Here I thought that you would be better than my daughter. What a surprise that my grandson is just as bad as her."

The man sighed heavily as he stood, his joints creaking as he moved, leaving Midoriya to shiver and tremble on the cold stone floor. "I rule the world, Daizō. It may have taken me several hundred years, but I did it."

Midoriya glanced up to look at him from underneath his long bangs. All for One looked back to him in turn, his face clean of any injury that he used to have from his fight with the man with lies in his smile all those centuries ago.

"That pathetic group that calls themselves a revolution will be squashed under my boot. And if it means using you to do it, well..." His statement unfinished, he turned back to the doorway. His footsteps where heavy and echoed around the barren room, which was covered in a thin layer of blood and gore with just the smell to match it. Just as he was about to exit through the small arch, however, he paused. "You know, Tomura collects hands. Guess you could say it's part of his costume." A small smile lit up his face. "Why don't we add yours to the collection?"

Midoriya felt his stomach drop to his feet as a cold pit of dread overcame him. The man continued, oblivious to Midoriya's swelling fear.

"It would go so well with the rest of them, and I'm sure my apprentice would be very, very happy..."

The small tilt of his lips would have seemed ostentatious in any other situation; his stone cold expressions characterized his public image, but it was clear that he was enjoying himself now in the rare moments where he found happiness after the supposed love of his life died.

"Of course, we have a healer on standby that could regenerate your hand, but you'd still go through quite a bit of torment. Maybe it'd teach you a lesson about opposing me."

He turned to the guard. "Take his left," he said in an amused tone as Midoriya started to struggle against his chains, his throat clenched painfully tight.

"No," Midoriya hoarsely whispered. "No, no, please no—"

"I'm sorry, Daizō. Maybe next time you'll think twice about trying to kill me." His smile grew bigger now as he went to close the door behind him. "And anyway, call this... a repayment. A hand for a hand, right?"
He left through the doorway, the metal locks slamming into place and echoing through the room. He whimpered and struggled desperately as the guard walked forward, and he fell onto his back as he pushed himself into a corner.

The guard was unsympathetic as he drew a dagger.

"No," Midoriya begged as the man grabbed his arm forcefully. He kicked fruitlessly. "No, no, no, please don't do this," he sobbed. "Please don't do this, please!" He felt his chest seize as he struggled to croak out the words.


He screamed.

And then he woke up.

=====

Making a cup of tea at two in the morning wasn't an unusual thing for Midoriya. It happened more often than he'd like to admit, and while he knew the best thing would be for him to attempt to sleep more, he was afraid of the monsters that lurked under his bed.

As he waited for the water to finish boiling, his hands trembled furiously. He rubbed his left palm with cold fingers and cupped it near his chest, trying to regain the feeling in it. It was entirely numb now, and that scared him to no end.

Regenerating hands wasn't an easy thing to do, and there were times where Midoriya was slapped in the face with reality that reproducing a body part did not mean it was going to be perfect. More often than not he lost the feeling in them, and on occasions it would cramp up and hinder him from using it at all. It forced him to learn how to use both his hands for whatever he did, and though it was yet another useful skill to have, he wished he never had to learn it in the first place.

He flinched as the whistling of the teapot shattered the silence, and he quickly moved over to it so he could shut it up. The sound frayed his nerves, pulling at the strands and slowly unraveling it with each passing second.

He swallowed the bile that was rising in his throat as a stray thought came to mind about the new hand that rested on Shigaraki's shoulder.

His hand.

He shuddered and poured the hot water into a cup, watching absentmindedly as the steam rose from the coloring liquid. He let the teabag seep for a few minutes, mind wandering to any corner or crook that relieved him from thoughts about anything macabre. He assumed Juni was still in his bedroom as he turned on the radio, setting it to a certain station that he often listened to to calm down his anxiety. The white noise washed over him harmlessly, and he took in several deep breaths as his shaking hands raised the cup to his lips. The liquid burned his tongue, and it was bitter without any sugar, but he couldn't care less.

Time. That was what he needed. Time. Time to unwind. Time to relax. Time to plan.

He needed time.

======
When he glanced up at the clock several hours later, it said that it was one in the morning.

He rubbed at his forehead, trying to ease the headache and the pain that came with it.

His (not his) quirk was getting out of control.

Again.

There was was a Man who ruled the world. His wife died, and his daughter ran away.

He did not care for either, however. His heart turned to stone and his daughter was finally dead.

Rumors said that she had a son, though. And the Man was scared.

"Had that filthy wave of resistance finally taken my only hope?" asked he. He watched under a calculating eye as the sea of people rose and fell, but a small wave in the background, moving against the tide, caught his eye.

"A revolution," said he. "How dare they try to revolt against my rule?"

"They took your grandson," his protege said. "They've taken him and are going to try to use him to defeat you."

The Man paced. "I must destroy them," said he to no specific person. "I must destroy him. I must make him my own."

And the protege smiled. "Let me have his hand, Sensei. Let me have his hand."

And the Man laughed.

Hiroji grabbed his arm without much warning that day. Midoriya panicked.

(Later, the man would gently explain that he went into a full-blown panic attack. Midoriya hated to think about that.)

The entire situation was blurry. He faintly remembered the man ushering him to his apartment after getting a few instructions from him.

"Where are your parents?" he asked frantically.


The man ran a hand down his face as he sat him down in the living room. Some minutes later, he handed him a cup of tea. Midoriya let the warmth seep through his gloves and into his hands, distracting him from the barrage of thoughts and feelings clouding his mind. "Drink," he ordered, and Midoriya followed it.

Silence fell.

"Midoriya," Hiroji said, "I don't know what I'm supposed to do. You need help. You need a psychiatrist. You need *someone*. Please, Midoriya, you need *therapy*. Your mental state is something I have never seen before."
Midoriya froze and shook his head frantically. He hadn't realized he was crying, but Hiroji was shocked beyond anything he had seen before as he tried to reassure him. "No," Midoriya said. "No, I can't. I can't. I can't get help." He buried his face in his hands. "I can't do it. I can't. Please, you can't make me go there. Please. They won't know what to do with me."

Hiroji sighed. He stood up for a second, calling out to him that he'd be right back before he left the apartment. Midoriya tried to calm himself as the seconds ticked by, and he felt his stomach curl into tight knots that made his throat clench and his face grow hot. His hands shook, and he struggled not to spill the tea that Hiroji was so careful for making for him.

The man was quick to return. In his hands was a small journal and a ball. Immediately, he handed both to Midoriya, who had to set down his tea to do so. Hiroji explained immediately.

"The ball is meant to relieve stress. If you're ever in a tough situation, or when with other people, you can use that to help. The journal..." He fell silent before sighing while rubbing the bridge of his nose. "Part of a way to help with traumatic experiences is to write down how you feel. Like a diary, almost. It's really effective among heroes who had to suffer from... life-threatening injuries or psychological torture. If you're not going to get therapy, this is the best I can do for you."

Midoriya stared at the brand-new journal, letting the tips of his fingers trail over the cover.

"Izuku." Midoriya's head snapped toward Hiroji. "... If you get any worse, I'm going to find a therapist for you." His gaze was unusually solemn. "I thought... I thought you were finally getting better, you know? And you were, but this past week..." He sighed and ran a hand through his locks. Midoriya felt shame crawl up his chest as he remembered that Hiroji had to suffer as well.

"Chikara-senpai—" he started, only to stop when the man held a hand out.

"Don't worry about it, okay? I just want you to get better. Take this week off. Just... play the piano. Don't stress yourself. Have some alone time. Take a few sick days from school. Hang out with Juni. I don't care as long as you can keep yourself together, alright?"

Midoriya swallowed heavily as the man sighed for the umpteenth time. He walked away from Midoriya, and he wasn't quite sure what he was doing until he came back with a pad of paper and a pen in hand. He wrote something down and placed it in front of him before he eased himself into the couch.

"My phone number," he explained. He rubbed his eyes tiredly before looking around. The two fell into another silence, and Hiroji took that as his sign to leave.

"Oh, and Izuku?" Midoriya looked up to Hiroji. The man had his hands in his pockets as he frowned. "I won't hesitate to call in child services and get you away from this place if your situation deteriorates. You don't deserve this shit."

And he left.

=====

Midoriya did as the man asked. He took a week off and gave himself a bit of time to just relax.

He started writing in his journal. He wasn't sure how to go about it, but then he realized that writing his problems down would leave evidence behind. And so, instead of writing it in Kanji, he wrote it in his native language.

Which didn't exist. (Yet. And hopefully, never.)
Translation:

She nicknamed me echo, you know. Maiko, that is. She's the woman with the blonde hair and brown eyes (her quirk is called Chain Conjuring). She was the one who convinced her unit to take me in when they found me in my mother's house.

Ah. Another thing. Maiko was a leader of one of the units of the organization that was rebelling against my grandfather's rule. The organization had a council made up of around sixteen representatives that ruled the place. Maiko was looked down upon because she was in charge of the units that went outside their hidden base to pillage and secure important information for the organization. It was a little unfair for her, since she was good at her job and she was one of the most important people there, but her job was hated amongst the people. She was the one who lead men and women out to what was viewed as a death arena. All those that died were blamed on her.

As a result, when Maiko brought me to their base, I wasn't... well received with the other people and the council. They hated my guts, especially since I was their greatest enemy's grandson.

Maiko helped raise me, though, you know? She was really the only one who cared. She was like a... second mother, almost. She helped me learn Japanese, too.

Granted, it wasn't perfected, and the language had long since faded out of use since the entire world was converted to a single, secular language, but it was better than nothing. Even though now I know that several things I was taught are wrong, I got most of the basics, which was helpful.

That was where she nicknamed me echo, actually. When she was teaching me she would use all these hilarious voices, and I would try to copy her exactly. She said something about me being an echo of her, and it just kind of stuck, I guess.

My little echo, she used to say to me. Or mi eco pequeño. It depended on what kind of mood she was in.

Spanish was... strangely prevalent, even after All for One took over. I don't know how it survived so long, but even then it was petering out.

Anyway, I guess... Maiko is one of the problems I have to tackle first, right? I mean, All for One and Shigaraki messed me up quite a bit, but... I'm not sure I'm ready to talk about them yet.

Or maybe I should start with my real mother? And start from the very, very beginning. When I first manifested my quirk, yeah?

Yeah.

I call it Recipience. That... just about sums it all up.

My mom suffered a lot from my grandfather, you know? She had a terrible case of PTSD, (not that any case of it isn't terrible) and seeing my quirk... well, it's not the exact same as her father's, but it was close enough. I guess she just... didn't want me to end up like him. Her solution was just to get rid of me from the equation, which is pretty messed up, but I guess I see where she came from.

I just wonder sometimes if we could've been a family, you know? It probably would have been a bit on the dysfunctional side of things because of all the trauma my mother had, but we might've been happy(?)
I don't know. She had a few things wrong with her, and when she saw my quirk, she just snapped, I guess. That bottle of kerosene just happened to be there at the wrong place at the wrong time.

You know she tried to burn the house down shortly after, right? Yeah. She was... really messed up in the head, now that I think about it. I think she and Dad fled a little after? I don't remember. I can barely remember their faces.

I do remember Maiko's, though, when she first found me. When she rescued me from that fire.

At the time, she was my hero. Now, I just wish she left me to die. Maybe then I wouldn't have to deal with her smiling as she condemned me to hell.

God, that woman was so manipulative.

=====

There once was a woman with blonde hair and hazel eyes. She smiled in the face of death and frowned in the hatred of man. She entered the building alight, her fellow allies close behind her. They had approximately two minutes before the fire department arrived and wiped out the scene from existence.

"All for One's daughter and son-in-law are gone," one of them said to her.

The woman, Maiko, tutted when she heard a cry of pain. "Oh my!" cried she when she found a small child. He was crying. "We must save him!"

Her allies protested. "We cannot. Look at what our technology claims his quirk to be—he will be our greatest enemy."

"Nonsense!" said Maiko. She picked up the child into her arms. "This little Daizō will never harm us. And I shall raise him as if he were my own!"

And so Maiko did. She masqueraded as an adoptive mother to the solemn child while, beneath her smile, a snake's tail rattled dangerously.

Neither Daizō nor the council of their organization knew any better.

It would lead to the deaths of thousands.

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Translation:

I don't... Maiko is...

I don't know.

I loved her, you know. She would tuck me into bed every night. She would read me bedtime stories, and every time I had a nightmare, she would come and sing me to sleep.

You know she was the most talented person I ever met? It felt like she could do anything, really. She even taught me how to fight. That's where most of my previous fighting skills came from. I got a little rusty over the years when I was with Hisashi, but it didn't take too long to get back into the groove.

Maiko was very... protective over me? To put it into context, I'd have to explain the whole revolution thing. You could say that it was less of that and more of a whole society with how populated it was;
it was like a hidden world that resided under the radar of the empire of him. Most people were born and raised under the council; very few, if none, had been a part of it since the very beginning of its formation. And really, most of those people had age-defying quirks.

For a time, this "society" was doing really well. The revolution seemed to be making good progress, but then there came a point where things started going downhill. Rations were constantly applied, and they were getting smaller and smaller with each passing year. Medication for the sick was out of stock, so a lot of kids and adults died of illnesses and other diseases.

Since Maiko was part of the council, and she treasured me, I didn't really... suffer as much as others did. I guess you could say that I was unaffected, if only a little undernourished. And a lot of people took offense to that, so...

Yeah. Let's just say that there were a few people who tried to kill me.

The council, from what I heard when I was eavesdropping, thought that it was reasonable. That I should have died. I didn't... well, Maiko was pissed, for one thing. And because of it, the rift between her and the other council members kinda grew. At the time, I thought she was angry because she cared about me, but...

Well, that wasn't exactly her reasoning.

You know, she was really smart. She figured out everything that she needed to do, know, and say down to the smallest details, and it worked out in her favor, in the end.

Or not. Depends on the way you look at it.

It's a little unnerving to think that everything she told me, everything she made me think and believe was just part of a plan. A plan that ended up getting her killed in the end, mind you, but she wasn't alone. She brought down hundreds of thousands of lives with her.

Maybe that was part of what she was going for? I'm not sure, even now. I despise her, though. A lot.

And I love her, too. I can never decide which one I'm leaning toward. Maybe I'm suffering from a case of Stockholm Syndrome. Not that it really matters anymore, now does it?

I was... just part of her master plan though. Just a pawn in a game of chess. Just something to be used.

You know, she wanted me to

=====

He realized, with a start, that every class/hobby he took up forced him to interact with another human being when it came to the learning process.

And while that was part of the reason he did it in the first place—human interaction was inevitable, and learning how to cope with it was something that he'd rather learn sooner than later—he also needed something to do that could keep his mind off things without the contact. Writing bios about heroes was a good hobby to have, but he was sure he was going to rip his eyes out of his skull if he had to add one more criticism of Endeavor.

(Seriously, for the second ranked hero in Japan, he could go dunk in waste. Or a trashcan. Or both.)
So, he started another language. (He was sure that he was going to drop it within a week, but screw it. Might as well add one more thing to stress over.)

He had been debating between French and German, and he decided on the latter. Which lasted about a day before he realized that hey, remember that giant woman that worked for Hisashi way back when? Yeah, she spoke German too.

... So he may or may have not taken up French.

"I have no idea what the heck you're saying," Hiroji deadpanned.

Midoriya smiled at him. "Not sure you want to."

=====

Knows Too Much:
Yaochan help

Knows Too Much:
I started muttering in a different language in class today, right? while i was asleep, cause i didn't get much last night

Knows Too Much
Yeah, I know

Knows Too Much:
So anyway, I wake up and everyone including the teacher is just staring at me, right

Knows Too Much:
And one of my classmates just says "The hell were you saying"

Knows Too Much:
And so I blurt out the first thing that comes to mind

Knows Too Much:
Which was "Damnation awaits those that make the same mistakes"

Knows Too Much:
I KNOW????
Knows Too Much:
Anyway, now everyone is terrified of me and think I'm some sort of demon spawn from hell

Knows Too Much:
I have no idea what to do

Knows Too Much:
Help me, Jesus

Sparkle Emitter:
I dunno what to tell you man

Sparkle Emitter:
The only thing that comes to mind is "The power of Christ compels you"

Knows Too Much:
...

Knows Too Much:
I feel as if that reaction is much deserved

Sparkle Emitter:
:D

=====

Translation:

_Sometimes I miss Maiko. I can still hear her laugh, and her joyful eyes are always so hopeful. I can hear her soft voice as she sings a melody that is foreign but welcome all the same. She would hug me, and she's always so warm and soft and such a great person to hug._

_I miss her. Why did she have to do this to me?_

=====

He got better. Hiroji was happy with the advancement, and he pulled him into a hug one day.

"I care about you so, so much," he whispered, and Midoriya believed it with all of his heart.

They practiced in silence. But that was okay, because it was comfortable. They didn't need conversation to pass the time.

Finally, Hiroji spoke up.

"There's a new kid transferring in." His eyes were trained on the ceiling. "I know that you won't get along with them, so I'm going to get you ready for the uneven bars and the balance beam so you can practice on your own. I'll have someone keep an eye on you to make sure you don't get hurt, but we're going to aim for simple things for now, like being able to run across the beam and then twist on the bars. Sound good?"

Midoriya nodded. "Yes sir."
Hiroji smiled lightly at him. "Then we better get started then, right? You've mentioned several times about wanting to increase your balance anyway—I'm sure the beam will help tremendously."

Midoriya nodded and fidgeted with the cloth around his neck, pulling it off the side of his sweaty skin to let air in. He let the elastic snap back into place, the nerves too damaged to feel the pain, and followed the man to the beam.

He tripped three times when he tried to walk briskly to the other side. Hiroji just encouraged him as the weeks passed, and then he was able to do said action with ease, and then he was running—

-----

Midoriya was almost thirteen when he performed his first choreographed dance in his Gymnastics class. He had practiced for hours upon hours, though his stomach felt like a group of fluttering butterflies burning his confidence away as he watched the other participants do their own. He was terrified, really, even though Hiroji was encouraging him thoroughly.

He was sure that he was going to slip and fall like one of the other guys did. His hands and knees were shaking terribly, and he knew he wasn't going to be able to support his weight.

He had to take a few breathing exercises before he started. He managed to calm himself long enough to make it out onto the floor, where everyone before him had performed already. He waited for the music to start up, and then he moved.

He didn't slip up. Which was gratifying, really. He could tell that it surprised a few teenagers who were expecting him to blend into the background because it was his first performance, though he merely smiled shakily at them in response. Really, the only reason he was doing so well was because of Hiroji's teaching—he was the best of the best.

(Off to the side, the gymnastics instructors all were talking. A little bit of gossip here, a little bit of actual conversation there. "Hiroji," said one, "you're so lucky. Your student is doing so well."

Hiroji would smile. "It's 'cause my student is the best of the best.")

Midoriya felt his face flush when he was called up to the stands. He thought that he was finally done being at the center of attention, but when he was rewarded second place and a fake, plastic medal, everyone was looking at him again. A girl a couple of years older than him was standing in first place, her smile blinding. She was the most experienced when it came to dance routines, and her music choice was excellent. Midoriya was surprised he could even be compared to her when she was so talented.

"Midoriya Izuku, right?" the girl said to him just as he was leaving.

Midoriya nodded. "Yes ma'am."

The girl shot him a pair of thumbs up. "You did good today. When you're finally comfortable around us, why not join with our instructor?" Seeing Midoriya's curious glance, she elaborated. "We have the old man. She jabbed a finger over her shoulder. "He's a bit of a jerk at first glance, but he loves all of us. Really."

Midoriya hummed to himself. It was true that he was fine in a class when he was in his martial arts lessons, but that was different. There, he could essentially pretend that he was in a real fight, that it was a necessity to be in a group, which fended off most of his problems. Gymnastics? Eh, not so much.
"I'll definitely think about it," he promised. "I'll have to get to you later, though."

The girl nodded. "Sure thing." Her smile turned soft as she stretched her hand out to him. "My name's Hiroji Aika. I'm your teacher's daughter."

Midoriya blinked in surprise. Because that was the last thing he was expecting, really. "Nice to meet you, Hiroji-chan."

The girl shot a smirk to him. "Dad's basically adopted you already, so you can just call me Aika. I don't mind."

And Midoriya nodded again, dumbfounded and brain dead as the girl skipped away.

=====

—and then he was jumping—

=====

After a lot of hesitation, he decided that he'd participate in Aika's class every other lesson. The girl was sweet, though she had a bit of a fiery temper on her to match. She never hesitated to use her sharp tongue to tear anyone to shreds if they so much as looked badly in her father's or his direction.

So yeah. If he had to have a sister, she would definitely be one.

=====

—and then he was hopping on one foot—

=====

**Knows Too Much:**
*Mom, help*

**Knows Too Much:**
*What are vines*

```sparkleEmitter
ohohohooo
```

```sparkleEmitter
let me show you the world, child
```

=====

—and then he was cartwheeling—

=====

"Turtlenecks aren't too girly, right?" he asked Juni one afternoon. They were in the mall, and Midoriya was peering at a rack full of warm, fluffy turtlenecks for the colder months and light, thin ones for the hotter parts of the year.

Juni didn't make any specific reaction that he could tell of—the whole expression-reading thing was still a work in progress—but it wasn't a negative, so he pulled several of the softer-looking pieces of
clothing from the rack and into his arms. Oh yeah, they were really, really soft. And they covered his neck too. What more could he want?

Turned out, Juni liked them too. Which was just a bonus, in his opinion.

=====

—and then he was walking across it with his eyes closed.

=====

Hiroji stood off to the side, grinning. He held out his hand for a high five, and Midoriya grinned back as he reciprocated the gesture.

"Just think about it—three years ago you tried to walk across it somewhat fast and tripped three times," he said.

Midoriya laughed. (It was something he grew more comfortable doing around Hiroji.) "I'm just going to ignore the fact that you remembered what twelve-year-old me did better than what I could've recalled."

Hiroji tussled his hair gently. "Yeah, well, you're constantly doing so much crap that I'm not surprised that you can't remember your own childhood. Seriously, do you even remember that time you did our practices with that darn scarf on? Or the time you baked us cookies on your birthday?"

Midoriya scoffed and pointed at him with fake annoyance. "Excuse me, I'll have you know that I bake you stuff at least once a month nowadays. I swear, you're a spoiled brat."

Hiroji pretended to take offense to the statement, but he quickly shrugged it off as they walked shoulder-to-shoulder toward the entryway. Midoriya was still relatively short, but it felt weird to think that several years ago he was barely up to his chest. "Anyway, you have a nice day, Izuku. You've made a lot of progress these past few years."

Midoriya smiled and waved as he left the warehouse, backpack in hand and scarf thrown precariously across his shoulders. Juni could faintly be seen on the fringes of the silk material that was started to fray at the ends from so many years of use.

Hiroji sighed longingly as one of his fellow instructors approached him. "They grow up so fast," he muttered.

The man laughed. "Just adopt the kid already, would you? It's painful watching you two play father and son. And he's already, what, fifteen? You only have three years left."

Hiroji sighed again, though this time a little sadder. "Yeah, I know."

(Deep down, he wished that he could just take in Midoriya legally. He still never got to meet his parents, and he had a feeling that they weren't the most pleasant company around. Well, if they were ever going to be around, that was.)

=====

"Mido, would you let me kick your behind for one moment so I can actually impress the new girl?"

Midoriya rolled his eyes as he pulled a bruised Eishun Akihito to his feet. "If you deserved to win, I might let it slide."
Eishun held a hand over his chest in mock upset. "Are you saying that I'm not worthy, your Highness?"

"Yes," Midoriya replied bluntly. Being called girl-like for his hair so many times had immunized him against any offense that would come with those comments originally. This wasn't to say that it didn't annoy him, because sometimes it did, but he found that it was easier to roll with the joke. "So bow down to your queen or actually get your head straight long enough so I don't have to fight a lovesick puppy. It's pitiful."

Eishun groaned and rolled his eyes but got back into position. "Can I just, like, forcefully apply you to Yuuei several years early? So I don't have to deal with you surpassing me in every way, shape, and form?"

Midoriya blinked. "You're at least ten times better than me at socializing."

Eishun rolled his shoulders. "Well yeah, you have a pet slug for goodness sakes. Clearly that information is obvious."

Someone winced in the sidelines, and another person backed further away from the sidelines. "Dude, you did not just insult Juni..."

Eishun paled as he waved his hands in front of his face, trying to ignore the dark smile frozen on Midoriya's face. "Mido, I was not slandering Juni I swear please believe me—" His voice was getting increasingly higher pitched as he continued talking.

Midoriya just continued smiling innocently. "Of course not."

The girl ended up asking Eishun out anyway, even though he was dragged through the dirt after Midoriya wiped the floor with him. Eishun sent Midoriya two thumbs up, as if it was all some part of some master plan. Knowing Eishun, it probably was.

"Did you mean it?" Midoriya asked Eishun later. It was a little odd for Midoriya, sometimes, to talk to the man. He was almost getting ready to move out and start his own life as an adult, and Midoriya kind of missed the blubbering fourteen-year-old that continuously called him Black Widow.

"Mean what?" Eishun asked curiously. He was grinning, still on a high from the promise of a date his new girlfriend gave him.

"The Yuuei thing," he said quietly as he raised his arms over his head, stretching his back pleasantly. He could see the surprise on Eishun's face at the question.

"Kid, you are the most talented guy I've met at your age. If you wanna go to Yuuei, than I say go for it. Shoot for the stars." After a moment of contemplation, he added, "Don't worry about needing validation, boyo. You're going to do great things when you grow up."

Midoriya's chest felt warm. He smiled.

=====

On the way to school the next day, Midoriya watched with a blank expression as Mt. Lady slammed a villain into the ground. He swore he could hear his groan from where he was standing.

"Don't worry about needing validation, boyo."

Yeah, right... that's a bit hard with a quirk like mine.
Midoriya knew he was getting better. He just didn't know how much better he was.

Hanging out with the same people until he was comfortable with them was fine. It was helpful, really. But sometimes he forgot just how long it took to get that relationship to where it was. Most of them took years. Scratch that, all of them took years.

It always hurt a little, when he got caught off guard and had to take a moment to calm himself.

For example, there was this boy with sharp teeth and dark, black hair that was tied into a ponytail. He was riding his bike, and he didn't seem to live in the specific part of the city they were in. He was exploring, apparently, and he bumped into Midoriya and asked him for directions to a certain area. Midoriya stuttered through the whole explanation, and though the boy was nice, patient, and smiled encouragingly at him whenever he trailed off into silence, Midoriya still felt like throwing up.

"Well, it was nice meeting you!" the boy said, and Midoriya drank in the happiness in his red eyes as he pedaled away.

Midoriya wrapped his arms tightly around himself, digging his fingers into the meat of his forearms. He wished he had his stress ball on him so he could squeeze it instead. He took in a few deep breaths, letting years of experience with human interaction slowly wash over him. Yeah, he was fine —maybe not okay, but he was fine.

Huh. He looked a lot like Kirishima Eijiro.

But didn't he have red hair?

Translation:

Disaya. That’s the guy that... kind of was a pedophile? The one that Hisashi beat half to death?

I saw him on TV today. He committed suicide, but in the most bizarre way possible that it drew everyone’s attention to him.

I think he did that on purpose. As if he was calling out to me, "Look at what you've done."

It... sucks. Because it wasn't his fault, for what happened to him. I mean, sure, he was a bit of a creep, but really? Hisashi... Hisashi took it too far.

I guess he was just... really into the "parental figure" idea, and protectiveness was seen as a necessity. Though, I'm not quite sure I'd describe what he was as protective.

I wish I could give it back to him, you know. What Hisashi made him give.

And... it really messed me up too, you know? I remember just... someone did that to me before, once upon a time. He didn't want what he had, didn't want the responsibility, so he forced it on me before jumping off a roof.

And since he's gone, I can never give it back. I can never return it to its original owner.

Damn it. Why did it have to be me?
Once upon a time, Daizō asked Maiko why he was training.

Maiko smiled. "Because we're going to

The End.

=====

When Yaoyorou texted him, confessing how terrified she was of the U.A. entrance exams, Midoriya went into a panic. Because wow, the U.A. exams were coming soon, weren't they? And time flashed by way too quickly for his liking.

One of his terrible habits he had (or maybe not so terrible in certain situations) was noticing anything else that wasn't relevant to what was bothering him. Maybe it was just a tactic his brain used to cope with everything that happened to him. Or maybe it was just something that everyone did? Maybe he'd ask Yaoyorozu.

Maybe that was why he noticed that Hiroji didn't have a ring on his finger. Of course, it could have just been chance—or maybe his instructor just never wore it during practice to keep it protected. He wasn't quite sure, but what he did know was this:

If he had a ring, he never wore it. Ever. Not once had he accidentally left it on his finger. Not once did he leave it in his cubby shelf. And Hiroji never, ever mentioned having a wife (or husband, if he swung that way). Which was odd, because Midoriya knew that, if he was happily married to someone, he would probably talk about them. A lot.

Midoriya glanced to Aika, Hiroji's daughter. She had a few of his features, though she mostly looked like—what he assumed anyway—would be her other parent. He looked at the small, star-like scars on her shoulders and neck, which were visible from her gymnastics outfit. It made him a little sick to think about, so he tried to push it to the back of his mind.

He failed and ended up with two more things to worry and stew over. Hiroji's curious looks weren't
helping any, either.

 =====

Translation:

You know, Shigaraki wouldn't have been such a pain in the behind if All for One didn't give him that stupid anti-aging quirk. To be frank, if I didn't have any self-restraint, I would probably go find his base right now and stab him in the throat.

(Fun fact: I did that once. The only reason I even find it funny nowadays is because he also had a damn regeneration ability, and he healed almost immediately. [Future technology allowed him to receive all these quirks with a fraction of the pain and backlash.] So no, he didn't die. But hey, apparently the move was so radical and insane that it humored the guy. He didn't even punish me.

Honestly, I'm not sure what that says about me.)

 =====

"You want to get into U.A.?” Hiroji asked, surprised. "I mean, I think that's a great idea. It certainly explains why you're so nervous, though. Aren't the entrance exams next week—"

Midoriya promptly shushed him. "We do not speak of such horrors."

"Yeah, Dad," Aika chimed in, "don't freak out the smol bean. You'll scare him away."

"I still have no idea what that means," Midoriya deadpanned.

"It's a slang term," Hiroji explained. "I'm not fully sure myself, but I don't think it's anything bad."

Midoriya sighed and rubbed a hand down his face. "Okay. I'm going to trust you."

"I wouldn't do that," Aika said, "the last time I trusted him with anything, he managed to do the exact opposite of what he was supposed to do and shattered everything."

Hiroki paled. "I still have nightmares from all the yelling you did that day."

Aika rolled her eyes. "Stop being such a drama queen, dad. We get it, you're the supreme ruler of the monarchy, whatever. Leave my dictatorship alone."

Midoriya snorted loudly and slapped a hand over his mouth as he tried to suppress his giggles. It wasn't necessarily hilarious by any means, except it totally was for a history junkie like him, but Aika—once again—caught him completely off guard. Hiroji seemed a little surprised at his fit of giggles, but he smiled openly.

"Well, that's besides the point," he said. "I think you'll do fine, Izuku. And I know you've been working extra hard these past few months. Yes, I noticed, don't think you can get away with that kind of stuff."

Aika smirked and leaned down so they were shoulder to shoulder, holding her hand over her mouth as she whispered to him. "He says that, but he's really the most oblivious guy in the world."

"Hey!"

Aika laughed and skipped away, doing a few handless cartwheels as to show off. "I call that we get celebratory smoothies!" She cackled as she sprinted toward the entrance.
"Is she always like this?"

Hiroji sighed and facepalmed. "I love her, but unfortunately, yes."

Midoriya snorted again as he followed her out the door. "Well, it looks like Aika and I are going to go skip practice. Hope you don't mind."

Hiroji seemed to melt in horror. "Aika has rubbed off on you way too much," he whined. He shook his head before chasing after them. "Let me at least join you two, I don't want you getting hurt."

Aika turned around, fake surprise plastered on her face. "But Daddy, you can't skip work. You'll get in trouble."

"But—"

"And can't I have some free time with my brother?" At this, Aika wrapped her arms around Midoriya's limp form, his expression blank of any emotion.

"Well—"

"Midoriya's been taking martial arts lessons since he was super little, Dad, and he can protect me if it comes down to it!"

Hiroji looked a mix between utterly depressed and mortified. From his open mouth poured stuttered words and his spiritual self.

As Aika turned around and dragged Midoriya away by his collar, he waved to him. "Don't worry, Dad, we'll buy a smoothie for you, too." He tried his best to suppress a grin as Hiroji fell to his side, twitching uncontrollably as he stuttered out excuses. He laughed quietly as Aika pulled him far, far away.

(He felt a little twitchy himself; while Aika's hold was fine, it still made his skin crawl nauseatingly.)

One of Hiroji's colleagues laughed at his broken, pitiful form. "Dude, you are so smitten."

Hiroji didn't humor them, instead muttering something that sounded quite a bit like, "Those brats better be thankful that I love them so much."

But yes, they got him a smoothie. Strawberry-flavored with just a little bit of whipped cream and two cherries, his favorite. And if Midoriya and Aika got the exact same order as a "sign of family," as the latter proclaimed, well...

That was a secret for them to share.

=-=-=-

Recommendation students had a different exam than those that entered U.A. publicly. Due to the nature of the two events, recommendation students took their exams just a few days before others did. Yaoyorozu, who happened to get a recommendation from a family friend who witnessed her potential by accident, was an absolute mess.

And she hated that she was a mess. Because she had been preparing this for years now, getting ready for the moment that she would enter U.A. high school as a student. She had the talent and the quirk to do it, and she was prepared to get in with some of the highest scores.

Of course, she didn't think that she'd be getting in on recommendations instead, and suddenly the
stakes were much higher. Talent didn't matter anymore, nor did quirks. What mattered on top of that was *skill*. Tactics. Analyzing.

And that meant that Yaoyorozu had no idea just how talented everyone was going to be compared to her. At least with the original exams she had a chance. She knew that the biggest challenge was fighting different kinds of robots and getting points, almost like a game—and that was something she could prepare for.

This? Not so much.

She sighed and rubbed at her face, trying to withhold her panic and tears. She took in a few deep breaths, letting a weak, false streak of confidence overshadow her utter panic before it shattered into small fragments. The temptation to just not show up at the exam was heightened now more than ever before, but she knew that she was going to have to go through it. At the very least, she had to try. She made a promise to her friend, and she couldn't let him down now, right?

Just as she was thinking that, her phone buzzed in her pocket. She reached for it and turned it on, biting her lower lip as she looked at the time. Only a few hours to go, now. It didn't take her long to notice the notification that she received, however, and she quickly unlocked her phone to open up her messenger app.

**Knows Too Much:**
Hey, Yaochan

**Knows Too Much:**
I know you're freaking out

**Knows Too Much:**
And if you aren't, well, that sucks for me

**Knows Too Much:**
But, if you are, I want you to know that you're going to do fine.

**Knows Too Much:**
Just remember to be confident in yourself, alright?

**Knows Too Much:**
And, when it comes down to it, think on your toes.

Yaoyorozu couldn't help the small smile on her face. Midoriya, as odd as he may have been, was a good person to talk to. Especially in situations like these.
Midoriya sent a smiley face in return before the conversation ended. Yaoyorozu sighed again before standing up. She was still nervous, there was no helping that, but it had died down slightly enough to be bearable. Enough, at least, so that she could actually head to the high school without devolving into an anxiety attack.

Midoriya had sent her a playlist full of calming instrumental music as she climbed into the back of her family's limousine. She inserted her earbuds and let the notes distract her from the weight of what was soon to happen before it overwhelmed her. She gazed at the dozens upon dozens of unique individuals that passed by her windows in a blur, recording each to memory the best she could. The drive didn't take nearly as long as she hoped it would, and she swallowed heavily as she thanked her driver and pulled the door open. She swung her legs out the side and stepped out, taking in a few deep breaths to calm herself before she slammed the car door closed. She didn't look back as she walked under the intimidating archway with the symbol of U.A. placed in the middle, too scared that she'd chicken out and run back to the car.

She clasped her hands behind her back as she entered through the bottom floor, and she was quickly greeted by a heroine with long, dark hair and striking blue eyes. She had on a skin-tight outfit made of some kind of white fabric, which was partly covered by a pitch-black corset-esque suit that wrapped around her thin waist. Her leggings were held up by a belt that hung low across her hips, and a whip was curled at the leather accessory with dark boots to top off the look.

Right. She was called the R-rated hero for a reason.

The hero's lips curled into a seductive smile. "You must be Yaoyorozu Momo," she said, licking her lips. "My name is Midnight. The rest of the recommended students are in a room not too far from here. You're a bit early, though, so there's only a few here at the moment." The woman's smile grew bigger as she looked Yaoyorozu up and down, and, as if satisfied by what she saw, she twirled on her heel and walked down a hallway. Her pace was surprisingly quick, and Yaoyorozu struggled to keep up without jogging. She eventually stopped in front of a large doorway, and she rested her hands on her hips as she turned to the younger female. The older woman winked to her before swinging it wide open, ushering her in before she even recognized what was happening.

Yaoyorozu tensed as she felt a pair of eyes on her. She glanced to her left, and she caught the gaze of a boy with a bright smile on his face. He was immediately by her side, and she blinked in surprise at his immense height. He bowed extremely low, yelling something about it being a pleasure to meet a fellow recommendation. Yaoyorozu bowed back, mostly out of respect.

"I'm quite glad to have been acquainted with you as well," she said. In all honesty, it was the only way she could respond after being shocked with the dramatic entrance.

The large boy grinned at her before his attention became divided, and he patted her on the shoulder before zipping away to a new person entering through the door.

Yaoyorozu shook her head as she tried to ease her racing heart. Glancing around at the rest of the teens in the room, which served as her competition, her eyes caught onto a boy standing by himself. He had a pained look in his eyes that was covered in layers of apathy, and Yaoyorozu might've approached him if he wasn't seeping waves of anger. He turned slightly in her direction, perhaps a nervous tick, and Yaoyorozu flinched as his dual-colored eyes locked onto hers. His hair, which was parted evenly down the middle between white and blood-red, partially hid the marred and burned skin that covered his left eye.

Yaoyorozu's breath caught in her throat as she averted her gaze, not wanting to look at those eyes that seemed so spiteful. So full of hatred. So...
Afraid.

She tried to ignore the fact that they reminded her so much of Midoriya's. The only difference here was that her friend's eyes were filled to the brim with anxiety and deep sorrow. Not only that, but...

Midoriya's radiated pain.

=====

Translation:

Hey. So, I heard from Yaoyorozu today. She said that she isn't quite sure how well she did on the test, but I'm pretty sure she did okay. She'll pass. Of course, this means that now I have to pass the public exams that U.A.'s holding.

I didn't tell her about this. I didn't want to bring her hopes up if I can't make it.

I'm getting a headache now, and I kind of don't want to write any, but I know it helps. It kind of... puts my impossible life into a few words. And it just simplifies it into a couple of symbols.

I guess it helps to wrap my head around it. Not that I hadn't already understood what happened to me, but... it's just easier, somehow? It's not like the burden has changed, really. It's still just as heavy as ever. But I suppose that, now that there's more space for the weight to go to, it's grown to be more bearable. There's more parts of me holding it up than just my head. Or my mind, in this case.

Sometimes I forget, you know. It was never meant to be me. This was never my role in this world. It was supposed to be someone else, someone more capable of fixing this mess, but...

It's like I said. He couldn't take the burden, and so he passed it on to me. In my sleep, no less, when I had no idea what was happening and couldn't resist. I was actually the one who found him, you know. He had been dead for a while; the height he jumped from was pretty high. I wouldn't be surprised if he died on impact.

A part of me hopes he did. He suffered, just like I had, and a quick death would have probably been nice. Even though it wasn't his place to force all his problems onto me, I hope he got to see the afterlife, if there even is one. And I hope that, above all else, he got peace. Who knows? Maybe he actually managed to walk again after Maiko paralyzed him from the waist down.

Of course, Maiko didn't actually do that.

Not directly, at least. Though she was the reason behind it, and she was the one who ordered them to do it.

So I guess it is her fault, isn't it?

I guess it makes sense though, her intentions. Maiko was constantly going on and on and on about "protect this" and "protect that" and "protect those" and "protect these." I can't believe I hadn't seen it coming, really. Of course he wouldn't be the one to protect them. Not when Maiko was the one pulling the strings in the background, not when she was planning for me to save them instead.

But I didn't want it.

God, Seiya, I didn't want your quirk. Why did you have to give it to me? Why me?
"Inko, I've finally figured out his quirk! I don't think you realize how much potential he has."

"You know as well as I do that there's more to him than what he seems. He had these energy levels-

"What? Don't you think that it's suspicious that a kid who can speak Japanese is all the way in Brazil? He didn't even understand Portuguese for crying out loud!"

"So why doesn't he have a name, huh? Why hasn't anyone been looking for him? Why doesn't he have a family, Inko?"

Another bad habit he often performed under stress had to do with his contacts. It had taken months to get the "stress pattern" right, and a year before he finally perfected it, but he managed to find a way to activate the heat vision at will. Turning it on and off would usually leave him with a headache, but it was fascinating and he loved it. Most of all, however, it distracted him.

Which was exactly what he did as he waited for the minutes to pass. He knew he should get some rest, or even take some medication to help him sleep, but he couldn't bring himself to do it. His nervousness ebbed in his stomach, and he twisted underneath his many covers as he tried to find a comfortable spot. The U.A. entrance exams were the next day (or today, seeing as it was past midnight) and Midoriya was terrified for many, many reasons.

His grip on the fluffy blankets increased tenfold as he realized what would happen if he failed the exam. What he'd lose. What the world would lose.

He pressed his lips into a thin line as he pushed the covers off of him, standing on unsteady feet. He was blind in the darkness, but he had long since memorized his room for it to be too much of a hindrance. It didn't take long for him to find his phone, and he turned it on without too much thought. He had to blink several times as the furious glow made his eyes water, but he wiped the tears away and unlocked it with one hand. It took him a second to remember where the messenger app was—yes, he was that tired—and he pressed on his most recent chat.

**Problem Child #2:**
Hey, so.

**Problem Child #2:**
I know you're not up.

**Problem Child #2:**
But I kind of need help calming down.

**Problem Child #2:**
So when you do wake up, can we talk please?

He was about to abandon his phone when it buzzed in his hand, and he felt a jolt of surprise go through him.

**Flippy-Flipper:**
On the contrary, I am up?
What do you need, Izuku?

Flippy-Flipper:  
I can come over if you'd like.

Problem Child #2:  
I don't think that's necessary.

Flippy-Flipper:  
I think it is necessary - Aika

Flippy-Flipper:  
She's right, you know.

Problem Child #2:  
I'd rather you not, Chikara-sensei.

Flippy-Flipper:  
You don't have to use the sensei, you know, right?

Problem Child #2:  
Yes.

Flippy-Flipper:  
Okay... so what's the problem?

Flippy-Flipper:  
Oh right, it's the night of the U.A. exams, right?

Flippy-Flipper:  
Kid, you're going to be fine. Don't worry about it, really.

Midoriya licked his lips nervously. It wasn't exactly helping his nerves at all.

Flippy-Flipper:  
If it makes it any easier, you should know that you can still get into the Hero Course even if you don't do well on the entrance exam.

Flippy-Flipper:  
Those that look to have potential are placed in General Education. If you do well in a few other events, I've heard that they can move you up into the Hero Course.

Flippy-Flipper:  
Heck, I have a friend who did that.
Flippy-Flipper:
Well, not friend. More like colleague. Or acquaintance.

Problem Child #2:
Who???

Flippy-Flipper:
Just some guy with a quirk that wasn't suited for the entrance exams. I used to work in the police force for a couple years, and I met up with him on a case.

He had this awesome quirk that could erase other people's quirks as long as he could look at them. He was an amazing guy, through and through. He was extremely dedicated to the hero job.

Midoriya was pretty sure he was going to have a heart attack.

Flippy-Flipper:
Though, I must say, he had the worst dry eye problem I have seen to date. I don't think he ever got sleep, either.

Flippy-Flipper:
Promise you won't be like that when you become a hero?

Midoriya felt something warm tug at his chest.

Problem Child #2:
Are you, by chance, talking about Eraserhead?

He knew that he was ignoring the question, but that was alright. It could be worse.

Flippy-Flipper:
...

Flippy-Flipper:
Figures you'd know one of the most secretive heroes to date.
Problem Child #2:
You know he works at U.A. now, right?

Flippy-Flipper:
Chikara.exe has stopped working.

Flippy-Flipper:
HOW DO YOU EVEN KNOW ALL OF THIS STUFF??????

Problem Child #2:
Hm... Can't say.

Problem Child #2:
Thanks though, that helped a little bit.

Flippy-Flipper:
Of course. I hope you don't mind if I walk you to the high school?

Problem Child #2:
Sure, that's fine.

The conversation was quickly dropped after that. Midoriya sighed again before curling up into bed, pulling the covers high over his face.

He got a few hours of sleep that night.

"You're going to be fine," Hiroji reassured as he walked beside Midoriya. As for him, he was halfway between puking and smiling excitedly at the man.

Knowing him, he was probably going to do both.

Hiroji showed him a few cat videos to make him feel better as they walked toward their destination. They were already starting to see crowds of students around Midoriya's age walking in the same direction, which alerted him that they were getting reasonably close. They still had a ways to go, and with their current pace, he knew they were going to be pretty early.

As time wore on, Midoriya became more nervous. Eventually, talking seemed too hard to do, and conversation fell flat. Hiroji's presence was still comforting, though, which Midoriya was thankful for.

Midoriya fidgeted with the scarf on his shoulders, poking at the blob inside to make sure she was still there. She moved under his fingertips, which was a comforting (but also gross) thought. His stomach reeled slightly, though it wasn't aching in hunger, at the very least. He ate just enough to cover him, but not enough that he'd end up throwing up from nervousness. Clasping his hands in front of him, he bit his lower lip as he tried to think of what to say if he made it into U.A. Yaoyorozu would probably be happy to see him, though he had no idea how to show that he was happy as well. A simple hug probably wouldn't cut it.

Yaoyorozu blinked as she opened the box. It was sweets. And baked goods. "I love you," she blurted out. "I am adopting you and we will be family forever and you can't escape me."

... Maybe he could bake her cookies? Yeah, that sounded like a good idea. Yeah. He could do that.
Midoriya didn't even notice it when Hiroji stopped, and the man had to grab him by the arm to keep him from walking further.

"We're here, Izuku," the man explained as Midoriya flailed slightly.

Midoriya blinked and looked up to the entrance of the school, paling at the sight of the building. "Oh," he said lamely. "We are."

Hiroji's mouth quirked up into a smile as he shook his head fondly. "Well, you're around ten minutes early, but don't slack off and be late. I don't think they take those kinds of people kindly. And remember to not freak out, okay? You'll do great."

Midoriya nodded mindlessly, letting his words wash over him. The man pulled him into a tight hug, tucking him underneath his chin and rubbing his back. They stayed like that for a few seconds before Hiroji let go. Midoriya didn't really want him to, but he knew that it would be better for him; that, and if he could have what he wanted, he would make it so that the man would keep him there until the exams were over and he couldn't participate.

Midoriya nodded to him and sent him a feeble wave as he went underneath the archway, counting his breaths as he walked forward. Hopefully he wouldn't have to talk to anyone else in the exam—that would be disastrous. Wait, what if that was part of the exam? Oh god, part of being a hero was the ability to talk down people from panicking. But panicking was all he did. What was he supposed to do no—

Something bumped into him, hard, and he stumbled. He managed to keep himself from falling, thankfully, but only just barely.

"Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry!"

He turned, wide-eyed, to see a girl around his height blubbering in embarrassment. "I totally wasn't watching where I was going, and I know that was really stupid of me, but I'm a little nervous and common sense has evaded me like the last of my brain cells."

Midoriya blinked as the brown-haired girl continued to blabber on, her cheeks flushed a slight pink. "Um," Midoriya said intelligently, "you're fine. Really. I do worse things all the time. I'm klutz. Wait, no, I'm a klutz. Klutz isn't my name, I swear. Well, sometimes I'm a klutz. Not always. It usually only happens when I'm exhausted. Or maybe that's just something that everyone does when they're tired? I don't know." At seeing the girl's expression, he clammed up. "S-sorry. I'm just going to leave now."

"Oh, okay! It was nice meeting you! Love your hair, by the way!"

Midoriya hunched his shoulders as his ears turned pink. He was wondering if she even realized he was a guy. Maybe that was the reason she looked so surprised when he spoke? It wasn't like he looked particularly feminine, but his hair and clothing choice sometimes threw people off. (Or maybe it was the baby blue and mint green scarf? He didn't know. Perhaps it was a combination.)

He still stood by the fact that turtlenecks weren't female clothing. Guys could wear them too, dang it.

He let out a feeble "Thanks" to the girl before fleeing into the room. He found a seat and slipped into it, trying to ignore the looks he got from other people. He waited impatiently for the minutes to tick by, and finally the doors closed as a hero with blonde hair gelled up took the stage.
Present Mic.

The man's quirk, which allowed him to increase the volume of his voice, deeply interested Midoriya. He partly wondered if the man had resistance to his quirk, which kept him from going deaf, or if he had to have hearing aids. Or, perhaps, he knew someone that had a quirk that allowed him to regain use of his hearing (if he even lost it in the first place?)

He was snapped out of his thoughts as Present Mic started talking about the exam. He explained that it was a point-based exam—points were earned by defeating robots. There were three kinds, and you earned points depending on their level of difficulty. The weakest gave you one point, the second gave you two, and the strongest gave you three. Simple as can be.

And then a boy stood up. He had dark blue hair and glasses, along with a broad build. He was kind of intimidating, to be honest. If Midoriya wasn't so frazzled, he might have paid a little more attention to exactly what he was saying. The most he got was something about there being four robots on U.A.'s website instead of three.

Present Mic laughed, though he looked a little uncomfortable. "Yes, there is one more robot. It's worth zero points—meant to be a distraction more than anything else. You'd best run away from it than try to fight it!"

Something about that... didn't seem right. Midoriya narrowed his eyes. U.A. was known for not wasting any of their resources; if they added a robot that meant nothing, than there was a reason for it.

Huh.

"Remember that there's the written portion of the exam after the practical! So, if you decide to break a few bones, get ready to have to deal with the consequences and sit through it in pain!"

He saw several faces pale. "B-break a few bones?" the boy beside him muttered shakily.

Midoriya shook off his worry as he clenched his fists in his lap. He waited, still, until Present Mic exclaimed for them to take their places in the specific field they were assigned to. Midoriya stood up with everyone else, and he waited patiently to climb into the bus that would take him to that sector.

He sat near the front, and he tried not to pay attention to the temperamental teen with ashy-blonde hair and red eyes. He was cussing angrily under his breath, brow furrowed as small explosions were formed in his palms.

... Was that Bakugo Katsuki?

Was that his old neighbor?

How had he not connected the dots sooner? Of course his neighbor was Bakugo. They looked alike. Explosions would make sense with his personality and the circumstances.

But he didn't know what Bakugo's quirk was. He knew that he had some kind of heat-related one, but that was the extent of his knowledge. He had no way of realizing that the boy he watched from his window and Bakugo Katsuki were the same person.

He'd have to keep an eye on the explosive male and make sure that he didn't remember him. Not that it was likely that he would, but there was always a chance.

He jolted as the bus came to a stop, and everyone filed out to step in front of the city. He winced as
he was jostled around slightly, though he ignored the crawling of his skin. He noticed the girl with the brown bobbed hair, and he was half-tempted to thank her. If he wasn't so sure he'd throw up the moment he opened his mouth, he might.

Then, suddenly, without warning, Present Mic's voice came through the speakers.

"START!"

Everyone stopped and stared.

"What? Life doesn't have countdowns, kids!"

Wait, what? He understood, sure, and it was good lesson to learn, but testing people on their ability to react quickly in situations without prior practice was asking a little much. Of course, maybe this was their way of weeding out the "weak," if anyone here was really even weak, but really—

Midoriya blinked and, ignoring his confusion and shock, sprinted forward. He wasn't the only one who recovered quickly. In fact, Bakugo and the boy with the blue hair and broad shoulders—wait, was that Iida Tenya?—soon surpassed him. He looked at the direction they both took, and broke off from them. It would be much easier to go into a quieter area where he wouldn't have to compete for his points.

Just as he turned a corner, he was met with a two-pointer whose guns immediately raised to meet him. He cursed under his breath, ducking into a roll to dodge the bright blast that was flung toward him. The impact on his shoulder was dulled with the movement, but it still smarted and stung. He didn't have much of an idea what to do. He had brainstormed about what would happen when he was greeted with the robots, but he still had no clue as to how to defeat them. All in all, the easiest thing he could do was to... well, that was the easiest thing now, but there was no telling how difficult it would be later.

He winced as the concrete and small pieces of gravel dug into his hands, and he pushed himself up to his feet. After a moment of contemplation—because, really, what he was about to do was insane—he ran toward the machine as it slowly turned toward him. He slanted backward into a slide, yet another shot flying over his head. His slide put him underneath the machine, and Midoriya was greeted with a large tile on the machine's belly. Wracking his brain, he pulled the metal off to be greeted with wires and metal. He pursed his lips when the robot started to move forward, which would not be good for him. At all.

He pressed a few fingers into the inside of the lip of the cavern, watching as chains the same color as the metal burst forth. Controlling the individual chains was a pain and often left him exhausted, so he aimed them all at the wires and hoped for the best. Immediately, the robot stopped as sparks flew, and he rolled out from underneath the machine. He looked back to see that it shut down, its "eyes" darker without the light behind them.

Within anywhere from a few minutes to an hour, the chains would meld back into the metal on their own. This meant that no evidence of his quirk would be left behind, which was a risky move for him to take, especially if they thought that he brought an unregistered item to the exam, but he also didn't want to reveal all of his cards yet. And, perhaps, it would raise suspicion against him, but he'd deal with it when he got there.

Of course, there was also the chance that if he continued to use this tactic, he'd end up electrocuting himself, but details, right?

He shook his head and continued down the street he was taking, pulling his scarf tighter around
himself. If worse came to worst, Juni could always gain someone's attention. Yeah. Because slugs were great at that and all.

He remembered to count his breaths as he ran, not wanting to waste his energy and grow too tired. His feet ached against the cement as he continued to jog, and he looked from side to side in something in a sort of desperation. He could hear the sounds of explosions to his right, so he took a turn in the opposite direction. He found a one-pointer this time, in the middle of the street, and he managed to get under it and back out quicker than the last. Whether that was because the robot was weaker or because of him, that had yet to be determined. He saw another two-pointer, and then a three-pointer (which was incredibly difficult to get under). It didn't take long for him to get into a rhythm, though, and he strained his ears for the sound of cogs whirring or the clanking movements of the metal. There was barely a minute left when he heard it.

A scream. A blood-curdling, heartbroken scream that echoed through every corner of the field. Midoriya froze and turned to where he thought the source came from, eyes wide. A sinking feeling in his gut overpowered his sources, and something akin to terror shot through him. His left hand grew numb, and he failed to notice that the robot not far away from him was remotely shut down.

Before he could sort his thoughts, he felt his legs push him forward. He ran toward the origin of the shriek, a drop of cold sweat rolling down the back of his neck and disappearing into the folds of his scarf. His feet pounded against the concrete, and he moved past several robots that he knew hadn't been taken out by force. He passed street after street after street, and nearly skipped one until he noticed the crowd of onlookers. He skidded to a halt and burst forward, shouldering through the participants of the exam to get a look at the scene. There was a hero there, one that he recognized as Recovery Girl, an elderly one with a white coat and gray hair. She had deep wrinkles and eyes full of pain as she looked over—

Midoriya's breath caught in his throat. There was a bob of brown hair curled around a pale face, and the cheeks that he noticed had been pink were now pallid.

Tears sprung in his eyes as he noticed the pool of blood around her body and her malformed legs. He looked up to see the zero-pointer hovering dangerously above. The damn robot was bigger than any of the buildings around it, and it too was shut down. Midoriya clenched the front of his shirt tightly, feeling his heart shrivel up as Recovery Girl attempted to do CPR on the girl whose body was limp. Her hand was outstretched, to the crowd, as if asking for help.

Uraraka Ochako had died at 4:27 pm.

=++++=++++=

Daizō couldn't find Seiya anywhere.

"Maiko," he said, "I don't know where he is. Can you help me find him?"

The woman blinked her hazel eyes. "Of course I'll help you."

And they found him. Or, Daizō found him. Maiko was on the other side of the block.

He screamed at his pale face, which was partly hidden with his brown hair matted with blood. Red covered him head to toe, and his legs were bent at an odd angle. His arms were twisted in an unnatural manner, his fingers crooked.

Daizō let out a guttural sob as he grabbed Seiya's corpse by the front of his shirt. "Seiya, no, please no," he cried. His shoulders shook as the blood, which had partly dried in some places, soaked his
hands. He fell to his knees, and he ducked his head as his tears mixed with the dark red liquid. He thought about the fingers carding through his hair, he thought about the gentle hugs and the sleepovers they had. He thought about the icy blue eyes and crooked smile and sharp chin.

He cried. And he cried. And he cried.

And the sea of people rose and fell, rose and fell, and Seiya fell, fell, fell.

===== 

Uraraka Ochako lived at 4:27 pm.

It was thanks to the boy she bumped into before the exam started, the one with the long-ish green hair and freckles. Trapped underneath a slab of concrete, with no one willing to help her, she was fully convinced that she was going to get crushed under the zero-pointer.

And then he came, sprinting down the street with a purpose that she didn't know a person could have. He ran through and past the crowd, shoving people out of the way in the process, before skidding to a stop in front of her. He struggled to push the piece off her back, but after a few moments of grappling, he managed to push it over her. He then picked her up firefighter style and ran with her in his arms. His size led her to believe that he wasn't capable of such action, but he proved her wrong in that moment.

"Oi!" he exclaimed, and she was surprised by the amount of anger in his voice. "Exploding kid! Instead of rolling your eyes and acting like an asshole, why don't you actually beat the shit out of the goddamn robot!?"

Cussing didn't really suit him, but holy crap did it work. The boy with the ashy-blonde hair, who was grumbling about no one being able to help themselves, cussed angrily at him before flying up with his explosions, obliterating the head of the robot into a mess of wires and stray pieces of shrapnel. He used his explosions to balance himself as he fell back to the ground, though Uraraka noticed the way he winced when he landed, immediately massaging his hands.

The boy with the green hair sighed before placing Uraraka down onto her feet. She looked incredulously into his eyes when she noticed a pain in them that wasn't there before. Maybe because he thought she died or something?

"Thanks for saving me," she said, rubbing the back of her head. "I guess I owe you twice now, right?"

He blinked before sighing, his shoulders sinking with too much weight for the situation at hand. "If you can keep yourself safe, Uraraka, that's enough payment for me."

Something about that phrasing sounded wrong, but she nodded anyway for the sake of being polite.

=====

Later, she'd realize that he couldn't have known her name. She never told it to him.

=====

**Quirk — Recipience:** The ability to receive quirks with the original owner's full consent; can GIVE quirks received, but only back to their original owner.

**Warning:** Consent can still be achieved forcefully through torture, as seen by example three.
Quirks Received:

#1: (XXX, Seiya): ???
#2: (XXX, Maiko): Chain Conjuring—with skin contact, can summon chains; also controls their movements until contact is relinquished
#3: (XXX, XXX): ???

*Note: One quirk that had been received was a vaulting-type quirk from the user's cat. This quirk was given back to its owner after an incident with the family.

The problem with his quirk is that no one wanted to get rid of a piece of themselves. Even if they were on their deathbed, almost no one was completely prepared to give up something that had meant so much to them.

Even though it was a problem, however, he also found it relieving. It meant that he could never become his grandfather. But it also meant that he was going to have to work extra hard to pick up the slack that his quirk developed.

And a part of him was terrified that he'd never be able to defeat All for One because of it.

Once upon a time, there was a woman with blonde hair and brown eyes.

"Seiya has given Daizō his quirk," said she. "Daizō now has the power to stop you." Maiko smiled. "But don't worry. I'll keep him from doing anything rash against you."

She turned to the man by her side. "Right, All for One?"

Translation:

Sometimes, I still have nightmares about you.

You'll smile at me, with blood coating your teeth and slipping from your lips.

"It was worth it," you'll rasp.

Was it worth it, though? Was it worth betraying the entire revolution to All for One? Was it worth watching All for One's nomus slaughter our people? Was it worth forcing me to watch it all? Was it worth the screams of agony, the blood and snapping of bones?

You betrayed the rebellion twice. You sold out our location, forcing us to move to a weaker spot. Half of our people were killed. Seiya was tortured and forced into a wheelchair. I was taken, and for a year I was stuck in All for One's hands, suffering the days away until you finally saved me. I came "home" to see that the revolution was a fraction that it once was. I saw that Seiya, your only hope to prevent this from ever happening, was paralyzed from the waist down and wanted nothing more to end it all. I saw crying children and hopes dashed and starving people.

And then you did it again. A second time. And you made it public, for everyone to know. And when all was said and done, when everything you did was at its closing point, when the revolution was replaced by rotting corpses, you stepped up to All for One.
"You can't kill Daizō," you said. "You can't kill him." Your reasoning?

Because I was going to stop him. Because I was going to stop All for One.

All for One stabbed you through the abdomen himself. Took joy in watching you die.

And yet, still, you'll smile at me and say, "It was worth it."

You pretended to be a part of the rebellion. You pretended to be a part of the council. You pretended to be a villain. You pretended to be a spy for All for One.

You were none of those things.

You were my aunt. You were my mother's twin. And, above everything else, the only thing you wanted from the world was for me to go back. Not Seiya, no. Me. It had to be me. Because you thought that it had to be done right, because you had no faith in Seiya.

And so you caused the deaths of thousands. You tortured millions.

All so I could be the time traveler you wanted.

So, Maiko.

Was it worth it?
The Receding Blaze

Chapter Summary

It's the calm before the storm, but it doesn't seem like it at first glance.

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry if anything seems a little rushed. This chapter is super, super long. In fact, it's over seventeen thousand words, which is the longest chapter I've ever written in my life. Seriously, the first chapter was only around ten thousand, what the heck???

Quirk — Recipience: The ability to receive quirks with the original owner's full consent; can GIVE quirks received, but only back to their original owner.

Warning: Consent can still be achieved forcefully through torture, as seen by example three.

Quirks Received:

#1: (XXX, Seiya): Time Manipulation—can manipulate time at will on both objects and self; stress can cause it to activate; will sometimes replace dreams with visions
#2: (XXX, Maiko): Chain Conjuring—with skin contact, can summon chains; also controls their movements until contact is relinquished
#3: (XXX, XXX): ???

*Note: One quirk that had been received was a vaulting-type quirk from the user's cat. This quirk was given back to its owner after an incident with the family.

===== If anyone had to ask, Aizawa Shota was tired as hell. He always despised the time of the new year when he was forced to dedicate his sleeping hours to looking through file upon file upon file of applicants. At the moment, he didn't have much to look at. There was the two recommendation students' files he kept for himself a few weeks back, and he was definitely looking forward to them in his class. They had the potential to be great heroes with a little polishing, and that was fine by him. Todoroki Shouto and Yaoyorozu Momo. Both were in excellent shape physically, and the two had quirks that would come in handy in the hero business. He was a little worried by Todoroki's behavior—being Endeavor's son, he had been expecting a brash, maybe prideful attitude. Aloofness and cold, but cautious, was what he was greeted with. It was, no doubt, a better alternative since he didn't have to deal with any long monologues founded on ego alone, but it still concerned him slightly. Yaoyorozu was intelligent, and though she wasn't very confident in her abilities, she wasn't shy and was respectful of other people's boundaries. She would be a pleasant addition to his classroom.
As for a few he was on the fence about, there was a guy and a girl—Ashido Mina and Tokoyami Fumikage. Both also showed signs of heroism; Ashido saved quite a few amateurs from three-pointers with her acid quirk. Tokoyami, with his sentient shadow quirk, managed to crush whole groups of robots with what he called Dark Shadow. Ashido seemed a tad too cheerful for his liking, but that could be toned down in a few months under his teaching.

There was also Kirishima Eijiro. He got in second place in the exams, and he had almost an equal amount of villain and hero points. He had just a little more of the former than the latter, but his balanced personality would serve well.

There was one that he knew he should add to his class, but really didn't want to. This was otherwise known as Bakugo Katsuki. The kid was strong, powerful, and didn't need to be reassured every other step that things were going to be okay and that he could be a hero. On the flip side, the kid was strong, powerful, and too damn confident in himself and he was going to give Aizawa hives from the amount of pride that seeped from his pores.

Maybe he could get away with shoving the kid into Vlad's class. That wouldn't be too hard, right?

He was about to take a ten minute nap afterward when Yamada Hizashi, or Present Mic, jumped into his face. "Shouta, Shouta, you have to see this!"

"What." Of course the buffoon would try to show him something with his loud, obnoxious voice the minute he tried to get some relief from the universe. Of course.

"So, remember the zero-pointer that nearly killed that participant?"

"Wish it did," he muttered, though Yamada ignored him.

"Well, there's this kid there—"

"Bakugo Katsuki, I know. I've already seen his profile."

Yamada's face brightened. "Oh, so you have seen it! Well then, you should know that that's not the the kid I'm looking at."

Aizawa glanced at him with one eye opened. "And which one would you be alluding to?"

Yamada grinned at him. "Well, first off, Uraraka Ochako—the victim in this case, if you can even call it that. Her quirk is well suited for being a rescue hero; anything she touches will have its gravity negated. I think you should look at her to put in your class."

"I'm not doing this one," he said bluntly.

"Eh? Why not?" Yamada whined.

Aizawa sighed and opened the file, pointing angrily at one of the requirements which was left blank. "It doesn't have a word about his quirk in here. If he couldn't put the time to name his quirk and describe it in a sentence or more, I'm not going to waste my time on him."

Something in Yamada's eyes shifted. "Then maybe you should take a look at the video recordings
we captured," he said. Aizawa noted the serious undertone to his voice. "I honestly think the kid has potential. There might have been a reason he didn't explain his quirk."

Aizawa watched as Yamada smiled and then bounded away to leave to his own classroom. He sighed and rubbed his face tiredly, irritated beyond relief. He hated it when the man was so cryptic.

He placed the folder off to the side. He would get to it later. Or tomorrow. Or never. Really, it depended on how much his curiosity got to him in two in the morning.

===== At two in the morning, six days later, Aizawa grumbled angrily to himself before snatching the folder off his counter and grabbing his old laptop. He was supposed to go out on an assignment tonight, but it turned out that some newbie let their status slip; now, he was dealing the consequences of the villain group slipping away, again, and he had nothing to do while the police force tried to find out where they could have gone. He had asked to help out, explaining that he wasn't inept when is came down to chasing criminal organizations, but guess what they police said?

No.

Goddammit. Where was that one officer—what was his name again?—when you needed him? The man didn't underestimate him and always let him do as he pleased. He even gave him coffee every time they met up.

Aizawa sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose before he pulled up the recordings from the entrance exam. It said that Midoriya Izuku—the boy Yamada was determined to put in his classroom—was in field C. Great. Now, if only he could find the kid...

Ah. There.

Aizawa watched with barely contained disinterest as the kid slipped underneath the robots to do...something. According to the report, the robots' wires were broken and their innards shattered, but they didn't know how. Which was both a little concerning and, much to Aizawa's distaste, it piqued his curiosity. He watched as the kid continued down the street, defeating seven robots with the same tactic. Aizawa didn't really see the point in continuing the video when the kid stood.

And he just froze. For a second, his limbs locked and his determined expression flashed blank before it morphed into something entirely different. It was barely discernible in the camera's footage, but Aizawa leaned close to catch the kid's countenance, which was one of pain and heartache. He glanced up at the time counter in the corner, and he narrowed his eyes. That was... approximately thirty-seven seconds before he reached Uraraka. Before she almost got crushed.

... Shit. Yamada might have been on to something.

Aizawa rewound the video, watching his expression over and over again. Seeing the haunted look just screamed wrong to him. He had seen that look on older heroes wasting away, he had seen it on the faces of loved ones who watched the people they cared about die, he had seen it on criminals who didn't know better. But never a teenager. A teenager should not have that facial expression.

Something deep inside him twisted uncomfortably. He pulled up a fresh tab on his computer and pressed on his Gmail account. Ignoring the emails that he knew were important and yet he refused to open, he created a fresh one and sent it to an acquaintance he hadn't seen in a long, long time.

=====
Hiroji blinked in surprise as he stared at his phone. From the corner of his eye, he watched as Midoriya and Aika performed a few back flips in perfect sync, and he suppressed the urge to stare at Midoriya.

Hiroji Chikara,

I know it's been a while. It's Eraserhead. I wanted to ask you for your help. There's this kid, Midoriya Izuku, who participated in the U.A. entrance exam, and three fourths of the way through he looked like someone died. I need your expertise.

Aizawa Shouta


Hey Aizawa,

It has been a while, hasn't it? Well, I'm going to get straight to the point because I know you don't care for long emails. Midoriya is my student at my job—I work in a gymnastics program, by the way—so I understand your concern. Midoriya is... an interesting character? He's a genius, and he knows things that he probably shouldn't. I'm not saying this to dissuade you, because he's great. He has a heart of gold, and he's grossly intelligent; he might just be your favorite student.

However, I am going to be completely honest with you. Detaching myself from the situation and pretending I'm not close to Midoriya, I will tell you that, if you decide to teach him, he will be difficult. I'm not sure myself of his situation, but he suffers from trauma. The intense kind. It's even worse than from the time Aika was living with her mother. I've managed to ease some of it these past few years, but if you're not willing to take up the challenge to teach him, I would let another teacher take care of it.

He told me about his quirk; I think I remember him saying that he hadn't filled that part out in his file. I would tell you about it, but I honestly think there's more to it than he led me to believe. I dunno. He kind of acted like he hated his quirk, like it wasn't something he deserved or something.

If he was honest about his quirk, though, I will tell you that it's suitable for hero-ing. It's effective, and great for both immobilizing the enemy and for rescue operations if using correctly.

Tell me if you want to teach him, though. I can give you a list of things to be wary about.

Hiroji Chikara

Satisfied with the email, he sent it and hid his phone as Aika rushed up to him, Midoriya closely following behind. "Dad, Dad, tell Midoriya that he did great on his exam, please, his worrying is killing me."

Hiroji smiled and ran a hand through both of their hair. "You guys should focus less on freaking out and more on completing the uneven bars choreography. How else are you going to beat me?" he teased.

Aika huffed. "Daddy, please, I can wipe the floor with you already."
Hiroji grinned. "You bet?"

=====

Sometimes, the two forgot that Hiroji was still a professional gymnast.

=====

Aizawa stared at his email. And then he groaned and slammed his forehead against the desk.

"Lord save me," he muttered harshly to himself.

Fuck it, Midoriya was going on his roster. Screw sleep, it was for the weak anyway.

=====

Midoriya was paranoid when the letter from U.A. arrived. He holed himself in his living room, Juni by his side, and just stared at the envelope for hours. Maybe he could open it with his eyes or something.

He flinched when his phone buzzed beside him, and he turned it on after a moment of hesitation. Hiroji texted him, asking if they could call one another. Midoriya sighed before complying.

"Hey. Stop panicking."

"How do you even know I'm panicking?"

"You say this like I haven't known you for the past four years."

"I suddenly understand the universe."

"Good. Now open the letter."

"How do you even know that Yuuei sent a letter?"

"That's a good question that I refuse to answer. Now open it."

Midoriya sighed as he moved the phone so it was trapped between his shoulder and ear. "I'm just going to hope that you didn't do anything illegal."

"Can't promise you anything, but if the police come to your house, don't mention me, all right?"

Midoriya paused and narrowed his eyes. "Usually I would wave this off as a joke, but I'm actually worried for you, Chikara-sensei."

Hiroji laughed. "Just open the letter."

Midoriya nodded, though he mentally slapped himself when he remembered that Hiroji couldn't see it. With cold fingers, he opened the seal carefully on the letter. He was expecting a letter, but instead he pulled out a small black disk. He set it down onto the coffee table, and he was about to ask Hiroji what the heck it was meant to be for when a huge hologram popped out. He barely suppressed a scream as he yelped.

"I am here!"

Midoriya blinked. Was that... All Might?
"Midoriya Izuku, you scored twenty-seven points in the exam! Unfortunately, this isn't enough to carry you into Yuuei's hero course." Midoriya felt his stomach drop down to his feet. Bile rose to his throat.

"That is, if those were the only points rewarded!" What. "Hero points were also rewarded for helping another participant." A picture of the girl with brown bobbed hair and eyes popped up on the hologram. "You received fourteen more points for helping Uraraka Ochako." All Might's smile brightened. "You passed with forty-one points! Welcome to your hero academia!"

Midoriya stared for a second as the hologram turned off. He felt his shoulders shake slightly.

"Izuku?" Hiroji sounded worried as Midoriya's sobs carried over the line.

"I made it," he said with a watery laugh. "I made it."

And they celebrated.

=====

According to the letter, he placed fourth in the written portion of the exam. Out of the ninety-two problems, he only missed five. Midoriya was glad that he spent several years taking up extra online courses so he was ahead. It made it so much easier instead of cramming all of it in the last few months.

As Aika and Hiroji waved goodbye to him, he smiled lightly and bid them goodnight. They had a nice night of cake and cookies and too many sweets that left his stomach aching as he laughed. It was worth it though, and he was too happy from passing to care.

He let out a happy sigh as he crawled into bed, and he closed his eyes to go to sleep. And, of course, the one night he wanted sleep was the night he couldn't get some.

A side effect of Seiya's quirk was visions—it overrode his sleep so he wasn't technically sleeping any longer, though, from an external viewpoint, it seemed that way. If he slept while stressed, he would usually get dreamed of the future that could (not that it was guaranteed to) happen. If he was emotional, he would get warped into a scene from the past.

So, of course, he was emotional. And so, of course, he got warped to the past. Again.

Midoriya sighed as he came face-to-face with dark, run-down buildings and decrepit roads. He walked over to an empty bench, sitting down with a grunt. He watched as small leaves flew across the cement and nearby his feet.

"So we meet again."

Midoriya looked up to see a man with a lithe figure and gentle eyes. "So we do," he replied. After a moment of silence, he patted the space next to him. The older man took his spot next to Midoriya, and they sat together, watching the leaves.

"Did you get in?" the man asked.

Midoriya felt a small smile crawl up his face. "Yeah," he muttered quietly. "I did."

The man nodded. "Good." He elbowed Midoriya gently. "Don't worry, I know you can do it."

Midoriya hummed. "I'm getting there." His small smile faded. "But it's getting extremely close now. I
have no idea how much time I have left before the day comes."

The man sighed. "When All for One comes?"

Midoriya nodded sullenly. "When All for One comes."

The other shook his head in pity. "I wish you didn't have to face him."

"He's weak now, though," Midoriya pointed out.

"Yes, but for how long?" the man countered.

Midoriya remained silent.

The man let out another sigh. "All for One is powerful. Even if he's weak now, he'll regain his strength eventually. You know this from experience after he managed to rebuild himself stronger than ever before."

"So I'll take him down for good," Midoriya said.

The man shrugged. "You can do that. Or," he paused, "you can let someone else do it for you."

"Who?" Midoriya asked. "Who would even try to take All for One now?"

"The present user of One for All, of course," the man replied.

Midoriya wracked his brain before he remembered. "All Might."

The man nodded. "All Might," he echoed.

Midoriya sighed. "I'd like to let him do it, but he died in the rematch against All for One. There's no way that I'm just going to leave it to him."

The man remained quiet for a moment before he spoke up. "You simply being here has changed so much." He glanced to Midoriya. "So, think about it this way. Your job is to make sure that All Might and Class 1-A survive. Leave the taking down of All for One to Time and her changes."

Midoriya watched as a brown leaf flew up, disappearing into the smog. "I want to listen to you, but getting help from a dead person is a dangerous idea."

The man smiled. "Really? I think Death has made me more..." His smile gained a sharp glint as he started to fade away. "Experienced."

And the dream warped out of existence.

=====

Once upon a time, there was a boy named Daizō. "Maiko?" asked he. "Maiko, what is Seiya supposed to do?"

A woman with blonde hair and hazel eyes smiled. "Prevent U.A.'s Judgement Day, of course!"

"U.A.'s Judgement Day?" asked Daizō.

Maiko's smile disappeared. "Well, that was when all of U.A. was slaughtered. It started with the death of the man with lies in his smile and then Class 1-A. Seiya's meant to go back in time and
prevent All for One from killing the class, since we believe that that incited everything else to happen. That's how All for One took over."

"Oh, joy!" said Daizō. "Seiya's gonna save the day. But what am I supposed to do, Maiko?"

And Maiko grinned.

=====

**Translation:**

_Sometimes my priorities get all mixed up. I forget that I'm the new Seiya, and I'm supposed to be protecting everyone, not taking down All for One._

_But yeah, that was why the council kept me around. Because, if Seiya failed, they wanted to use me to kill off All for One. Present (Future?) All for One, that was._

_I guess I still have to figure out which one I'm going to do. Am I going to protect the class, or am I going to defeat All for One?_ 

_I'm not sure. And I don't have much time left to figure it out._

=====

Daizō was six and was playing with Seiya. The older boy and him had already tired out Hide and Seek, I Spy, and Simon Says. Now, they were simply dancing. Daizō giggled as Seiya twirled him around.

And they continued dancing over and over again, until even Daizō's clumsy feet could get the moves right. They laughed, they smiled, and then their feet hurt so bad that they had to plop on Seiya's bed to relieve the pain. Seiya's long legs took up most of the bed, but Daizō liked them. They were long and gangly and he reminded him of a gazelle, long and fast but sleek and nervous. Seiya was always comparing Daizō to a parrot, always repeating what was told to him exactly how it sounded.

"I'm a fluffy parrot," Daizō countered. "I'm a soft one with bright colors."

And Seiya laughed but nodded. "Of course you are."

They giggled and shared stories about what happened to them the other day, though it was the same thing that happened every other day. Repeating them was the only thing they could do for entertainment nowadays, however. Daizō's eyes felt heavy, and he closed them after a moment of silence. Seiya chuckled, saying something about a cat nap before they both dozed off.

And then, Daizō felt it. It was a rumble, deep in the heart of the building the were in. Daizō and Seiya shot up, and Seiya paled considerably.

"Stay here," he ordered, and he shoved a squirming Daizō back onto the small bed. The teen ran over to the door, and he turned back for a second. "Don't make a sound, and be careful." His expression was serious, his eyes dark and heavy before he slammed the door behind him. Daizō felt fear grip him as the building shook, and he stumbled slightly.

He looked around the small room, trying to find a place to hide. His eyes locked on the closet, and he flung those thin doors open before cramming himself inside. Even as tiny as he was, he could barely fit himself inside. He pressed his hand against his mouth, trying to keep himself from breathing too loudly. As the seconds wore by, he noticed how the loud trembles and explosions seemed to grow
shorter and shorter until a thick silence fell.

Daizō continued to remain silent. He breathed lightly, afraid that a single sound would alert anyone to his location. A part of him wondered what happened to Seiya and if he was alright.

And then he heard the door creak open. He tensed, his body growing rigid and his eyes widening. The hand on his mouth clenched tighter. He held his breath.

Footsteps. They were loud. He watched as two feet-shaped shadows moved underneath the crack of the door. The moved closer, closer.

And then they moved farther away. They left.

And Daizō let out a sigh of relief.

And then the closet doors slammed open, and Daizō shrieked as a hand grabbed him by his hair. He clawed at the hands as they pulled him out of the closet and forcefully shoved him into the floor.

"Got him," Shigaraki said.

He was grinning.

=====

Daizō was tired and a year older. His left hand was numb and his eyes were dark.

He stared at the huddled groups of men and women and children, trying to get some remnants of warmth from the controlled fires spread out along the field. Maiko's hand was resting on his back. It was grounding, almost.

She led him into one of their few buildings. At the bottom floor, he was greeted with a familiar face, who was stuck in a wheelchair. Seiya looked up at him with sorrow-filled eyes, dark bags hanging underneath.

"I tried," he whispered. "I tried so hard, Daizō. I went back forty-three times before I finally blacked out for good." He looked down at his hands in his lap. "I went back until... until this happened." He waved to his legs with one hand.

Daizō stared at his paralyzed limbs. "Can't you go back and fix them?" he finally asked, throat sore and dry enough that it cracked in several places.

Seiya shook his head. "I can barely use my quirk anymore," he admitted quietly. "I don't think I'll ever be able to use it again unless it's for Yuuei. Maybe not even then."

Daizō stared at the boy that once reminded him of a gazelle, sleek and sharp and quick. He thought about himself, a colorful parrot with soft feathers.

Daizō turned away. No reunion hugs. That could wait for another day.

For now, the gazelle was broken and the bird shot down.

=====

Daizō was still seven when, several months after he returned from All for One's clutches, Seiya made up his mind. The two always shared a bedroom, and Seiya maneuvered himself into his wheelchair before pushing himself to Daizō’s bedside. He looked at the small boy, his hair gleaming in the
moonlight and his expression solemn, even while sleeping.

"I'm sorry," Seiya said. He placed light fingers on Daizō's forearm, watching as the skin lit up beneath his touch. Daizō didn't so much as twitch as the transaction was completed.

Seiya sighed, ready to turn and leave when he paused. He looked back to Daizō, who was curled into a small ball with the covers down at his waist. Seiya felt his eyes water as he pushed himself back, and he pulled the thin blankets back up to Daizō's hunched shoulders. And then he kissed him lightly on the forehead.

"I'm so sorry," he whispered again. And then he turned away, leaving the room behind him.

He took the ramps up to the roof level. He let the chill create goosebumps along his skin as he stared up at the moon, the pollution hiding all the stars from view. He let a gentle breeze flow through his hair.

He pondered.

Did he really want to do this?

The answer was yes, he did.

He hoped that he'd find relief from all this suffering, even if there wasn't such a thing as the afterlife.

=====

Midoriya hummed a tune to himself as he set the timer on the oven. His hands were covered in cookie dough, but he supposed it could be worse, all things considered. After washing his hands at the sink, he leaned back onto the island counter.

"What should I make my costume be?" he mused. He looked to Juni, who was curled up on the windowsill, sunbathing. He was half-tempted to put something random down when an idea hit him.

Oh. Heck yeah.

He pulled out his sketchbook, already forming the details. It came rushing at him like a tidal wave, more information flooding his brain than going onto the paper. He smiled.

Thanks, Eishun.

=====

He proceeded to panic the morning of his first day at U.A. Waking up at five in the morning, he stared at the far wall in blank horror.

Yep. Today was the day he was officially going to screw himself over.

He managed to dress himself reasonably well. He hoped he didn't look too shabby, though that may just have been him. He wasn't sure. His nerves were probably just getting to him.

He made sure to make himself a cup of tea before he fell too deeply into a panic mode. It helped a little, though he wasn't sure how long it'd last. He counted his breaths, and when he looked up to the clock to see that he still had forty minutes before he had to leave, he sat himself down by his piano. He let his fingers run over the keys freely, not caring too much about the actual sound than the practice itself.
When he still had ten minutes until he had to leave, he stood up abruptly and grabbed his bag and phone from the kitchen counter. Since he wasn't too fond of the idea of arriving early, he thought about stopping by the cafe he always liked for a small bite to eat. Yeah, that sounded like a good idea.

He picked up Juni from her place on one of the piano keys, tucking her into the folds of his scarf. She didn't squirm or move, perfectly content with her spot, and Midoriya counted that as a good sign. He was soon out the door—though he picked up one last bag he prepared and let it hang on his forearm—and he locked it from behind him before he started to jog. The cafe wasn't too far from U.A., but it was slightly off course and he really didn't want to be admonished for any late activity.

His entrance didn't surprise the girl at the counter. She was semi-new, though she had been working for several weeks at least. She was nice, but Midoriya preferred the other woman who had worked there. He was glad, though, because she didn't drag things on for longer than they had to. He soon left there within three minutes, smaller bag in hand. It contained a few pastries that were baked to perfection, and he felt his mouth water.

God, he was such a sucker for sweets.

Entering through the U.A. barrier was slightly surreal. He had been imagining this for what seemed to be forever, but actually doing it was kind of... terrifying? Yeah, that was it. It was terrifying.

Also fun fact: U.A. was a labyrinth. It took him ages to find his classroom (holy bejeezus, he made it into the Class 1-A what the actual hell) and he blinked at its first impression. Which was the door. Which had to be eight times taller than him. With a giant red A on it, too. Which was a little over dramatic, but he supposed U.A. and dramatization were synonyms in the dictionary, so it really shouldn't have been a surprise.

After a moment of just staring, he finally convinced himself to push the door open. With a little difficulty, of course, but overall he managed to do it just fine without making a fool of himself. A few pairs of eyes glanced at him, but they soon went back to where they were before. Midoriya was a little thankful for it, because he wasn't sure what he'd do if someone tried to talk to him.

Large windows covered one side of the wall, letting in large amounts of light. The room was large in size, and the ceilings were even taller than the door was. Rows of desks were lined in perfect rows. He glanced around the area, trying to find the one person in mind when long, dark hair caught his eye. It was spiked up in a ponytail, its voluminous waves somehow defying gravity.

Well, it certainly looked nice on her.

At first glance, she looked entirely similar to the girl that Midoriya met several years ago. Except she wasn't; her face had thinned and grew slightly sharper, and her body was leaner than before. Her hair was longer, too, and her hips were slightly more curved as well. So basically, puberty.

She was sitting in the back row, looking down at her phone as she rested her chin in her hand. She seemed to be texting someone, and Midoriya would feel bad for interrupting if it weren't for the fact that it had been years since they had last seen each other. Honestly, he didn't give a crap.

He pulled out the chair from the desk in front of hers, sitting in it backward so he could rest his arms on the back. He plopped his backpack by his feet, as well as the other plastic bag he brought with him, and then resorted to staring at the top of her head.
"I'm not interested," Yaoyorozu almost immediately said. Midoriya remembered all the complaints she had because a bunch of guys would ask her out on her looks alone—it made him a little sad that that had become her automatic response.

"Good," he responded. "Because neither am I. I'm sixty-three percent sure I'm aromantic, remember?"

Yaoyorozu paused in her typing before her head shot up. Her mouth opened and closed for a second as they locked gazes, and her eyes widened. "I thought you were seventy-percent sure," she finally blurted out.

Midoriya shrugged. "And I think that I promised you baked goods," he said nonchalantly as he pulled a small box from the plastic bag and placed it on the desk. "Anyway, hi, Yaochan."

Yaoyorozu blinked. And then she blinked again, before she finally stood up and circled around her desk to catch him into a hug. He returned it fiercely.

"Hi, Zuku," she whispered. She separated their contact and sent him a bright smile. "It's so good to see you again. You look so different!"

Midoriya smiled lightly. "You do too."

"Aww, this is so cute! I didn't think we would get any reunions in this class!"

Midoriya and Yaoyorozu looked over to see a girl who... wasn't there. Right by her side was a taller female with pink skin and hair; the scleras of her eyes were black instead of the usual white, and her irises were a bright yellow. She was bouncing up and down. "Yeah, I think that's really cool! So, you're like, best friends or something?"

Midoriya froze as all the attention was focused on them two. Panic started to seep into him, and if that couldn't get worse, yet another voice was aimed at him.

"Oh hey, you're the boy from the entrance exam!"

Midoriya felt his eye twitch as he shakily looked to the girl with the brown bobbed hair. She looked a little sheepish.

"I'm sorry, I never got your name. I felt super bad after you helped me out there, and I wanted to give you a thanks, but I couldn't find out from anyone who you were, so..." Uraraka rubbed the back of her head. She had a small smile on her face, one that made Midoriya cringe as a memory of a pale hand reaching out came to mind. Suddenly, a familiar face butted into the conversation.

"Saved you? Him?" His face was red with rage as a few pops emitted from the palms of his hands. "Who the hell destroyed the zero-pointer? I was the fucker that saved you, what fucking kind of Alzheimer's do you have if you couldn't even remember that shit?" Oh, that was Bakugo. And now there were even more eyes on all of them.

Oh. Oh no. Midoriya felt his face pale and his hands jerk underneath the desk. He bit his lower lip, not ready to deal with so many new faces at once. Especially when they were aimed at him.

"Shut up, all of you."

Almost immediately, all chatter and noise silenced. Every pair of eye snapped to the owner of the gravely, exhausted voice, which turned out to be a man with long black hair and ashy skin. He was curled up in... a bright yellow sleeping bag?
Midoriya almost immediately recognized him as Eraserhead. Granted, he was a bit more interesting than what he remembered he was told, but he supposed a lot of things surprised him. Say, for example, one of the students in the practically worshiped Class 1-A was an utter jerk. It was a bit disappointing, but Midoriya had to remind himself that they were just teenagers without a clue as to what was going to happen. That, and there were hundreds of years worth of time between now and when he was told this information—inaccuracies and bloated facts were bound to happen.

The older man stood up slowly before unzipping the inside of his sleeping bag, speaking all the while. "That took you too long. It shouldn't have been more than a few seconds." He made his way to the podium, and he glanced around at their class. He's analyzing us, Midoriya's mind supplied. At first glance, it seemed as if the man's eternal exhaustion would keep him from noticing any of them in great detail. But Midoriya noticed the small narrow of his eyes and the way he lingered on some of them more than others.

He also noted that he didn't look at him at all.

"My name is Aizawa Shouta," he said tiredly after the few seconds of examination. "I'm your teacher."

That statement immediately raised eyebrows, but no one had the confidence (or the stupidity) to outright mention their surprise. Instead, a thick silence remained. The man didn't seem to care and pulled out a stack of clothes.

"Here," he said, passing it on to the first person in his reach. "You have ten minutes to get dressed and by the field. If you don't make it in within the time limit, I'm expelling you."

... Say what? This was new. This was definitely new. Midoriya knew the man had little to no patience for people's bullcrap, it was blatantly stated in the way he stood and spoke when he was on the job. Even the few blurry videos that had been posted online had enough evidence to support that the man didn't care for slacking off. But he wasn't expecting this.

And honestly, that both unnerved and excited him. But mostly unnerved. And his excitement was slowly edging away into terror.

Dressing into the P.E. clothes was a little awkward to him, to say the least. He wasn't used to being so exposed to other teenagers his age, and the changing room was filled with jokes and little teasing remarks. There weren't any accidents though, at least, and he was glad that he remembered to put on the piece of cloth around his neck (he had no idea what the thing was even supposed to be called) before he left for school that day.

He was one of the first few out, and he was left to awkwardly scuff his foot at the ground as he waited for the rest of the students to pile out. He had his arms crossed to hide the few scars that covered the skin of his arms. Maybe he'd ask for a long-sleeved jacket. Or maybe if he could wear a shirt underneath instead?

He was broken from his thoughts when Aizawa threw a ball to Bakugo. The boy caught it with ease as the man explained shortly.

"In middle school, you were given physical tests without the uses of your quirks. Bakugo, how far could you throw a ball then?"

Bakugo smirked. "Sixty-seven meters."

Aizawa's expression didn't change. "Then add your quirk to the mix."
If Bakugo was surprised, he didn’t show it. Instead, his grin grew as he bounced the ball into the air a few times, catching it before shooting it up again. He pondered for a moment, then took one step back as he swung his arm back.

"DIE!" he yelled, and explosions blasted the small thing far into the air. Midoriya winced as his hair blew back, a few strands getting into his eyes. His quirk was incredibly powerful, no doubt, and it definitely surprised him how easily the strength behind his explosions came. It wouldn't surprise him if he got into quite a few fights, which would make sense with his low fuse. People served as the best practice for quirks anyhow.

Aizawa displayed the screen of the tracker, which said 705.2 meters in clear letters.

"Quirk ability is the most rational way to form the foundation of a hero," he finished blandly as he lowered the device to his side. "We will be performing a quirk assessment test to apply your skills."

"Oh man, this's so cool!" said a boy with canary-yellow hair that had a black, lightning-shaped streak along his bangs. Kaminari Denki.

"Cool, huh?" Aizawa said, his eyes glinting dangerously. Midoriya felt his blood grow cold. "All right. Whoever comes in last place in all eight tests will be judged to have no potential and will be punished with expulsion."

And Midoriya felt his face grow pale. Because there was no way that he was passing.

===== 

Daizō watched as the sun started to rise. It was slightly foggy, though the temperature was nice and it wasn't raining. He had already stayed for a few hours longer than everyone else had. Their speeches, long and full and gentle, had been read until they were out of words and tears.

Each of the council members left behind a flower on Seiya's shallow grave. Each one left after their parting words.

And Daizō watched, silent all the while.

When he was finally alone, and when the last person had left to return to life, he finally approached the tombstone. He watched as small droplets of dew formed on the gray stone, and he traced his fingertips along the cool surface. He thought about him, covered in blood and contorted in all the wrong ways. And then he thought about him before the attack, with a half-smile and brown hair and blue eyes.

He could run fast. He always ran fast. He was like a gazelle; when the sun came up, he was running faster than the fastest lion. But then the lion caught up to him, and broke his legs and left him behind, to suffer in agony. And when the sun came up, he was no longer running, but he was counting the time left inside him.

Daizō turned his head toward the rising sun. When the sun came up, all of them were running. When the sun came at its center, they were all cowering in fear. When the sun started to set, they all faced the repercussions for their actions. And when the sun disappeared completely, they all reminisced on the previous day, which was so much better for them, and the previous day, which was even better than that.

Daizō thought about Seiya, with his long legs that ran whenever the sun came up.

He turned back to the grave and left a wilted flower with only two petals left, one right beside the
"I hope you can run, wherever you are," he said. No fancy speech. No dramatic ending. Just running.

They were always running.

=====

Midoriya tied for last place with his classmate Mineta Minoru. Yaoyorozu was giving him nervous glances, though he refused to return them. That would just make him fall apart, and he knew it.

"What can you do?" Aizawa asked Mineta. The boy blinked before brightening.

"The balls on my head can stick to anything for up to twenty-four hours, maybe even longer when I'm stressed enough. I'm smart too, and a hit with the ladies!" He winked at that. Aizawa didn't seem amused, though it was hard to tell with him. Midoriya wasn't too happy with the kid either, to be honest. He had ogled at the girls multiple times, and it reminded him too much of Disaya for him to be comfortable. Aizawa finally sighed through his nose, and then he turned.

Away from Midoriya.

"No one's getting expelled this time. I've decided otherwise," he said without care.

And Midoriya was utterly confused. Because not only had the man blatantly ignored him, but he didn't even question his potential level. Which was, frankly, terrifying in his situation. Because he had no idea how to go about this. He could tell that other students were whispering about him, just as confused about the whole ordeal as he was. A part of him told him to drop it, to let it go, but another part of him wanted answers.

And that latter part of him was much stronger.

"You're Eraserhead, right? The underground hero." Aizawa stopped, and for a second Midoriya didn't think that he'd humor him when the man turned around. His eyes were blank, without any hint of emotion or surprise. No confirmation was present, just silence, even from his now-classmates.

Midoriya sighed. "Look, I don't want to seem crude or anything, but I'm afraid we're kind of lacking in the conversational department. You've been ignoring me this entire time. Which is great and all. Seriously, I don't mind it. But I don't know if that's something that you want or if it's another one of your tests." When Aizawa made no sign to respond, he continued.

"So, as much as we both probably hate the whole, "Let's use our vocal cords to make noises like the pre-humans did to tell their other pre-human friends the difference between 'Let's go smash rocks together' and 'Oh shoot, that's a predator about to kill us',' I think it's a valuable resource. Because I cannot read you for the life of me, and I'd rather learn how to be a hero than constantly step on your toes because we can't talk like functional human beings." At a glance at the man's expression, he corrected himself.

"Well, semi-functional human beings. Becoming an underground hero condemns you to a life of constant work with little relief. So anyway, that was my long version of me requesting you to either explain what you want vocally or tell me if you're just going to expel me already."

Aizawa blinked. To his credit, he didn't seem that surprised or offended, if just a little caught off-guard. "Hm. So you do speak." He turned back around. "I was going to expel you if you seemed too complacent with sliding by, but since you confronted me about it, I guess that's not required
anymore. Which is great; I'd rather not have any wasted potential."

Oh. Midoriya felt like he was about to die. Wait, no, there went his soul. Guess he was already
dead.

However, the entire thing set him on edge. Aizawa purposely singled him out with a little test for him
separate from everyone else's. The rest of his class relied on their ability to use their quirks, and yet
he hadn't even used his and yet passed without much trouble.

That was... concerning. Aizawa was smarter than he looked, that was for certain.

Midoriya sighed in relief, his shoulders sagging. All confidence he had prior was totally lost, and he
felt the urge to die and curl into a small ball grow stronger than ever.

But hey, at least he passed the first test.

=====

Lunch rolled around, and Midoriya was content with sitting by himself when a familiar warm voice
greeted him to eat at her table. He thought about her empty brown eyes and felt guilt warm in his
chest, and he slid into the chair opposite of Uraraka. Beside her sat the boy named Iida, who was
surprisingly humorous in his strict attitude. Iida had actually been the one to initiate conversation with
Uraraka before, and they hit it off quickly.

Shortly after, Yaoyorozu plopped in the chair beside Midoriya's, giving the three of them her
winning smile. No one stopped her from letting her stay.

"I must say though," Iida started as they ventured into today's events, "I wasn't expecting Aizawa's
hidden trick. I was appalled by your manner when you first spoke, but to think that he would have
actually responded in kind..."

Uraraka pursed her lips. "Yeah, that is kind of weird. And to think that you were the only one he
tested that way, huh?"

Yaoyorozu wiped her mouth with a napkin. "Maybe because you have a mental quirk, and the
physical tests would have proved useless?"

Uraraka's eyes lit up. "Wait, I didn't know that you had that kind of quirk!"

Midoriya sighed. "I don't. Yaochan is just grasping at straws."

The teen in question pouted. "Oh hush, that had to be a reasonable prediction."

"If I may ask," Iida interrupted, "is it not odd that you have known one another for years, and yet
you have not shared such information with her?"

Midoriya sighed, picking at the food in his small lunch. "I'm not comfortable with using or talking
about my quirk," he admitted quietly. "I was hoping that I could overcome that and help people out
with it."

A moment of silence followed his statement.

"I think that's very admirable," Yaoyorozu said.

"Yeah!" Uraraka followed. "Plus, that's super great how you're working to get over your fear. I think
that's really inspirational and all."
Iida adjusted his glasses. "Indeed, you are setting a good example to those who follow you."
And Midoriya let a small, sad smile overtake him as he continued to look down at his food.
It was great, really, to have friends.
(Were they friends?)

Midoriya planned on walking home alone that afternoon, but Uraraka, Iida, and Yaoyorozu surprised him with their appearances.

"We wanted to walk to the train station with you!" Uraraka exclaimed, excited as always. Midoriya agreed with little hesitation. He wouldn't mind the company.

Uraraka and Yaoyorozu were the main source of conversation, though Iida jumped in every once in a while to give his own opinion. It bounced around a few times, going from random topic to random topic with ease. Midoriya listened in curiously but quietly, taking in each fact that was passed.

"So, when did you and Midoriya meet, Yaoyorozu?" Iida finally asked.

Yaoyorozu laughed bashfully. "We met at this highly-rated cafe, actually. I arrived at the height of business time, so I was forced to share Midoriya's table. I had been sitting there for about five minutes before he finally noticed me. He was too busy drawing some kind of hero bio at the time. And then we just... awkwardly talked, you could say? Since I was visiting the area, he recommended a few places around and offered to accompany me."

"Aww," Uraraka said as she clapped her hands on her cheeks. "That's so cute! You guys are, like, the definition of what it means to be best friends."

Iida nodded, though he seemed to take notice to a different detail. "I hadn't realized you were so artistic, Midoriya."

And he really couldn't help it. He snorted, remembering the painting that he and Yaoyorozu attempted to do and failed miserably. He coughed to cover it up, though the damage had already been done. "I wouldn't call myself artistic. I can draw people, which is just about as far as my ability goes. Everything else? You might as well tell me to draw the Mona Lisa and then call the result "modern art," otherwise known as a white rabbit in a snowstorm."

Yaoyorozu smiled. "Really, most modern art is just preschool-level art skills thrown on a canvas. What happened to the Renaissance art, or the Baroque art eras? Such artistic skill was highly refined back then."

Uraraka laughed. "Yeah, I know what you're talking about. But I have seen a couple that are... somewhat worth the title, yeah."

Iida sighed. "Yes, but for paintings easily accomplished with little skill and talent involved, I find it unnatural for its worth to add up to the hundreds of millions in yen."

Midoriya hummed. "Maybe we should sell that painting we did those years ago, Yao-chan," he said. "We could get plenty of money out of it. It'd be a profit."

Yaoyorozu shook her head. "Zuku, my family is already financially well off. I don't need it."
Midoriya crossed his arms. "Well, then we could give the money to those in our class that need a little bit. U.A. is expensive, even if they cover almost all of the costs."

"But it's already in my bedroom, hanging on my wall and everything. And I kind of like it."

"... Great, now I'd feel bad if I tried to convince you."

Uraraka laughed. "I think that's the point, Midoriya."

He sighed. "You're a manipulative beast," he said as he pointed at her in mock anger.

The three of them laughed. He smiled.

===== Classes felt a little boring after Aizawa's little stunt. Of course, Midoriya'd rather take the boring over the chance of getting expelled, but sometimes he found himself drifting off. He'd always snap back to attention before he could go too far into nap mode, but it was still hard.

It was after lunch of the second day, though, that interested him. Foundational Heroics. He had a faint idea of who was teaching it, but his knowledge had already been proven wrong on multiple occasions. Assuming what was going to happen before he knew for a fact that it would was a dangerous move from now on.

As he waited for the minutes to crawl by, he let a few thoughts wash over him. He knew that the League of Villains attacked the class. He knew this, and he was totally aware of it. When was the question.

From what he was told, the first invasion happened around three quarters through the year. Another happened in the beginning of the second, and then another shortly after. But Midoriya had no idea if this was true or not. For all he knew, his appearance could have caused a butterfly effect where everything was changed. At the moment, this didn't seem to be the case, but...

He didn't know. He was going in mostly blind, hoping for the best.

What if U.A.'s Judgement Day happens earlier than before? And that was a terrifying thought.

"I am here, coming through the door like a normal person!"

Midoriya's head snapped up. All Might, in all his glory and height, was there, smiling with his never-ending smile. Seeing him in person was kind of intimidating, and the man was a lot taller in person than he could ever seem on TV.

Midoriya flinched as everyone burst out into chatter, though he remained mostly calm. Of course, everyone would freak out. It was the number one hero, who wouldn't?

You. Shigaraki. All for One.

Hm.

All Might pointed to side of the classroom where briefcases shot up from the wall, numbers on each side. The man mentioned that they were to get their respective cases with their costumes inside before following him. Midoriya felt a combination of both nervousness and dread come over him as he thought about his quirk. Now that he was thinking about it, his design was probably terrible. Oh
That was the last time he was going to use Eishun as a reference.

=====

Jirou's classmates had great costumes, but the one that attracted her attention the most was the green-haired fellow who tied for last. Honestly, she was kind of jealous of his choice, and *holy crap it looked good on him?*

She was pretty sure that only he could pull it off. And he pulled it off *well.*

Now, don't get her wrong, she wasn't attracted to the male in the slightest. She meant the entire thing platonically. He was a pretty cool classmate, and he was smart too. But dang could he *wear* the suit.

Compared to everyone else's, his was more functional, though it had its own sense of style. He was wearing a green jumpsuit with a collar that went several inches up his neck. It was tight in some areas, though looser in others so movement was easily and fully achieved. He kept the fingerless gloves he always wore, and on top of the suit was a gray vest that protected his chest. A dark red belt (with pockets and storage!) hung at his waist comfortably, while matching colored combat boots went halfway up his calf. He had a few highlights and little design additions to add a bit more color—and there was also a small face mask that hung around his neck—but other than that, there wasn't much to look at.

Except for the sheaths he had strapped tightly along his upper legs. She had no idea what was inside, but it looked pretty cool.

She approved.

A part of her wondered if he had some kind of quirk that wasn't useful for heroics. It would explain Aizawa's reasoning from the previous day, and with the amount of stuff it looked like Midoriya was lugging around with ease, it seemed that he was sacrificing looks for practicality. Like it was required, almost. And that made her a little disappointed, because she had full confidence that his costume could have looked even better if he wanted it to.

Though the Black Widow theme going on was undeniably attractive.

=====

"Oh my god," Yaoyorozu breathed. "Midoriya, you look amazing."

Midoriya glanced at her direction, looked her form up and down, and then nodded to her. "You do as well. I'm guessing the lack of fabric is so you can make items more comfortably?"

Yaoyorozu smiled awkwardly. "Yeah, but it's also to get me used to putting so much on show. I know that if I try to stay with a more conservative costume, chances are it'll get ripped and I'll be caught off-guard. Getting used to it now is preparing me for the inevitable, I suppose, until I can find a fabric that won't rip when I create stuff."

Midoriya nodded. "I see what you mean. And this allows you to practice in a controlled environment." He looked awkwardly down at his own suit. "Mine's not so... creative, I guess."

The girl with the pink skin—Ashido Mina—butted in. "I think it's cool! It's so much different from everyone's." Her expression grew determined as she faked a few punches in the air. "Plus, it's like you're going out to war, where you're going to kick everyone's butts!"
Midoriya sweatdropped. *Oh, if only you knew.*

It was a bit odd, seeing all of them in their colorful attires. They also seemed so... carefree. And it both pained him and made him happy. It was something that made him feel a little lighter too, though it also sent sharp waves of sadness through him as he thought about how much pressure would go on them soon.

"Right, everyone, pay attention!" All Might called. Midoriya stopped himself from replying to the female, if only to give the man some time to finish getting his words out. "Today, we're going to be simulating criminal experiences. One thing that many news reporters and casts fail to mention is that most crime doesn't happen out in the open. In fact, a huge majority of it happens indoors, where criminals and villains are more likely at an advantage, or where they're less likely to get caught."

Midoriya tilted his head as he spoke. The man was doing well for his first day of teaching. From what the rumors he heard said, the man was supposed to be a little lacking at the skill. He guessed he was wrong.

"Sir, what activity are we going to do to today?"

"What are the rules?"

"How are we going to split up?"

"Isn't my cape fantastic?"

All Might looked overwhelmed.

... Yeah, he was starting to see where the rumors were coming from.

"Please wait until I've finished speaking before you ask questions!" he stated, flustered. "The game is played with a pair of villains and a pair of heroes each. I will be splitting you twenty students into groups of two by drawing from a hat. Then each match up will be decided by the two groups I pick after that. Anything else?"

"Yes!" Iida raised his hand. "Should we really pick them at random? I think assigning roles according to our skills would be much more efficient."

"I agree with you, Iida," Yaoyorozu interjected. "But the fact of the matter is, we don't know our skills or limitations quite yet. Going with a simpler design allows us to decide what we have and how to move on. Had this been on a later date, I think that would be a good choice."

There were a few nodding of heads, though Midoriya frowned internally.

"Actually, I disagree." And now all the attention was on him. Great. Why did he open his mouth? Of course he had to open his mouth. *But why did he have to open his mouth like an idiot.* "While assigning specific roles for us would give us a challenge to learn from, the basic lesson we're supposed to learn in this simulation is different. In almost all cases where heroes have to team up, they don't get to choose who accompanies them or who they're with. More times than not, you're going to be with a person you either don't know or don't care for."

"So you have to learn how to be a team player," a boy with red, spiked hair said, connecting the dots. It was Kirishima. "How to utilize what you have and what you don't to save the day."

Sato Rikido spoke up. "Oh yeah, I remember this one time a hero got into an argument with an experienced one and caused them to fail their objective. It resulted in a few people getting killed, and
it took the guy years to rebuild his reputation..."

"Indeed!" All Might cut in, a mix between relief and desperation on his face. "This exercise is supposed to teach you how to be quick on your feet and improvise, how to work with advantages stacked against or with you by pure chance, and to push your arguments off to the side when on the field. Thank you, Young Iida, Yaoyorozu, Midoriya, Kirishima, and Sato! Your input is all greatly appreciated."

From the corner of Midoriya's eye, he could see Kirishima blush to his roots and bream.

All Might then started to pull out names. (Midoriya assumed that he had already prepared it beforehand.) "The first group is Ojiro and Koda. The second is Todoroki and Uraraka. Third group is Ashido and Hagakure. Fourth is Yaoyorozu and Denki. Fifth is Iida and Sato. Sixth is Midoriya and Tokoyami. Seventh is Bakugo and Kirishima. Eighth is Aoyama and Mineta. Ninth is Jirou Kyoka and Asui Tsuyu. Tenth is Shouji and Sero!"

Midoriya blinked as his name was called out. Tokoyami Fumikage.

He glanced around, and spotted a boy with dark feathers along his head. Tokoyami's red eyes looked slowly toward him, and he caught Midoriya under a tense gaze.

"Now then, the first teams will be fighting in a specific building of my choosing not too far from here. Inside the building, a bomb is placed in a random location. Heroes will have fifteen minutes to find the bomb and touch it, a sign of deactivation. Villains will try to protect the bomb. Both sides can eliminate their targets by using their capture tape, removing them from the exercise. The rest of us will be watching and observing elsewhere. Remember though: if you go too far, I will stop you, and the practice will be canceled."

When he received confirmation, he continued on. "Now then! First, the hero team: Yaoyorozu Momo and Kaminari Denki!" Yaoyorozu startled at her name, but she quickly schooled it into a professional expression. "And then the villain team: Jirou Kyoka and Asui Tsuyu!"

Midoriya swallowed thickly. Was he coherent enough, he might have uttered a "good luck" to Yaoyorozu before she left.

===== Midoriya watched carefully as the fight continued on. Yaoyorozu and Kaminari entered through the front, Kaminari twitching with excitement while the former already had a small flash bomb formed in her hand. Yaoyorozu talked with Kaminari carefully, presumably explaining that Jirou's quirk would render a sneak attack useless. The boy nodded along, expression determined.

Midoriya knew the battle was going to be hard. Asui and Jirou seemed to be formidable opponents. Jirou's sound-based quirk would definitely cause problems, while Asui's strength would be valuable in protection. Meanwhile, Yaoyorozu was adaptable, and had plenty of plans up her sleeve. Kaminari had a lot of power in his hands, literally, though Midoriya had no idea how well he would work in this kind of environment.

Yaoyorozu's team barely managed to get the win, just ten seconds from the end of the time period. She managed to create distraction after distraction with gas bombs, sound disruptors, and darts. Jirou's sound amplification from her boots had caught Yaoyorozu off guard long enough for Asui to grab her around the waist with her tongue and slam her into the ground. Luckily for her, just before the girls wrapped the capture tape around her wrists, Kaminari jumped down from the vents in the ceiling and placed a hand on the paper mache bomb. It was a close call, but they won.
Ojiro and Koda were the next villains, up against Hagakure and Ashido as heroes. Hagakure managed to capture Koda, who didn't notice her because of her invisibility. He was on an upper level to try to get a few birds' notice, away from his teammate. Meanwhile, Ashido fought with Ojiro in a back-and-forth fight. Ashido's maneuverability saved her from getting knocked out by Ojiro's powerful tail as she lured him into an intersection of a hallway. Hagakure, just arriving from her capture of Koda, managed to get behind Ojiro and tackle him. Ashido captured him right after as Hagakure kept him down.

Bakugo and Kirishima were heroes after, and they faced off against the "villains" Iida and Sato. Bakugo, who ran ahead of Kirishima, sent an unassuming Sato through the outermost wall with a well-timed explosion as he was patrolling the floor. Sato got back up after some difficulty, and he swallowed several packs of sugar to gain muscle. They went into a full on brawl, knocking down several support systems in the building. At the same time, Kirishima found the bomb and approached Iida, though he couldn't get to it with Iida running it around. Eventually, though, Bakugo defeated Sato by exploding him several floors up and through the ceilings. Kirishima used the distraction to drag Iida away from the bomb. Kirishima called for Bakugo to touch the bomb so they could end the exam, but the ashy blonde refused. They got into a small, desperate argument as the two heroes started to get up; finally, Bakugo listened to the redhead and ended the exercise.

After that, Aoyama and Mineta stood up to become the next heroes. Todoroki and Uraraka were the villains.

It didn't last long. Todoroki ordered Uraraka to make herself float before freezing the entire building solid. The other two had barely enough time to even step inside before they were frozen, captured, and their turn was over. It was a stark contrast to the previous battle with its vicious and brutal fighting.

And then the last game. Midoriya felt his nerves spike.

"Heroes: Shouji Mezo and Sero Hanta!" Midoriya clenched his fist.

"Villains: Tokoyami Fumikage and Midoriya Izuku!"

"Are you ready?" a voice came from beside Midoriya. He flinched before he looked to the owner, and his heart beat in his throat.

"I'll try to be," he responded weakly.

Tokoyami nodded shortly. "Do not worry. If our efforts are at our hardest, then that is surely a win nonetheless the results. If we fail, then we will learn. There is nothing but advantage coming from this."

Midoriya breathed deeply. "So you're saying that if we fall, we can pick ourselves up, then."

"And flight will be ours," Tokoyami added.

"Or we could run," Midoriya added. The other tilted his head in question. "When you fly, you're out in the open. Ready to be shot down." Midoriya sighed lightly before twisting on his heel, heading toward the doorway.

"Instead of wasting your feathers, run faster than the fastest predator."

Tokoyami, surprisingly, seemed to understand.

=====
Midoriya and Tokoyami were standing in front of the bomb.

"I do not wish to underestimate your strength, but I do not think our combined power is enough to go head-to-head with the heroes," Tokoyami said with his arms crossed. "Shouji is a daunting opponent."

"Agreed." Midoriya reached inside his vest, pulling out a few slim objects of the same size and shape. He ran his thumb over the surface of one. "And Sero is a great fighter as well, if not for support alone. We need to separate them."

"Am I wrong to assume that you already have an idea?" Tokoyami asked.

Midoriya looked down at the small items in his hand. "No, you're not." He headed toward the doorway, his pace quick. "In case I don't make it back in time, protect the bomb. In the meantime, I'm going to set up what I have in mind. I'll fill you in while I work." He pointed to the earpiece they shared.

Tokoyami nodded. "Of course. You'll be swift?"

Midoriya smiled. "Swift as a rabbit," he promised, and then he was running down the hallways.

======

Sero stood beside Shouji. He was a little intimidated by the taller male, but he didn't let it show as he smiled up at him. "Hey man, it's great to be working with you."

Shouji nodded. "And you as well."

Sero looked down at the floor plan. "Honestly, I'm a little worried about our competition. Tokoyami has the quirk with the shadow thing, right?"

Shouji nodded. "Yes, though I am not fully aware of its capabilities as of yet."

Sero sighed. "So don't do something stupid around that, and assume that it has a mind of its own and is ridiculously powerful."

A moment of silence fell over them.

"Midoriya is a wild card," Shouji finally said. "We don't know what he's capable of. He's already made himself to be an outcast among the rest of us with his reactions from our teachers alone. There's nothing wrong with him as a person, but I still have no idea why he was allowed into U.A. if he refuses to use his quirk; the specific treatment just raises questions."

Sero shrugged. "From what I heard from a few of my friends, not even he knows why. He's just been going with the flow."

Shouji hummed. "Whatever the case, don't let your guard down. Perhaps he has other skills where he shines in, and U.A. decided to take in a new kind of student." He faced toward the smaller boy. "My arms can warp into different body parts, such as eyes and ears, which I'll use to listen and look out for anything. My extra arms should also come into handy with physical altercations."

Sero nodded. "I can make a bunch of tape from my elbows. It's super durable and sticky."

Shouji looked at the boy's elbows, which were wide and oddly-shaped. "That should come in handy." Before he could continue, however, All Might's voice could be heard over the radio,
indicating to them that the exercise had started.

"You should probably stay in front," Sero said as they entered the building. "You're bigger than me, and chances are you can see anything that attracts your eye better than I can."

Shouji nodded and listened to his teammate, forming a protective barrier in front of the smaller boy as they quickly moved forward. "I can hear some movement on the fourth floor," Shouji reported. After a moment of hesitation, he spoke up again. "There's more. It's quieter, though. They're either on the second or third, I can't tell."

"Maybe it's on the staircase?" Sero spoke up.

"Perhaps," Shouji said as they rounded a corner. "But what use would that be?"

Sero shrugged. "I'm not sure."

Silence fell over the two as they continued to make their way through the building. Most of Shouji's arms were used for hearing, both to listen out for any sound from their opponents and to use the echoes of their feet to maneuver around. They got to the first staircase without any trouble whatsoever.

"I'm going up first," Shouji said. "I want to make sure that there's nothing up here."

Sero nodded and stood at the base of the staircase while Shouji walked to the top.

"Something's wrong," he called after a moment of silence. "I can hear a faint... ticking. Somewhere beneath me." One of Shouji's arm peered over the railing, looking down at Sero and around the area.

Sero leaned forward to look up at Shouji. "What do you think it could—"

The eye in Shouji's arm widened. A loud beep sounded. Sero cut himself off, looking down at the stairs. And there, hidden behind a wooden panel jutting out ever so slightly, was a small, black object. A red dot glowed in the middle.

And then it exploded.

===== "Sero and Shouji are separated," Midoriya reported over the comm as he looked at the small device on his arm. He left a few hidden cameras around the area, which took the form of small bugs. At first and tenth glances, you wouldn't be able to tell it was anything else otherwise. He watched as Sero coughed and hacked, waving the smoke from his face as he pushed himself up from off the ground. He stared in horror at the rocks and debris that covered the entire entryway from top to bottom.

Shouji was also surprised, though he didn't look as frantic as the other did. The two talked over their ear pieces, but soon Shouji left, going deeper into the building. Sero went the opposite way, starting to wander aimlessly.

"Are you almost done setting up the last of your preparations?" Tokoyami asked.

Midoriya looked up at the camera that the rest of his class was using to see the action from his crouched position. He frowned. "Yes. I'm on my way to the bomb now."

"Alright. I'll be back as soon as my duel is finished." The comm cut off, and Midoriya sighed shakily as he stood up. That first trick had very little chance of working, but he was happy that it did. It
simplified things by a huge amount. He had set bombs on every one of the staircases in hopes that, if the first didn't work out, he'd be able to separate them then. And for... other reasons.

He sprinted with light feet back toward the room with the bomb inside. When he entered, he noticed that Tokoyami was gone.

Good.

Midoriya opened the front of his vest, looking over all the items stashed on the inside for the umpteenth time. He wanted to be prepared for when battle approached.

And then he stood in the middle of the room, waiting as the seconds passed with his heart beating in his ears.

*Eleven minutes.*

*Ten minutes.*

*Nine minutes—*

Heavy footsteps reached Midoriya's hearing. Shouji had arrived.

=====*

Sero was biting his thumb as he ran through the hallways. He cursed as he came across yet another dead end. There was no helping it; he had already wasted several minutes, and he had no idea how much time he had left. At this point, he wasn't even going to be able to help his teammate win the game.

And if they lost because of him...

Sero twisted around, ready to run back down the hall. He froze.

Standing a few meters in front of him was none other than Tokoyami, arms crossed with dark red eyes scrutinizing him. Sero gulped as he noticed the calmness of his gaze and the darkness of his feathers. He hid his fear behind a smile, though, and raised his elbows.

"Eh, I was wondering if I was going to get any action today," he said, just to test the waters.

Tokoyami had the smallest smile present on his face. "Good. Because so was Dark Shadow."

Sero's blood ran cold, and he barely jumped away in time to dodge the huge, moving shadow that pounced where he just was. He felt his heart leap into his throat as the shadow crashed into the floor beneath him, splinters flying in all directions. He cursed internally.

*Dark Shadow will be a problem. But if I can get Tokoyami!*— He immediately jutted his elbows out as he landed, feeling the long strips of tape shoot from within his skin. They were just about to wrap around Tokoyami's chest when the sentient form cut straight through them, leaving them to flutter to the ground.

Sero cussed inwardly again, though he kept his smile bright on his face as he leaped forward, sending another barrage of tape. Tokoyami ducted under it this time, meeting him halfway as Dark Shadow swiped at Sero's body from the side. Sero hissed as the shadow's attack made contact and just barely managed to miss the punch that Tokoyami threw. He rolled back to his feet, knees protesting against the action as he stumbled in the motions. The scratches weren't deep, but they were
painful enough to sting and make his smile grow weaker.

He straightened, ignoring the pain that radiated from his wounds. "You're going to have to do a little
better than that," he taunted. In reality, he was just trying to buy himself a few more seconds to get
his thoughts in order, but he hoped he wasn't so transparent.

Tokoyami stared at him coolly. "I hadn't been planning otherwise."

And Sero finally let his smile drop into solemn determination.

=====

"So you've arrived," Midoriya said.

"I'm going to assume that there's a reason you're not attacking me," Shouji ventured cautiously.

Midoriya plastered a smile onto his face as he raised his arm. In his hand, a small controller sat.
Shouji's eyes widened, and he made to move forward as Midoriya pressed on one of the buttons. He
was too late to intercept, however, and he braced himself as the building shook tremendously. Dust
fell from the ceilings, sticking to their hair. It took several seconds for it to pass, and he glared at
Midoriya.

"All the staircases have been destroyed," Midoriya explained as he pocketed the controller. "Don't
worry, I didn't blow up any of the floors. Not yet, anyway."

Shouji's eyes narrowed. "What does that mean?"

Midoriya's grin grew wider. (It was an act, but that was part of the role of being the villain. Inside his
chest, his heart beat frantically; all he wanted was for Shouji's eyes to get off of him and to escape
somewhere quiet.) "I've set up dozens of bombs around the buildings. Try to move the bomb behind
me, and you'll set them off automatically." He tilted his head to the side as he rested a hand by his
hip. It was the easiest way to ward off too much suspicion while getting the closest he could to the
hostler attached to his belt. "Your ally is still stuck on the first floor, unfortunately. Even if you
wanted to commit to some heroic action, he'd be stuck in the crossfire. The building would collapse
on top of him and kill him as well."

Of course, this wasn't actually true. If Shouji went to move the bomb, it wasn't like everything would
explode, even though he did set up fake "bombs" around the area. (He asked for some in case he
would have to bluff his way through an altercation, not that it would work very well as a hero.) But,
they were assuming the role of villain and hero, and that went beyond the simulation and the
exercise. They had to pretend that that was a part of the act.

Shouji understood this as well. "If that's the case, then you and Tokoyami would die as well. I doubt
you'd want that."

Midoriya tutted, and then he ran pinched fingers over his lips, pretending to seal them shut before
locking it. "I don't think you understand villains, Shouji. Some will cry and bawl the minute a finger
is raised against them." His grin grew devilish. If he was asked if it didn't bother him, he would be
lying when he said no. "Others will go through hell and back if it means that nothing, not even the
name of the group they're associated with, becomes known. It's part of the contract."

Shouji set his jaw, and he seemed to ponder for a moment. Midoriya hoped that he would surrender;
then it would be left to Sero, who wouldn't be able to get him the win. Not to say that he couldn't
defeat Tokoyami, because he could, but even if he did it would be useless. The timer would run out
before Sero could find a way inside the room. (Hopefully. Unless he tried to crawl outside the
building and through the window or through the vents into the room.)

Which would guarantee them the win. Shouji understood this as well.

Shouji stepped one of his feet back, flexing his arms with his movement. "Sero already told me that he'd be willing to be eliminated from the exercise if it came down to winning or losing," Shouji said.

Midoriya swallowed the bile that was rising in his throat, trying to block out the thundering in his ears as he copied Shouji's stance. Sero probably said it over their comm system when they were separated. "Judging by your position, I'm going to guess that you're not going to leave me unscathed."

Shouji's reply was to rush forward, and Midoriya had barely any time to duck as one of Shouji's fists came flying at his face. Despite his size, Shouji was remarkably swift, and Midoriya winced as Shouji swung another arm at him; it barely missed his jaw by a few centimeters. He slid backward, coming ever closer to the bomb as he bent his knees and dug his heels in. The friction quickly stopped him a few meters away from Shouji.

He couldn't let the other boy get any closer to the bomb. If he did, chances were that he would just touch it and end the exercise instead of fight with Midoriya; even if Midoriya said that he set up a trap, Shouji could pretend to deactivate them. He gritted his teeth at the thought before withdrawing the two cylinder-like weapons from the holsters on his thighs. He twirled the two in his hands, getting the feel of them before he actually tested them out. He was tempted to use the weapon at his belt, but he had a feeling that he'd use it for later instead.

Glancing down just long enough to set the electricity function on a mild shock—it was previously at one that could probably knock a person unconscious—he looked back up to duck beneath another swing and roll to the left to avoid two fists coming for his abdomen. He retaliated with a few sharp butts with the end escrima sticks, occasionally shocking Shouji lightly. He faked a swing to counter Shouji's punch so he could jump atop his shoulders. He knew that the boy had too much weight and muscle mass for his own body to have much impact, but he still used the surprise to kick him directly in the jaw before twisting back onto the ground behind him.

Unfortunately, since he couldn't stomach the thought of using Maiko's quirk, most of the fight was going to rely on hand-to-hand combat. It was most likely that the timer would run out before either of them made much progress on the other. While Midoriya wasn't nearly as strong as Shouji, he still had the speed and maneuverability to counteract that. And while Shouji was a powerhouse, the use of his arms was still a little clumsy—just enough that Midoriya could take advantage of it.

Once again, Midoriya leaped at Shouji, slipping between his outstretched arms as Shouji attempted to hit him. He landed a few more shocks but had to block with the weapons in his hands when Shouji tripped him up. Midoriya hissed as Shouji landed a punch on him, and he slid back with a closed eye. His first impulse was to cradle his arm over the wound, but he knew that that would cause him to reveal weakness—one that Shouji would most definitely take advantage of.

It was probably going to bruise and hurt later, but at the moment it was merely a dull throb—which was most likely due to the fact that the adrenaline was still kicking through him. He'd definitely regret further aggravating it later, though, and that was something he was not looking forward to.

(A part of him whispered that it wouldn't hurt so bad. Not nearly as much as other pains he went through, anyway.)

"You're still standing," Shouji stated. Midoriya wasn't sure if he was supposed to be surprised or if it was something else, but Midoriya went along with it. Anything to stall and let the clock count down.
"People are always making comments like that. I wonder if it's my small stature."

Shouji stretched his arms, moving them around him in a way that made him seem bigger. An intimidation factor. "Partly. But I think it's because you look like a wind could blow you over."

Midoriya clucked. "Fun fact, there's this place in the Hawaiian islands where winds get up to sixty miles per hour, sometimes seventy, every so often. I'm sure you'd be surprised how often people get knocked over."

Shouji, to his credit, didn't even blink. "Of course you'd somehow be able to turn it back into your favor," he muttered. Midoriya opened his mouth to make a reply, but Shouji ran back at him. His teeth clicked as he shut his mouth quickly, and he took a few steps back because Shouji was moving really fast now, and wait, was he even slowing down?

A tackle.

Shoot.

Midoriya gritted his teeth as he tightened his grip on the escrima sticks. His hands were sweating beneath his gloves, but he ignored the sticky feeling as he bent his knees. Shouji would probably push him into the ground, which was something he'd rather avoid, but...

The bomb was only a few steps away from behind him. Okay. So no dodging. Steeling his resolve, he locked himself into place as Shouji swung an arm at him, and Midoriya ducked—

Shouji sidestepped Midoriya, easing past him as he continued to run. Midoriya watched with wide eyes. Shit. He twisted the metal piece in his hand and jutted it into Shouji's side, who stumbled. Shouji turned back to him, panting.

One, Midoriya counted as Shouji's upper left arm shot out toward him. Five. He slid back to avoid it. Six. Four. Two. Midoriya used his escrima stick to block those arms, then twirling them in both hands. Shouji's barrage left him open, so—

Wait. Where was the third arm?

Midoriya was about to turn his head when a blinding strike hit the side of his skull. He went tumbling, crashing to the ground and rolling several times until, a few meters away, he stopped. His tongue, which he accidentally bit, started to ooze blood into his mouth as he held a shaking hand to his head. His vision swam, everything woozy as vertigo struck. Stars bounced in his eyes, and he fruitlessly tried to blink them away.

Judging by Shouji's expression, he hadn't meant to hit him that hard.

He tightly held onto the side of his skull as he shakily pushed himself up with a trembling forearm. He felt himself sway to the side as he watched Shouji turn.

"Shit, I have to end the exercise," the boy muttered.

Midoriya blinked clearly. Removing his hand from the side of his head, he placed it at his belt. Hesitation overcame him as he tried to sort through his muddled thoughts, which made it increasingly hard to understand what was going on. It took him a second to come to a decision, and he opened the flap at the holster on his belt with uncooperative fingers. He slid the gun-like piece of metal (though, if he were honest, it looked less like a gun and more like a barcode scanner) from it and aimed it at Shouji. It was supposed to help with his aim, though that was slightly difficult with his hazy vision. He narrowed his eyes, trying to steady his aim as Shouji reached to touch the bomb.
The contact with his hand would allow him to create chains from the metal. As long as he concentrated, the chains would burst from the front instead of the handle, though it only worked because the item was metal throughout.

Except...

"It was worth it."

He couldn't feel the tingling in his fingers.

He couldn't do it.

And then the window shattered. In came Tokoyami and Dark Shadow, the latter flying toward a paralyzed Shouji as Tokoyami ran toward the doorway, where a panel of controls sat beside it. He flicked off half of the lights with one swipe of his hand. Immediately, the room was cast in long, dark shadows as Tokoyami's quirk grew in size. In the shadow's hands was the capture tape Tokoyami had on him, and Dark Shadow wrapped it around Shouji's arms.

For some reason, the latter seemed oddly complacent. Almost as if he wanted the exercise to end as soon as possible.

Tokoyami was there, too. He immediately put himself at Midoriya's side, taking his head in his hands so he could peer at the wound. "How perilous." He knocked Midoriya's weapon out of his grasp gently before taking one of his hands with his own (which was incredibly warm) and placing it on the side of his head. "Keep your hand there."

Midoriya blinked slowly. He didn't understand, everything was too blurry and he had no idea why he would even say that. Somewhere, in the background, he heard All Might announce that Shouji was captured and the exercise was over. "I thought 'ou're only suppose' to put pressure when there's 'lood involved."

Shouji winced. "Yeah, well, there's blood involved. A lot of it."

Tokoyami glanced back at him. "In what circumstances could this have happened?" As he spoke, he positioned Midoriya so he was sitting with his legs splayed. Midoriya felt arms slide under his shoulders and knees, and then he was rising from the ground.

Shouji frowned. "He managed to keep up with all of my arms in our fight. I had to push myself to go faster so I could land a hit, but I hadn't expected that one to actually land."

Midoriya blinked. Shouji sounded incredibly guilty. He prepared to reassure him that he was fine, but a wave of nausea came over him and he had to clamp his mouth shut. Tokoyami said something to him, but it was muffled and he couldn't make out anything more than "Don't... that."

He was half-tempted to tell him to let him down, to at least let him walk on his own. He was definitely nauseous, and he did not want to throw up on either of them. Of course, walking on his own would definitely cause even more problems; he'd probably get lost if Tokoyami wasn't willing to help him out, and he'd be slow getting to the entrance.

Speaking of help, why was Tokoyami helping him? Was it because they were teammates, and it was an obligation? No, wait, this was probably a morals thing, right? Help out the weak and those that need it? Yeah. That was probably half the reason why his classmates were even trying to become heroes. Of course.

"Is it normal for people with head injuries to mutter like this?"
"My knowledge hasn't compassed such information. My assumption is going to be yes, but the context of his muttering is what worries me."

"You can understand him?"

"No. I believe he's speaking in a different language."

"I wasn't aware he was bilingual."

"Neither was I."

A sudden, bright light hit Midoriya's eyes, and he groaned as he squinted. The light burned his eyes, and it made them water.

"Sensitivity to light. He probably has a concussion."

"Dark Shadow, hover over him."

There were blurred shapes now. Colors invaded his vision and blended together in huge swirls of messy pictures. Were those people? His vision warped even further.

Oh yeah. He was definitely going to throw up.

===== When Midoriya woke up again, he was sitting in a bed with pristine white sheets and bandages wrapped tightly around his head. Stray pieces of hair fell into his vision, and he attempted to blow them out of his face. He was only slightly successful, but it was good enough.

He moved his head slightly, testing to see how much pain he was in. There was a small ache there, though it was easily bearable. He glanced at the elderly woman at a desk in the room, humming lightly to herself as she filed out some paperwork. Her graying hair was pulled into a tight bun, and her wrinkles were in full show. They weren't as deep as the time of Uraraka's... death, but they were still there. She looked tired.

He was about to shake his head to ward off those thoughts, but stopped himself last second. Yeah, that didn't sound like a good idea. Instead, he pulled his arms so they were closer to his chest and then pushed himself upward. His head pounded with the movement, but it was very minimal pain. It was probably due to Recovery Girl's quirk. It was some kind of healing-based one, right?

"What on earth do you think you're doing?"

Midoriya blinked and glanced over in the woman's direction, who somehow managed to appear by his bedside without his noticing. "S-siting up?" he said weakly with wide eyes.

The woman huffed and shook her head. "You kids are so reckless these days," she muttered. Then, louder, she said, "You got a head injury in the exercise. Luckily for you, there was no permanent brain damage, though the trauma to your skull left a bruise on the bone. Shouji's punch was relatively weak, but be glad that he and Tokoyami rushed you here. Any later and we might have had problems."

She turned and waddled away from him. "You were bleeding a bit from the head, but we didn't have to give you a transfusion since the blood loss wasn't terrible. However, your teachers will report to me if they think something is off, and we will give you one then. Capeesh?"
Midoriya blinked but nodded. He immediately stopped when his injury throbbed. "Yes ma'am."

Recovery Girl grumbled something under her breath. "Good. You're going to be a little tired. My quirk speeds up the natural healing processes of the human body, though it zaps your energy. Tell your friends or teachers if you need a snack or something." She waved her cane. "Now get out before you miss anymore class. And don't you dare think about skipping."

Midoriya wanted to nod so, so badly. Instead, he murmured a quick "Yes, thank you" before standing up. His legs were sore, but it wasn't too bad to put his weight on. He shuffled toward the doorway and opened it, ready to faceplant into his bed as soon as possible and take a nap.

Except there were people sitting outside the room.

Specifically, Shouji, Sero, and Tokoyami.

Sero noticed him first, and he leaped up from his chair. "Oh gosh, you're awake! Are you okay? Are you feeling all right?"

Midoriya felt his shoulders tense up as his ears flushed pink. "Yeah, I'm... fine."

"Are you sure?" It was Shouji speaking now. "I hit you pretty hard, which I must sincerely apologize for. I hadn't realized how much strength I was putting in my punches until it was too late."

Midoriya felt his face burn as he turned away. There were too many people radiating kindness, aimed at him, at one time. "Y-you're fine. I-it wasn't your fault."

Shouji seemed to want to argue, but Tokoyami placed a hand on his broad shoulder. "If you're sure," he interjected. "For now, shall we proceed back to class? We wouldn't want to miss anymore than we have to."

"Oh yeah," Sero said, his grin growing strained. "Do you think Aizawa is going to be mad at us?"

"That would depend on the circumstance."

Midoriya tried to smile. "Maybe I can convince him?" he asked softly.

Sero stared for a second before turning to the other two. "I think that he could convince anyone to do anything."

Tokoyami seemed solemn as he nodded. "Dark Shadow has already taken a liking to him. I wonder if he will leave my soul for his."

Midoriya paled. "Y-you're joking, right?"

Tokoyami didn't say anything after that, instead turning on his heel. He walked toward their classroom, Shouji beside him while Sero stood by Midoriya's side. The lanky teen helped him whenever a spell of dizziness came over him, and they finally made it to the door with the huge red A on it in one piece.

(Midoriya tried not to let his cheeks redden as he remembered his dream from so many years ago, where Sero snuck into his bedroom and slept with him. Although it was a friend thing, he still couldn't look the other male in the eye. They were barely acquaintances, and yet the urge to do the friendship things was incredibly strong.

Well, that just made him sound weird and pathetic.)
When they opened the door, Midoriya was immediately crowded by his classmates.

"Jeez, you were so cool back there!"

"Yeah, and you didn't even use any quirk or anything, just your skills!"

"Unless he did use his quirk and it was just unnoticeable."

"But you were so cool with those weapons! What are they called, escrima sticks?"

"Yeah, where'd you learn to fight?"

Screw embarrassment. He glanced over at Yaoyorozu, who was close by him. "Mom, help," he begged with wide eyes.

Yaoyorozu let out a sharp exhale, as if laughing, and tried to suppress her grin as she stepped away from the group and stood in front of him. "Please give him some space. Your volume isn't helping his head injury."

"Oops," Kirishima said. "Sorry, Midoriya. Hope you feel better! You were super manly out there."

And then the crowd sort of dispersed, and Midoriya held onto Yaoyorozu's arms tightly from behind her. He peeked out from over her shoulder. "Thank you."

Yaoyorozu laughed. "You're entirely welcome, Zuku."

Off to the side, Tokoyami stared at Midoriya, something hidden roiling in his gaze.

=====

"Midoriya, stay. I want to speak with you."

This had to be the third time that this had happened, and Midoriya was washed with a sense of repetition. Was every teacher going to do this to him?

Midoriya stayed, however, just like Aizawa asked. He watched as his friends left the classroom, closing the door behind them. Yaoyorozu sent him a confused look just before she went, but he shook his head. He had no idea.

When it was just them two, Aizawa sighed. He pulled up his sleeping bag, stepping one foot inside it before he began to speak. "I didn't expel you because I know there's something about your quirk that's different from anything I've seen," he started. "And you're talented. I saw your battle with Shouji today. You're off to an excellent start."

So where's the but?

"However..."

Oh. There it is.

"I am not going to train someone who is not willing to use their quirk." He began to zip up the yellow sleeping bag while staring at Midoriya in the eye. "You're good, but you're not great. Were you hero material already, I would have been fine. But you're not, and weaknesses—such as your unwillingness to show me your quirk—will be taken advantage of in the field."

"And what if my quirk's unsuitable for being a hero?" Midoriya asked.
Aizawa tilted his head. "I think you'd be surprised how many uses a quirk can have," he finally said. "And anyway," he stated as he turned away, "I doubt it's "bad" at all. A colleague of mine told me the exact opposite." When Midoriya made no comment to that, he sighed. "You have until two days from now to tell me what your quirk is. It'll be at the end of our field trip. If you can't tell me and prove to me what it is, I'll expel you. Understood?"

Midoriya nodded. "Understood."

Aizawa didn't respond to that, instead curling up into his sleeping back and hiding beneath his desk. Midoriya turned to leave, though he let a little smile appear on his face.

This was a man who expelled an entire class within the first day because he didn't see any potential. And yet, here he was, getting a second chance.

That felt... kind of nice.

But a field trip, so soon after school started? That sounded pretty cool. Most likely, Aizawa wouldn't announce it until tomorrow, either early in the morning or right before school ended.

Huh. He wondered what it would be like.

(Terror. Pain. Fear. And agony. Lots and lots of agony.)

=====

Once upon a time, there was a woman named Maiko. She watched as her father tortured her sister. She listened as everyone praised her for her quirk.

"You will be the next king," said her father.

And Maiko hated it.

She bid her time, however. She let the seconds wash by and age her bit by bit. She waited patiently for her time to strike.

She infiltrated the rebellion with the help of All for One, though he did not know her true intentions.

No one did.

No one ever would.

She found Daizō. He had brilliant bright eyes and a small light in his heart. He was warm, so, so warm.

"Maiko," said Daizō, "why are we training?"

She cried herself to sleep when she answered him.

She kneeled and took his hands into hers. "You're the only thing that matters, Daizō."

She cried when he grew cold, cold, cold.

"Maiko," said Daizō, "I'm not a bad person, am I? The council says I'm a bad person."

Maiko smiled and tried not to let her tears fall. "Of course you're not, don't listen to them. You're definitely not a bad person." Not anymore, at least.
And she cried, and she cried, and she cried.

You're the only thing that matters.

She watched as the rebellion was cut down. She raised it, fed it, let it grow, almost like a pig getting ready to be slaughtered.

It was for the better, though.

No one knew her intentions.

No one ever would.

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===== Once upon a time,

Maiko was the good guy.

But how is this possible,

When she was so diabolical,

In

E-very
Translation:

Usually, when I use Seiya's quirk, I get headaches. Terrible ones, really. I also get rashes along my arms, which will itch terribly. Creams and water doesn't help, either, which really sucks. But it's weird, because...

Because I didn't get a headache this time.

In the time that I'm using his quirk, my stomach does some kind of... flips? No, that's not right. How else would I describe it without it being entirely unsettling?... It kind of feels like someone's grabbed my stomach by both ends and is continuously twisting it; the farther I use it, the tighter it gets, and eventually it just rips and that's that. I can't use it anymore in that one time period.

And I got that feeling, just a bit ago. It was milder than usual, and the pain seemed distant. But it didn't make any sense whatsoever, because I didn't get any headaches. I didn't use it. Time didn't change at all for me. Which... doesn't add up. Why would I feel as if I was going through time if I didn't experience the symptoms?

Hey, idiot, this is future-you speaking. God, the answers are right there. If time changed, and yet you didn't go back in time, then it obviously had to be someone else.

So who's the someone else?

(I know the answer to this one, too. And trust me, it's a fucking trick question. Who the hell would guess __________)
I'm sorry this chapter is super short. It's only around ten thousand words long, which is seven thousand words less than the last chapter. I just thought that this was a good place to end it, you know? I'm also super nervous because I'm really unhappy with a few things about this, but I don't know how to really fix it. I don't know, you tell me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Translation:

You know, I really liked Seiya. Which sounds kind of obvious, I know, but he was such a great person, and he had so much character. I remember when we were little, when I was around five or six, I found a single daisy by his "house." It was the first flower I had ever looked at in my life, and it enamored me. God, it was just so beautiful to me; I had never seen one before.

I remember I picked it up, and I ran to my bedroom and set it in a glass I found in our small kitchen. (I lived with Maiko at the time.) Everyday, I would sacrifice some of my rationed water to try and give it a fresh cup. Maiko eventually found out, and she told me to put my needs first.

But I didn't really care. I loved that flower so much.

When it started to wilt, I called Seiya over and told him about it. I was super sad, because I wanted it to last forever. And Seiya, being the best person in the world, plucked the flower out of the glass and held it in his hands. And I watched in awe as the browned petals turned back into its pale white, and the stem grew lighter and stronger.

Despite Seiya's quirk having terrible backlash—he got a serious nosebleed from doing even simple things like that—he still did it for me. And he did it for me everyday, turning the flower back to when it was at its full bloom.

When he died, I... I tried to save the flower, you know? But, eventually, I decided that it would be better not to. In time for his funeral, I pulled the flower out of its glass and waited for everyone to leave. I set it on his grave, and, by then, only two petals were left.

I'd like to think that they represented us two. Just the both of us, sitting next to one another, waiting for the time where we would fall.

I said my goodbyes and left. I tried to ignore the pain and his absence for a long period of time. It took a while to recover. And when I came back a few months later, there were three daisies there.

All of them were in full bloom.

===== 

Midoriya knew that love wasn't a bad word. He used it himself periodically, and sometimes even flippantly.

But other times, the word made him cringe. Hisashi's words would come to mind, and he would
shudder. Some days, the word felt like nails down a chalkboard. It would usually be because of some kind happening through the day. Maybe he'd read a part of a book where a character reminded him too much of Hisashi, or maybe someone with yellow-orange eyes would bump into him. Or, perhaps, he'd see a villain fight where loved ones were hurt. Sometimes, it was simple things like seeing a heart carved into locket, or someplace where all eyes could see it.

And then there were the times where he simply woke up and hated the word. He'd get himself prepared to go to school, listening to Present Mic on the radio when the word would come up. A song choice, perhaps, or maybe Present Mic would be gossiping about the latest hero couple. And Midoriya would turn right around the shut the radio off, continuing his routine in silence.

"Love" wasn't an appealing word to him.

Safe was another word he despised. This one came from his birth mother, though. He could sometimes hear her whisper into his ear, as she cradled him in her arms, "We're going to be okay. I'm going to keep you safe."

He hated that word. He hated how many times he was lied by it, how misleading it was. He hated that every time it was spoken, every time it was a promise, his safety was ripped from his hands and torn to pieces.

But most of all, he hated protect. He loathed the job, the assignment, the duty he was chained to. Protect them, protect them, protect them, protect them, their protection means more than you, you have to protect them or you're nothing—

Midoriya felt the ceramic cup in his hand crack. He sucked in a deep breath, trying to calm the waves of detestation that burned in him. He set the cup down, letting both his hands rest on the side of the counter as he set his forehead on the cold surface. He counted his breaths, holding every third one to calm down. He was alright. He wasn't angry. He was fine.

He was a little late for his piano lessons, but the woman there didn't seem to mind too much. If she noticed his shaking hands and constant slip-ups, she didn't comment on it.

She also refrained from using the word love. He wondered when she managed to figure that one out.

======

There were news reporters crowded around the entrance to U.A. Midoriya swallowed the bile in his throat, clutched his stress ball tightly, and dove into the group, pushing people aside as gently as he could. They didn't reciprocate his carefulness, however, and more times than one they roughly grabbed a hold of him by his arm or shoulder.

His skin crawled. His hand was starting to grow numb, and he could barely twitch his fingers as he shuddered. There were too many people here, too many crowding around him—

There was a microphone shoved into his face.

"Is it true that All Might is teaching your class?"

Midoriya felt the urge to throw up. His face felt hot while his throat was tight, and his stomach curled nauseatingly. There was a burning feeling in the back of his throat, refusing to be relieved by weak swallows.

Another microphone was placed directly in front of his mouth. "What is All Might like as a teacher?"
Another microphone. "What kind of class does he teach, exactly?"

Midoriya's vision began to swim. The urge to vomit was greater than ever before.

"Forgetting everything about him being a teacher, what is he like as a person? Does he have any particular hobbies that you might want to share?"

His heart pounded in his ears.

"Is All Might going to move farther away from heroics and into the teaching job?"

His throat tensed.

"Do you think that U.A. has been on his mind for a period of time, now?"

He puked, directly over the microphones. There was a moment of silence before some of the news reporters shrieked, and some dropped the devices before holding their hands out in disgust. Others made guttural noises of revulsion. One man in the background turned and held a hand over his mouth, trying not to get affected at the scene.

Midoriya felt his ears burn as he looked away from the scene while simultaneously trying to ignore the taste in his mouth. Everything was still unclear, however, and he felt himself sway slightly. Even more of the attention was on him than before.

He was about to turn around and walk right back home when a hand rested on the back of his shoulder. (Midoriya liked that hand—it wasn't sitting on top his shoulder as if to push him down, but rather along his shoulder blade with a gossamer touch; part of Midoriya wondered how the person's grip could be so feather-light when he seemed so gruff.)

"You should all be ashamed of yourselves," Aizawa growled dangerously. "Stop acting like whiny, spoiled brats who wanted a phone and didn't get the exact version you wished for. Ask for All Might on your own time or when you seem him, but don't you dare corner Yuuei students. Especially not first years, who are dealing with their own problems."

His glare was more than venomous. In fact, Midoriya would've thought that his quirk was heat vision with how heated his gaze was. (Pun?)

Aizawa sent them one last sneer before lightly pushing Midoriya along with him, and the crowd parted like the red sea. Once the two crossed the U.A. barrier—which those without passes were excluded from—Aizawa turned to another student who Midoriya hadn't noticed before.

"Kirishima, take him to Recovery Girl's office," he said. "Stop by the class on your way there; tell them I'm going to be a few minutes late. Put Iida in charge, and then tell the rest of your classmates that they ought to listen to him or face the dire consequences that is my wrath."

At Kirishima's nod, Aizawa started to walk away, though not before Midoriya caught him muttering something along the lines of "stupid press can't keep to their damn selves."

"You okay there, dude?" Kirishima finally spoke up as he pressed his hand fleetingly against his arm.

Midoriya looked away, hiding further into his scarf. "Yeah, I-I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to bother you, I just... get really nauseous when I'm under a lot of stress."

Kirishima sent him a bright grin. "Nah, it's all good! And really, I don't blame you for any of that."
Those reporters were being kind of unmanly like that, you know? They shouldn't be putting that kind of pressure on some of us. And most of their questions were ridiculous."

Midoriya sent him a weak smile.

Most of their walk was spent in silence, even after the huge uproar that occurred when Kirishima relayed the rules to the class. Kirishima did strike up a few conversations, though they ended awkwardly when Midoriya had no idea how to respond.

Recovery Girl wasn't too happy to see him there again so soon, but she was slightly more sympathetic to his cause when Kirishima came to his defense and explained the ordeal about the press. She shook her head and clicked her tongue before handing him a glass of water and a small pill.

"It should help calm down your stomach and make you feel a little better. Don't chug the water, though, okay? We don't want you to throw up again."

Midoriya wanted to tell her that she didn't have to get him a pill, that he could bear through the first few hours, but he had a feeling she wouldn't let him go. Kirishima watched as he swallowed his pill with water, and then he proceeded to wash his mouth out in one of the bathrooms. The red-headed male continued to smile brightly the entire way.

"Here," he eventually said when they were getting close to the classroom, "it's my phone number. I wanted to exchange numbers with you before, but I couldn't get you alone, so..." He rubbed the back of his head before handing it shyly to Midoriya, whose cheeks turned pink.

"O-oh, here," he fumbled as he tried to find his phone. He stumbled in his typing as he made Kirishima a contact onto his phone before sending him an experimental text message. Kirishima's phone vibrated, and his face brightened.

"Thanks so much, Midoriya!" he exclaimed. "Now, how about we get to class before Aizawa-sensei kills us?"

(Turned out that Aizawa's "quick talk" with Principal Nedzu went on for much longer. Though the man had hoped it would be for only a few minutes expressing his concern about the press, the mouse-bear-rodent thing decided to make it an entire lesson. Honestly, he should have known better.)

=====

"Today we're picking class representatives."

Midoriya had approximately two seconds to cover his ears before his entire class burst into cheers, everyone trying to one-up the other. There were several exclamations of those who wanted to become class president, and Midoriya shrunk into himself as the noise grew steadily louder.

"Everyone, please quiet down!" Iida was standing up as well, his arms moving up and down robotically. "I believe we should make a vote!"

Asui placed a finger by her chin. "But we barely know one another, kero. We'd all vote for ourselves."

"That's true," Iida said, "but that just means that whoever gets the most votes made an impression on everyone!"
Yaoyorozu hummed. "Well, maybe we should at least spend a little more time getting to know one another. At least with what little time we have left of this class period, if that's okay with Aizawa-sensei?"

A small noise came from the yellow lump at the front of the classroom. "I don't care. Just get a move on with it and tell me the results when you're done."

Yaoyorozu brightened, and she clapped her hands. "Well, it would be best to move out chairs in a circle, correct? That way, we can all look at one another and speak freely."

"That sounds like a great idea, Yaoyorozu!" Iida said, and he immediately started to push the desks off to the side of the room. A few jumped in on the chance, and Midoriya squawked as someone moved his desk out from underneath him. Without warning, Shouji picked up his chair—with him in it, mind you—and placed him in an empty spot in the forming circle.

He was a little frazzled at it, and he thanked every god above that he had enough balance to not fall off. Soon, he was joined with the rest of his classmates who sat in their respective chair.

"Well, I suppose that we should start off with introductions, shall we?" Yaoyorozu said. "We'll go clockwise. My name is Yaoyorozu Momo, and my quirk is Creation. I can create objects using the fat cells from my body."

Ashido, who sat to her left, continued. "My name is Ashido Mina, and my quirk is Acid! It's exactly what it sounds like!"

Then it was a boy with an oddly-shaped head next. He seemed incredibly nervous as he began to sign in letters quickly, and a little sloppily from his apprehension. Silence followed him.

Yaoyorozu, with her brows drawn, turned to Midoriya, who hunched his shoulders at the sudden attention. "Do you know what he said?"

Midoriya blinked and then shook his head. He turned back to the anxious boy and signed, carefully, "Can you repeat that, slower this time?"

The boy's face brightened immensely. "My name is Koda Koji. My quirk is Anivoice. It allows me to communicate with animals."

Midoriya translated it orally, before adding to him, "It's nice to meet you, Koda."

Koda smiled shyly back at him.

"Todoroki Shouto," another boy said monotonously. His hair was split down the middle, white on his right with red on his left. His left eye was a bright blue, while his right was a steely gray color that showed no emotion. "Half-Cold, Half-Hot."

Kirishima was after him, though he was much more excited than the previous two. "My name is Kirishima Eijiro, and my quirk is Hardening! My skin can become so hard that I can break through concrete! It's a pleasure to meet all of you."

"My name is Hagakure Toru!" She waved her arm from side to side, though Midoriya could only see it because of her uniform. "My quirk is pretty self explanatory. It's Invisibility!"

"Shouji Mezo," the many-armed male said next. "My quirk is called Dupli-Arms. The tentacles attached to my arm can replicate any other part of my body. They look like extra arms from a distance."
Another female was next, and she had shorter hair with chopped bangs. "My name is Jirou Kyoka. My quirk is called Earphone Jack, which allows me to pick up vibrations and sounds. They can also channel my heartbeat into plugged objects, which can deal an immense amount of damage to them."

Next was Satou. "I'm Satou Rikido, and my quirk is Sugar Rush! The more sugar I eat, the more muscle mass I produce! Afterward, however, I crash and get super tired."

Ojiro sent them all a smile. "My name is Ojiro Mashirao. My quirk is Tail, which is a powerful extra limb that can take out grown men or women easily."

Bakugo was after, though he rolled his eyes. "Tsk. I'm Bakugo Katsuki. My quirk's Explosion."

"Oh, how do you create them?" Yaoyorozu asked, excited.

Bakugo growled. "Why the hell would you like to know? It's none of your damn business!"

"He sweats nitroglycerin," Midoriya and Kirishima said at the same time. They looked at one another in surprise before Kirishima burst out laughing. Midoriya hid his face in his scarf, trying to hide his smile from view.

"The fuck!?" Bakugo said, seething. Everyone ignored him, however, and continued with their explanations.

"My name is Asui Tsuyu, though I would like it if you all called me Tsu," she said. "My quirk is Frog. Basically, I have all the characteristics of a frog. I can jump extremely high, and my tongue can stretch long as well. Also, I'm able to spit out a mild toxin, while I can throw up my stomach."

This got a few looks of both awe and disgust, though Midoriya was leaning much toward the former. As he looked up at the ceiling, he let the words slip from his mouth.

"Can you throw up at will, or is it something that has to be forced to be done? And how high exactly can you jump? And is your tongue durable, or is it as sensitive as others might be? Using your tongue to capture or grab onto things is incredibly useful, but if you're not tolerant to pain, you lose a lot of ability. And why is your quirk so diverse? I've never seen anything like it. And your quirk can't be based on one frog breed, because then you wouldn't have all of those skills. So do your parents both have different frog-based quirks? That would make a lot of sense, right?"

"Zuku." Oh, that was Yaoyorozu.

"Hm?" he said, still not looking down.

"I love you, and all of those questions are very interesting. But let's wait until everyone else gets finished, alright?"

Midoriya sighed and finally looked down, ignoring how everyone was staring at him. He pretended that he wasn't currently the center of attention. "Okay," he said dejectedly.

"Well, I suppose that I am on stage next, hm?" A boy with light blonde hair stood up. "Bonjour, mes amies. My name is Aoyama Yuga! My quirk is the magnificent Navel Laser. I can fire sparkly laser beams from my stomach, which is controlled by my belt!" He bowed before taking a seat.

After him, Uraraka smiled and spoke. "I'm Uraraka Ochako! My quirk is Zero Gravity. Anything I touch will have its gravitational pull removed. I can remove the gravity of an object up to two tons in weight." Someone whistled in surprise, and she rubbed the back of her head abashedly. "Whenever I use it too often, though, I get super nauseous."
Iida stood up after her. "My name is Iida Tenya! My quirk is Engine; it allows me to run at an incredible speed."

A small boy spoke up next, and he stood... on his chair. "I'm Mineta. Mineta Minorou. My quirk's Pop Off, which allows me to—"

"Yeah, okay, we heard you at the beginning of the year," Kaminari interjected. "You can create sticky balls, whatever. I'm Kaminari Denki, and my quirk is Electrification. I can emit up to 1.3 million volts, though my wattage limit causes me to go into a haze after."

Afterward, Sero was up. He sent a brilliant smile to everyone in the room. "I'm Sero Hanta." He jutted a thumb in his direction. "My quirk is called Tape. From my elbows, I can release large amounts of sticky and durable tape." He winked at everyone. "Call me if you need a fixer-upper. My quirk has even held a broken-down car together."

This got a few chuckles from everyone.

Suddenly, all eyes were on Midoriya. He coughed awkwardly before speaking. "My name is Midoriya Izuku." He felt an awkward pause where everyone was expecting him to explain his quirk. He took in a deep breath. "I have a metal-based emitter quirk."

This got Yaoyorozu's—and anyone else who paid attention and knew that Midoriya's quirk was unknown to even the staff at U.A.—scrutiny. She looked at him for a second before clearing her throat, nodding to the boy sitting next to Midoriya. Which happened to be Tokoyami.

He seemed a little uncomfortable with everyone's gazes on him, but he continued on with little hesitation. "I am Tokoyami Fumikage." He pointed to the shadowy form hiding underneath his chair. "That is Dark Shadow, coincidentally the name of my quirk. He is a sentient form that does as he pleases, despite my many justifications why he mustn't perform any practical jokes on others."

Dark Shadow groaned. "You're so mean. I just did one prank. One."

"And you terrified a group of small children into wetting themselves," he countered. "And who got in trouble for that?"

"Oh come on, it was funny!"

"I have my reservations."

Yaoyorozu chuckled before taking the stage again. "So, what would we like to ask next?"

"Oo, oo!" Hagakura jumped up. "We should ask each other why we want to be heroes!"

Midoriya felt his stomach clench as the idea was agreed upon by many. He listened on with nervousness as people exclaimed why they were at U.A., and what made them want to do this job. Some of them were less selfless as others—Bakugo wanted to be "number one", while Mineta wanted to gain enough popularity to find a girl he'd like.

Others warmed his heart, like Uraraka, who wanted to help her parents out, or Iida, who wanted to continue his family's legacy. There was Hagakure, who wanted to help people understand that even those that can fade into the background are important too. There were a few who wanted to fight against mutant discrimination, while others were solely bent on helping and saving others. Sero surprised everyone with a solemn speech about wanting to encourage those with medical conditions as a hero and gain enough money to donate it to charities.
"I had a cousin who died because of an illness," Sero admitted. "She wanted one last wish, which was to see her favorite hero. We managed to contact him and he agreed to come over. She was so happy, and she told me that she was content she got to experience something so amazing, even if she was going to miss out so many things in life."

It was... a heartwarming, but bittersweet, thought.

And then the attention was back on him. Midoriya swallowed thickly, trying to wrack his brain for some kind of idea.

He bit his lower lip as he held both his hands in his lap. Honesty, Yaoyorozu said. I want you to be honest. "I want to be a hero because I can be one," he finally said. He didn't look up from his palms. "There are plenty of people out there who want to be a hero so badly, and are willing to work so hard for it. And yet there are many that are never given a chance to be one. There are people who are discouraged from it because of who they are." His grip on his hands tightened.

"And I want to change that. I want people to know that they can be a hero, no matter who they are or what challenges hold them back. I want minority groups—those that are deaf, blind, mute, (at this, Koda straightened) mentally and physically prohibited (traumatized, he mentally counted)—to be given a chance. And I want to stand for that, you know? I want people to know that others can't be judged on quirks and personality alone."

There was a moment of silence before someone squeezed him. Tightly. Midoriya felt his cheeks warm as he realized that yes, that was Sero, and yes, this was the same boy who literally invaded his bedroom.

"Stop being so amazing for once, will you? You're making us all look like trash."

Midoriya sputtered. "W-what do you mean, I thought all of you had very inspirational reasons for everything—"

Sero placed a hand over his mouth. He smelled faintly of eraser shavings and lilacs, an odd combination. "Shh shh, hush, child."

He felt his cheeks flush a deeper shade of red, because he was very close. Very, very close. And this hug was very awkward.

"Tokoyami, continue?" Yaoyorozu asked, looking mildly disturbed.

Tokoyami shook his head. "Don't think I could, even if I wanted to."

Iida stood. "Well, now we should take a vote, shall we not?"

Yaoyorozu stood as well, already forming slips of paper and pencils in her hand. "And so we are."

=====

Yaoyorozu was elected president. As for vice-president...

"Why," Midoriya said, distraught. His fists shook as he stared at his desk. "Why did you condemn me to this hellish torture."

Sero was snickering from somewhere in front of him. "Next time, think about whether or not you're going to make an inspirational speech if you don't want the position."
Yaoyorozu chuckled before pulling him out of his seat. He stood at the front of the room next to her, and Aizawa stood up with little interest. "These are the results."

Yaoyorozu got four votes. Midoriya received three.

(Later, he’d found out that Uraraka and Iida, alongside himself and Yaoyorozu herself, voted for the creation-user. Meanwhile, Sero, Tokoyami, and Shouji voted for him.

It definitely explained the glee on Sero’s face as he smirked at him.)

=====

Yaoyorozu added Sero Hanta, Iida Tenya, Uraraka Ochako, and two others to the group chat.

Yaoyorozu Momo: Hello, I created this chat because I became aware that not all of us know one another as well as I would like. I thought it would be nice to hang out with one another sometime?

Iida Tenya: Ah, so we can get to know our classmates better? I think it's great! Does anyone have a free day we can meet up?

Uraraka Ochako: oooh

Uraraka Ochako: yeah, I think I'm free today, later in the afternoon if everyone else is.

Kirishima Eijiro: Dude, that sounds great!!!

Uraraka Ochako: Oh, Kirishima?

Kirishima Eijiro: Yep, that's me

Sero Hanta: I think that's an amazing idea too! count me in

Kirishima Eijiro: Sero, my man!!!

Sero Hanta: Oh, hi Kirishima!

Iida Tenya: Okay, so are we on agreement that we'll meet after school today?

Yaoyorozu Momo: I think so. Uraraka and I are free then. Is everyone else?
Iida Tenya: Indeed I am!

Sero Hanta: yep! can't wait

Kirishima Eijiro: Same

Midoriya Izuku: I am as well.

Kirishima Eijiro: Buifbew hrcwoqn

Kirishima Eijiro: I didn't even realize you were here

Sero Hanta: Wait since when were you in this chat

Sero Hanta: FoR HOw lONg

Uraraka Ochako: What the heck

Midoriya Izuku: (

Yaoyorozu Momo: Izuku.

Yaoyorozu Momo: Izuku.

Midoriya Izuku has left the chat.

Iida Tenya: ... Is he normally like this?

Sero Hanta: fueownec iqhnowpcq

=====

There was a woman there, scowling with her arms crossed against her chest. Daizō was staring in horror at what she was showing him.
She was a part of the council. Her quirk allowed her to teleport a certain amount of people to any place of her choosing. At the moment, the two were standing in the ruined remains of U.A.'s campus. Large vines ran up and down the sides of the buildings, growing through the cracks of the glass. Birds' nests took up several nooks and crannies around the area.

The woman grabbed onto his arm, dragging him toward one of the fields where the students supposedly practiced at. She pointed toward a specific place of one. "There's the place where Class 1-A died," she said, letting her hand fall back to her side. She sighed as she glanced around, shaking her head.

"This is what happened," she explained, annoyed and saddened and desperate, all at once. She looked down at him. "You're only alive to get back at All for One. I hope you know that."

At eight years old, Daizō knew what a meaningless life meant.

"I know," he whispered. And then, again:

"I know."

=====

Translation:

It's a bit taxing to see Uraraka. Not that I don't like her or anything, no, she's an amazing person. She's funny, kind, and though a little too hyper and touchy-feely for my liking, she's a great friend to have.

But it hurts, sometimes. In the original timeline (the one I wasn't in), Uraraka was crippled by the zero-pointer. She couldn't use her legs by herself (though U.A. paid for all of her medical bills and managed to create a customized mechanism that would allow her to walk, albeit slowly.) Of course, U.A. still got in a heap of trouble, though Uraraka forgave them. Which I still can't believe to this day. Even though her parents were furious, she still found it in herself to give them a second chance. And with that kind of attitude?

She'll be a great hero. There's no doubt about it.

(I just wish that I could get her dead body out of my head.)

=====

Kirishima bounced on the balls of his feet. He was super excited to meet up with his new friends. He had been worried that his class would be incredibly serious and that he wouldn't be able to fit in, but lo and behold, there he was, waiting for his five new buddies.

Iida had arrived at their meeting point a little bit before he did, and the two of them waited patiently as Yaoyorozu arrived next. Midoriya was walking side-by-side with her, and they were already in a deep conversation. Their sibling-esque relationship reminded him much like Mina's and his—they had been good friends in middle school—and it was great to see that they weren't the only ones who knew one another before U.A.

Of course, their friendship was a bit different than Kirishima's had been. From what he heard, the two had only met for a little while, and they mostly stayed in touch via text. So the reunion had to be pretty cool of them.

(Though he didn't get half of their jokes. Especially the ones about baking goods for Yaoyorozu and
Midoriya's sixty-three percent surety that he was aromantic.

"Hey, Zuku," Yaochan had said as they passed Kirishima. She had pointed to one of their classmates, which happened to be Todoroki. "You sure you're sixty-three percent sure? He's pretty attractive."

Midoriya had made a groaning sound. "All of my classmates are good-looking," he had bemoaned. "I swear I'm only fifty-three percent sure now."

Yaochan had laughed as she shook her head, skipping ahead of him.

Uraraka came soon after, while Sero arrived two minutes late, panting and sweating. "I-I'm so sorry," he stuttered, trying to straighten the folds in his shirt. "I started our homework that's due tonight and I totally forgot about the time."

"It's fine, dude, really," Kirishima said before Iida could scold him. "You're not that late, anyway."

Midoriya looked up at the sky, blinking as he stared at the sun. "I don't think we have that much time before it gets dark," he stated. "We have a few hours at best."

"Well, we should make the best of it then, right?" Yaoyorozu smiled softly at all of them. She was wearing a red cocktail dress, and a small purse rested at her hip. Out of all of them, she was wearing the nicest clothes. Midoriya almost looked shabby next to her with his dark green turtleneck and usual scarf.

Kirishima sent the two a blinding smile. "Then let's go!" He pumped his fist into the air. Sero and Uraraka followed his movement, while the other three smiled.

=====

It was almost funny how much Midoriya liked animals. They all went to the mall, and one of the few stores was an adoption center where customers could look at dogs and cats through glass walls.

They stayed there for at least half an hour, looking at the cute animals and cooing at them. Midoriya planted himself in front of one window, and immediately he was met with several puppies pawing at the glass. Midoriya murmured a few sayings under his breath as he rubbed the glass.

"I want them," he said to Sero, who watched him, bemused. "I want all of them. I want to hug them and squeeze them and call them my very own." Sero laughed, and Midoriya pouted. "Look, they could fit in my hands! What more could you want!"

Sero just shook his head as he grinned. "Your hands are too tiny for them, dude." Sero grabbed Midoriya's wrists and held them in front of his face. "Look at them; they're like little baby hands."

Midoriya frowned. "Are you calling my hands fat?"

Sero choked on his spit and coughed. "I-I didn't mean it like that, I swear!" he stammered as he let go of Midoriya's arms.

(Kirishima noticed that Midoriya's fingers twitched, and he looked vaguely relieved that he was no longer in contact with the other. Kirishima almost wanted to ask him why he was so nervous about physical touch, but then he berated himself. Midoriya was clearly not comfortable with human proximity.)

Yaoyorozu ended up dragging Midoriya out of the store when he refused to leave a small teacup
puppy. "I want him," he said sadly.

Yaoyorozu sighed and handed him to Uraraka. The brown-haired female held onto him after making him weightless, and they moved onto the next store. And the next. And the next.

"Hey, Midoriya, how long have you had that scarf for?" Sero was looking at his dingy piece of clothing, which was fraying, with barely hidden distaste.

Midoriya hummed before shrugging. "Maybe around four years or so?"

Iida scrunched his nose up. "Perhaps you ought to replace it? Clearly, it is not doing its purpose to keep you warm as much as it should."

Kirishima pointed to a store across the mall. "I saw that they sold a few scarfs over there! Why don't we get you one now?"

Uraraka's eyes lit up. "Oh yeah, and we can pick out the perfect one for you!" She threw him over to Iida, who spluttered before catching him. He was about to yell at her about safety issues when he caught her sprinting toward the store.

"Don't run in a public place, Uraraka!" he shouted as he adjusted an expressionless Midoriya in his arms. "You'll get yourself hurt!"

"Eh," Midoriya said monotonously from his position. "Iida, not to be offensive, but are we getting married or something? I wasn't aware of this advancement in our friendship."

Sero snorted and covered his mouth as Iida's face flushed red. The blue-haired boy cleared his throat awkwardly. "I have to apologize, Midoriya, but I'm afraid that I'm going to have to reject this proposal of yours, pun not intended."

Sero was holding his arms over his stomach now, still laughing as he followed Uraraka. Kirishima patted Iida's back as he followed Sero. "Have a nice wedding," he said, ignoring Iida's response to Midoriya. "Make sure to invite me sooner or later, 'kay?"

Yaoyorozu waved to Midoriya. "And do have a nice honeymoon for me, all right? I want to know all of the details."

Iida looked vaguely horrified. "B-but it's not p-possible for us to get married, we're too young!" he stammered. "And we barely know one another. Right, Midoriya? We're not even on a first-name basis!"

Midoriya looked up at him without a single shred of sympathy. "Really? That's funny, I was going to ask you to call me Izuku."

"Midoriya!"

=====

The shopping trip wasn't anything special, really. Only a few of them actually bought anything, but it was still fun. They all got ice cream (Midoriya got strawberry and mint chocolate chip), and all of them picked out a scarf for him. It was dark green, and it apparently "matched his eye color" as Uraraka put it.

He almost said that his eye color and the scarf actually clashed in color, but then he remembered that he had his contacts on. Uraraka must've noticed his sudden stop as he spoke because she raised a
brow at him. He pretended he didn't notice it.

They soon separated as the sun began to finally set. Goodbyes were exchanged, and Midoriya gave them his best smile before heading home. It was nice to hang out with his friends (they were definitely friends, he knew now) without worrying about them. And it was nice to be with them. Iida almost reminded him of some kind of modest, overbearing sibling.

He was halfway home when his phone vibrated, and he pulled it out of his pocket. Hiroji was calling him.

"Hey," he said as he answered the call. "Something up?"

"Not really," Hiroji said. "Not on my side, at least. I was just wondering how things were going on your end."

Midoriya hummed happily. "Well, things are pretty great. I made a few new friends."

Hiroji laughed. "Was that before or after you threw up on live TV?"

Midoriya felt horror strike him as his face went bright red. "Oh shit, you saw that?"

Hiroji chuckled. "First of all, language. Secondly, yes, Aika and I saw it. Trust me, though, from what I've heard from everyone, no one blames you. You're a little bit of a joke at the moment, but the media and the reporters got a serious backlash from it. A couple of them actually got fired because of it."

Midoriya sighed in relief. "Does that mean they'll back off of it for a while?" he asked earnestly.

"Perhaps. I'm hoping so, anyway. They're such a pain in the ass. I still hate them from my time as an officer."

"I bet that sucked," Midoriya agreed. "Also, what did you say about language?"

Hiroji sighed dramatically. "Hmm, sorry, can't remember. " Before Midoriya could respond, he spoke again. "Also, I'm giving the phone to Aika. Have fun!"

There was a moment of silence as muffled sounds of movement came over the phone before Aika was there. "People are making memes about you, I hope you know this."

Midoriya sighed. "Oh god, lord save me."

Aika snorted. "No really, I'm being serious. I've already seen several things where they post the words "life" over the microphone, "me" over your face, and then your puke has the words "my hopes and dreams." It's hilarious when the microphone is shoved in your face and you just throw it all up."

Midoriya groaned. "That does not make me feel good about myself. At all."

Aika laughed. "Ah, but it's so amazing though. I already have several of them saved to my phone. You know, when you become a hero, I'm going to show this to all your friends, all right? Or, better yet, I'll release it when you become No. 1. "This is what my brother was like when he was a nervous emo wreck," it'll say."

"I hope you know that I'm face palming right now."

"All the more reason for me to post it!"
"I'm not sure whether to call you amazing or a terrible human being."

"Well, I'm a dictator, so I'd prefer the latter, but if you want the former, that's fine by me. I will accept both."

"This is why it's so hard to insult you. Anything I say bad about you, you take as a compliment. And complimenting you just defeats the purpose."

Aika laughed. The meaningless chatter continued on until Midoriya arrived at his apartment. They soon bid one another goodnight as Midoriya began to peel his clothes off for his shower. Juni continued to sleep inside his new scarf, which was sitting at the foot of his bed.

He glanced at himself in the mirror for a second—he flinched as he noticed the burn scar on the side of his neck—before scuttling into the shower. He turned the knobs, letting the water run for a second before it grew warm enough for him. (He liked the water hot. Cold was bad. Cold was really, really bad. He hated the cold. He hated it, hated it, hated it—)

Tomorrow was their field trip. Midoriya had mixed feelings on it. He was excited, because there had to be some kind of new experience. It'd be a nice change of pace from how things were going now, and he liked to learn what U.A. had to offer. But he was also nervous because he'd have to tell Aizawa his quirk, which he had been putting off for a while now.

He sighed as he placed his forehead against the tiles of his shower wall. It was fine. He could figure it all out. And anyway, he was just telling the man Maiko's quirk, it couldn't be all that hard.

Right?

=====

Translation:

I'm in a hero school, and yet I'm not here to be a hero. Which puts me out of place, really. I'm an outcast.

But is it wrong of me to actually want to be a hero?

I know it's not why I'm here. I'm meant to protect my class. (Which technically makes me a "hero" when you think about it, but I'm talking about the literal thing.) And I know that I shouldn't be distracted from my goal, which has been drilled into me since I was young.

But damn, I want it so badly. Maiko would tell me stories all the time about heroes and the world nowadays, and how they fought All for One tooth and nail. How they rose from the ashes every time he beat them into the ground, how they sent wave after wave after him. And the idea of being able to help people and do it for a living, to help people because you want to, and to be able to do it all the time...

God, I've wanted it for so long. I wasn't lying when I said that I wanted to be a hero because I can and because I wanted to represent the ones that couldn't. I've heard from so many people in the rebellion about becoming heroes, about saving the day and giving the world the savior they needed. About becoming the new Symbol of Peace. And it hurts every time, because I know that they all died then, in that second invasion.

But here I am, in a hero school, learning how to be a hero. And I'm so, so close.

So why does it seem so far away?
Daizō had been hiding in the closet when Shigaraki found him. He was grinning.

"Kurogiri," he called, and the man with mist for his body walked forward. "Teleport him to home base. And put him in my room after he sees him, okay? Sensei promised that I'd get to play with him."

Daizō was crying as Kurogiri approached him. He hiccuped, and he squirmed in Shigaraki's grip. (He noticed that the man had only four fingers on his skin; he faintly remembered that Maiko told him how his quirk, Decay, worked when all five of his fingers were pressed against an object. He shuddered.)

He wanted Seiya. He wanted Maiko. He wanted anyone but them, even if it was the council that hated him. Anyone but them.

Kurogiri hummed in confirmation, his echoing voice deep with little tremors. Before Midoriya could protest, a cold feeling seeped into his pores and into his pores. He gasped at the feeling of being paralyzed before the sensation disappeared from around him. Blinking his eyes as he tried to reorient himself, he was about to move when powerful hands grabbed him by the arms. Immediately, they started to drag him off through the hallways, and he struggled fruitlessly.

He was about to yell out and protest when a blinding pain shot through him, and a short scream escaped his lips. Stars bounced in his vision as he shivered, his senses growing faintly numb for a split second before bouncing back with nerves tingling. He let out another hiccup as his body twitched involuntarily.

There were more hands on him, now, dragging him into a room that was darker than the rest. It was a cell, and chains hung from the walls, dark and shining in the small light that escaped through the door. The person shoved him to the floor, and he groaned as he hit the cold stone head-first. He was going to try to push himself up when the same hands grabbed him again, and then there was cold metal wrapping around his wrists and ankles. He thrashed, but the person there was out of reach, and he watched their back as they left, slamming the door behind him.

After a few seconds of nothing, he pulled at his chains. Hard. Nothing gave, though, no matter how much force he used. He tried again this time, but pulled even harder. Maybe if he did it continuously, he'd be able to get fre—

A large wave of pain overcame him, digging its harsh nails into his senses as he shrieked. He could barely see as it clouded his vision, and it hurt, it hurt, it hurt so badly, please make it stop, it was burning and aching and it was so painful please please make it stop, please make it stop he swore he wouldn't do it again—

He couldn't look Kaminari in the eye the next day. The faint warning of electricity still rang in his ears.
Translation:

"It's too early, it's too early, this wasn't supposed to happen, I was supposed to have another year, why did this happen, why did it, what did I do, what did I do?

WHY DID THIS HAPPEN?????

=====

Translation:

im so sorry

=====

"All right everyone," Aizawa said, deadpan. "Get onto the bus."

Iida stood outside as he ordered everyone into a straight line. Midoriya and Yaoyorozu, as Vice President and President respectively, stood outside and watched them enter. The two had agreed that Iida would serve as their unofficial "executive officer." It was a great deal of help since the boy loved to do it, and Midoriya was too shy to speak up. Yaoyorozu and him would take care of the more important matters, if they ever came up.

The three entered last after everyone else, and Midoriya took his seat near the end. Aizawa sat in his own bench near the front. There were a few words tossed back and forth, though Midoriya didn't listen entirely as he leaned his head back. Thoughts trickled from one to another, and he lingered on a few before moving onto the next.

He spoke up when Kirishima mentioned his quirk, and how he probably wouldn't be as popular because it wasn't as cool-looking as other emitter-types were.

He poked at the skin that Kirishima had hardened. "I think that it's a great quirk," he mumbled as Kirishima stared at him.

Kirishima sent him a blinding smile. "Thanks, dude! I'm glad you appreciate it."

Midoriya responded with his own smile, though it was probably weaker than his. His nightmares were still haunting him from the back of his mind.

(Kirishima noticed. He pretended not to.)

=====

Daizō was strapped to a metal chair, his wrists and ankles burning against the indentations of the metal shackles. They dug into his skin as he moved, tearing off chunks and created long, jagged cuts and blisters that would probably scar. He had been sitting there for over two days now, no food or water given to him while he waited. His stomach gnawed into itself, aching for some kind of substance.

He looked around dazedly, blinking lethargically as he breathed unsteadily. His vision was blurry, and his throat was dry. He swallowed thickly, but it only served to burn his parched mouth. He threw himself into a fit of coughs, and he pathetically tried to regain his breath as his chest shuddered weakly.

He rolled his head onto the back of the chair, blinking as the bright light invaded his sight. It was
exceptionally bright, and it made his eyes burn. Faint tracks from his tears were visible on his cheeks, but he had no more tears to cry anymore.

He took in another shaky breath, wondering if he was going to be left to starve to himself. After they gave him a small meal back in his cell (which had been drugged to knock him out) he woke up here, shivering in the cold and tired.

A face entered his vision, one with brown hair and blue eyes, and Daizō felt his lips move against one another. "Seiya?" he croaked. The face continued to move in and out of blurriness, before it faded entirely.

Hallucinations.

Daizō blinked as he heard the door open, and he tried to quickly move his head upward. The action was still slow, however, and the person who entered had already reached him by the time he could see them. He narrowed his eyes, trying to focus his attention on them, though they doubled and tripled several times before he could see straight.

And when he could, his blood ran cold.

He took in another shuddering breath as the man pressed the back of his hand gently against his cheek. He tried to turn his head away from the touch, but he only managed to corner himself as his touch lingered. He released a shaking, breathless sigh as the man's other hand tilted his chin so he was looking right at him. With both hands on his face, Daizō looked on as the man smiled.

All for One.

"How precious you are," he whispered, and Daizō could barely grasp what he was saying as the words meshed together. "It's such a shame, really, that that council can't see how much good is in you."

Daizō hiccuped again before scrunching his eyes up weakly. All for One placed a gentle hand on his shoulder, which was trembling from silent sobs. All for One gently shushed him as he undid his shackles. Daizō fell limp into the man's chest as his restraints were gone, and the man picked up his thin, shaking form with his large arms and pulled him into his broad chest. Daizō whimpered as All for One held him closer. He felt his body succumb to sleep, begging for the sweet relief of sleep. As his eyes closed, he heard All for One speak.

"Good night, my little echo. That is what they call you, right?"

Aizawa tried to ignore the haunted look that appeared in Midoriya's eyes as he stared at nothing.

There once was a woman with blonde hair and brown eyes. Her name was Maiko.

She looked at the sleeping form of Daizō as he slept. The boy was still recuperating from the injury his mother placed on him for him to show the world.

She looked at him with sad, sad eyes.

"Please let me fix this," she had whispered to the faeries and the wind. "Please let me fix him."
Because Daizō was destined for terrible things.

"You're the only one that matters, Daizō."

Midoriya got a glimmer of something that echoed in his mind. It had come out of nowhere, like a flash of lightning from clear blue skies. It happened as he was leaving the bus.

"All for One didn't invade U.A., Daizō. He didn't cause U.A.'s Judgement Day.

"There's a reason we sent you."

But that couldn't be right. Midoriya was sure that that was in Maiko's voice, and he never remembered that.

(He never had any memories of that conversation happening.)

Once upon a time, the Husband of the Man's shapeshifting daughter was approached by Maiko. The two talked, and the Husband sighed.

"You'll take care of Daizō, won't you?" he whispered.

Maiko smiled. "Of course I will."

The Husband held his hand out.

"Then you may have my quirk."

Daizō's father's quirk allowed him to share, give, and take memories.

"Welcome to the Unforseen Simulation Joint!"

Midoriya flinched as he was greeted with a familiar hero. Uraraka gushed excitedly at the rescue hero, her awe clear on her face as she spoke. Midoriya too let a warm feeling overcome him as he recognized Thirteen.

They led the group of students inside, accompanied by Aizawa and All Might respectively. The dome was massive, holding five completely different areas and zones, each with different rescue possibilities and scenarios. All Might held up one finger to the other teachers, one that raised a series of questions in Midoriya's head. He had half a mind to interrogate the man and ask what he meant when Thirteen delved into their own speech.

They explained a little about the usage of quirks. At this, several students' expressions turned serious as they continued with what they said. "We all have quirks that can be dangerous, if even lethal, at times. For example, my quirk is Black Hole. I can use it to suck up debris and dangerous objects, but I could also use it to easily kill someone if I so wished." Most of their expressions had sobered by now.
"Many quirks can be used in the wrong way, in a direction that can harm and kill. That is what I am here for—to teach you how you can use your quirks effectively to save people instead of maim them. You have already gotten a handle of the power of your quirks from Aizawa, and you have already learned what it means to use them against others. Now you will be using your quirks to help people, and help them only. I hope you can do well in my class!" A few of the students clapped.

It was nice.

Thirteen led them down the stairs as they entered the flood zone first. They split them into groups of four, and Midoriya was teamed up with Asui, Mineta, and Tokoyami. The latter nodded to him respectfully as they all waited for their own turn to work together.

"Since there are people on the sinking ship," Asui stated, "we should have a few people rescuing them and placing them on the water. Someone should be in the water and bringing them to shore."

"I can climb up the sides with my sticky balls," Mineta chimed in.

"Perhaps I should go with Mineta," Tokoyami stated. "Dark Shadow and I can get the people on board to shore, or at least to the water safely. My swimming abilities are less than lackluster, and having me swim back and forth would merely serve to hinder us."

Asui nodded. "That sounds like a good plan to me. I'm a fast swimmer with my quirk, so I should be able to transport them to the shore as well."

"I can help you, Asui," Midoriya added. Though he wasn't the fastest when it came to maneuvering underwater, he still wanted to help the female so she wouldn't be too overwhelmed.

"Yeah, and when we're done on board, we can help you after!" Mineta said.

It continued like that, each of their groups—which was shuffled after every time—completing their zones. Each time, the teachers would explain what they did wrong and how to grow. More times than not, Aizawa had to rope in a screaming Bakugo as he raged about his classmates' "stupidity."

(Kaminari flinched at that word. Midoriya had a sinking feeling why, but he didn't say anything to the blonde.)

The colder zones put him more on edge, especially the windstorm area. He managed to keep his grimace almost to himself, though his partners (Jirou, Satou, and Kouda) could see his apprehension.

They were in the last zone when Thirteen finally spoke up.

"Midoriya, wouldn't now be a good time to use your quirk?" they asked. Aizawa glanced at her curiously.

"You know what it is?" he asked, and Thirteen flinched in surprise.

"Well, of course. I rescued him from a villain attack a few years ago, and I saw him use it then." Their tone turned worried. "Does he not use it?"

"No," All Might butted in. "He does not."

Thirteen went silent. No one said anything for a while after that. Midoriya ignored the stares on the back of his neck as he continued to pull someone into the "safe zone."

He felt his cheeks light up. (He was ashamed.)
Midoriya simply didn't fit in with most of the exercises. He was always in the lower quarter of the students, no matter which zone he was in. It was fine, really; he didn't mind it too much since he got to know his classmates better, and the experience itself was worthwhile.

Overall, it was a pretty fun field trip. He'd had to act as a victim several times, and he managed to get Ashido to laugh. He had hidden under a piece of rubble. When she found him, he waved to her and, with a deadpan tone, said, "Hey. I'm dying." She snickered before picking him up with little strain. Satou had mentioned how she had managed to keep up with him in strength, which was admirable.

Aizawa pulled him aside as everyone else headed for the doorway. As Midoriya and him stood by the fountain at the middle of the dome, everyone else stopped by the entrance. Midoriya swallowed painfully as Aizawa looked out at the zones, ignoring the other. A thick silence fell over the two.

Midoriya coughed awkwardly. "So, you want me to explain my quirk now, right?"

Aizawa looked back at him. "Would there be any other reason?"

Midoriya sighed silently before steeling his nerves.

"Well, my quirk is—"

Shigaraki hummed as he played with the roots of Daizō's hair. "It's so soft and fluffy," he murmured in Daizō's ear, letting the strands fall over the tips of his fingers. "I wish that I had your hair."

Daizō shuddered as Shigaraki continued to run his hand through his curly locks.

"But you know what would look better?" Shigaraki said as he kneeled so they were face-to-face. He grinned eerily at him.

"Your hand."

"Would there be any other reason?"

Aizawa waited as Midoriya sighed silently. The boy opened his mouth, ready to speak when his eyes dulled. His body grew slack for a moment, nothing visible in his expression when his eyes lit back up. His face grew pale, and his hands twitched toward the sheaths on his legs.

"They're here," he whispered, and Aizawa tried not to let his confusion show too much.

"Who's here?" he mumbled, mostly to himself, when the lights overhead flickered. Aizawa's head shot up, and he immediately tensed. The hairs on the back of his neck stood up.

Around them, a dark mist of purple and blacks melded together, expanding from the front of the fountain. It continued to grow, dark threads of shooting outward. From the shadowy mesh, dark figures appeared, walking through the film of mist. Dozens of them, one after the other after the other. Aizawa shot in front of Midoriya, holding his arm out.

"Get upstairs," he hissed. He felt Midoriya move closer to him as they stood back-to-back.

"That might be a problem," Midoriya replied, a small hint of fear in his tone, though he hid it well.

Aizawa looked back to see that the group of villains had already blocked Midoriya's way
out. Shit, Aizawa thought. We're surrounded. He heard the snickering of the villains as they prepped
themselves for a fight. Aizawa felt his heart beating in his eardrums as he thought about the
implications of Midoriya being stuck in the battle. He growled as he pulled his goggles up to his face.
Where the hell was All Might?

The one at the front chuckled, and he could see Midoriya flinch from the corner of his eye. The man
had shaggy hair, and hands gripped different parts of his body. He let out an airy chuckle that
bounced around in the air, and Aizawa felt his shackles raise as the broken sound reached his ears.
The man peered down at the two, his grin visible behind the hand on his face.

"A hero and his little sidekick, eh?" he said, awe lacing his words. He let out a little giggle as
Midoriya stepped further back into Aizawa, the villains pressing in. The man held out his own hand
in front of him, waving Aizawa on. "You know, I was hoping I'd get to face the final boss right
away. It's such a shame that I'm going to have a little warm up instead."

His grin grew wider. "But first," he motioned to the big, black creature beside him, "let's see how
much you care for your student, Eraserhead."

Chapter End Notes

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS:

I have received requests(?) from a few readers on two different subjects. The first being
whether or not Midoriya should get One for All, the second about romance.

So, I'm going to ask for your help. Originally, I was going to have neither with
Midoriya. However, I want to see what you guys think about the two.

First of all, I was going to have All Might and Midoriya have a special bond either way,
no matter the outcome of One for All. At first, I thought that Midoriya would help All
Might find a suitable owner for OfA. If Midoriya were to receive OfA, it might change
quite a few things, so I'd have to make a few adjustments.

Second: romance isn't my thing. I'm not a good writer with it. So, it'll mostly be in the
background, and there won't be cringey mentions of relationships every other paragraph.
The most you'll get, MAYBE, is a kiss. But flirting? Not much of it. They're teenagers,
and Midoriya is too awkward.

If I were to have a relationship including Midoriya, I'm afraid Uraraka wouldn't be my
first pick. I love her, don't get me wrong, and I don't hate the ship at all. But I see them
more as friends than anything else. Also note that I don't mind relationships between
two boys or girls, or one including trans people. (I thought it was a little obvious with
Midoriya's mom, but I want to make that clear.)

Now remember, you don't have to decide right now. It can be ten chapters from now,
really. I will say, though, that those who explain why they want it or why they think it'd
be a good choice rather than just saying "I think this person and this person should date"
will sway my decision more.
Also keep in mind that no one has to date anyone, and there doesn't have to be any relationships. If you want everyone to stay as friends, I think that's great for the story too. I'm not going to judge your decision, or I'll try not to. Unless it's Shigaraki/Midoriya, because it really does not work with the set up I have right now. Maybe a different fanfiction, sorry.

Anyway, sorry for rambling! Thank you for reading it if you got this far!
Hey guys! I just wanted to thank you so, so very much for all of your support and input from last chapter. I got a lot of different views and ideas from everyone, and it really helped me sort some things out. Also, thank you so much for being respectful to one another! While some added onto other people's viewpoints and openly stated that they agreed with them in their own comments, no one tried to pick a fight or tell anyone else their opinion was wrong. I'm super ecstatic that we could all have a peaceful debate about what was right for our story, so thank you all!

Also: I promised a few of you guys a timeline because I failed to make a few things clear. However, instead of putting it here, I inserted it into the story. That way, those who don't read the notes or want an in-depth description of what's going on can understand what's going on. So don't panic that it's not here!

And last but not least, I'm sorry if this chapter seems rushed. I was debating about whether or not I should split this chapter into two parts, especially because the two different arcs seem so... different. But I decided to keep them together. And I'll be honest, I'm frankly mortified with how it turned out. So I'm super sorry if it doesn't meet up with anyone's expectations jajwkkwmauwnwki. I'm sorry, I'll just stop.

"Oh Maiko," All for One said. "To think that we have almost the same quirk."

Maiko rolled the metal pen between the tips of her fingers. She frowned before looking up to her father.

"Yeah," she said quietly.

(She hated it.)

========

She stole her first quirk when she was seven years old.

It was called Chain Conjuring.

(She loved it.)

========

Midoriya felt panic grip him as he glanced at the villains surrounding Aizawa and him. His muscles were sore from all the exercises they had done just before, and his knees protested as he bent them into a fighting stance. He felt his left hand grow number with each passing second, his fingers unwilling to cooperate with him as he pulled out his dual escrisma sticks. He tried to erase the face of Shigaraki from his mind, but his giggles still rang in his head.

He was terrified. Mortified, really. This wasn't supposed to happen for another year or so, so why...
why now? It had only been a few days at most, the League of Villains shouldn't be attacking now...

Aizawa's hair was already floating above his head, his eyes glowing behind his goggles. Two villains leapt at his teacher, and Midoriya instinctively reached his two sticks out. He felt his power bubble beneath his fingertips as thick, dark chains burst forth from the metal covering and wrapped around the two villains. He pulled sharply downward, abruptly changing their course and shoving them into the ground. He heard their faint groans over a huff that came from Aizawa. "Why couldn't you have used that before..." he muttered under his breath before going into the action.

Aizawa ducked beneath a villain's swipe of their claws, kicking him hard enough to be sent flying. He wrapped his scarf around another thug's waist and threw him into a group of others, sending them into the ground. At the same time, Midoriya upped the electricity factor on his weapons before sending two men to the ground with a well-timed hit to the head and shock; they coughed and groaned as they hit the floor. Midoriya sent another wave of chains toward a woman with a fire quirk, who attempted to burn him alive with flamethrowers that tipped the end of her fingers. He used the force of his chains to send her flying into the flood zone.

"Midoriya!" His head shot up as he glanced toward the entrance, where Yaoyorozu was standing, a horrified look on her face. The rest of the students looked terrified as well, and he grit his teeth in apprehension. He was about to turn back to his own fight to stay alive when something caught his eye.

Mist.

His eyes narrowed as he swung his escrismo stick into the head of another villain before reaching it out toward his classmates. He aimed, stilling the shaking of his hands before firing two lone chains at Kurogiri. He watched as he chains neared the flickering body, close to wrapping around him. The villain didn't even flinch as it created two portals on either side of it. The chains disappeared one end before going out the other, harmlessly avoiding him.

Midoriya gritted his teeth but imagined the chains to fling back toward him, melting back into the metal covering of the weapon. He cussed under his breath when a thug took advantage of his stillness to knock him in the stomach and throw him back, and he coughed up a glob of spit at the impact. He slid, barely regaining his footing before sending a double roundhouse kick to the face of a man with a rock-like body. He twisted around and butted the end of his escrismo stick into the side of a woman trying to sneak up on him from behind. He watched from the corner of his eye as Aizawa punched a man in the face, sending him to the floor.

The ground beneath him shook slightly, and Midoriya glanced over to see that All Might and the black creature-like thing—a nomu, his mind supplied, and he refrained from shuddering—were trading blows. Shit. It didn't look like All Might was doing too well.

Midoriya clenched his teeth as he ducked beneath the punch of another woman, grabbing onto her forearm and flinging her into a group of other villains. He heard it again this time, a shriek of panic.

"Midoriya!"

He turned.

Shit.

=====

Yaoyorozu was prepared to leave. In fact, all of them were. Her classmates had started climbing the
steps toward the entrance, most of them complaining about how sore they were. She reached the top of
the staircase, stretching her arms as she walked. Today had been a great experience, and she
already had a few things planned out to learn from. While her combat experience wasn't lacking, her
on-the-spot thinking creatively was less than spectacular. She knew that she could do more with her
quirk, but the few ideas that popped into her head simply didn't seem logical or wasn't something that
she could effectively pull off yet.

She glanced behind her to see that Midoriya and Aizawa were still standing near the center of the
platform below, a few meters from the center fountain. She was worried about the usage of his quirk
and if he was going to get expelled for it or not. She knew that Midoriya could be a great hero, but if
he didn't use his quirk, it was likely that Aizawa wouldn't have patience to keep him in his class.
Biting her lower lip, she watched as they exchanged a few words when Midoriya suddenly froze.

And then they appeared.

Yaoyorozu felt her stomach turn to lead as she inhaled sharply, watching as a dark portal appeared
around the two. It stretched long and wide, and out walked a single figure. And then two. And then
four. And then nine, and then sixteen, and then there were enough to have the two completely
surrounded, and the number just continued to grow, grow, grow.

"Wh-what the hell is going on?" Kaminari said, his eyes wide with panic.

Yaoyorozu's eyes widened in turn when something occurred to her.

"Someone's broke into U.A. security systems!" someone said, and chaos ensued.

Yaoyorozu was pressed against the glass window, Midoriya curled up beside her. He was shivering,
his arms tightly pressed around himself as his eyes gained a faraway look in them.

It was the press, Iida explained as he jumped onto the exit sign. Everyone calmed down.

And yet Midoriya's face was pale.

"What's the matter?" she asked him. "Is something wrong?"

Midoriya flinched. "Someone just looked familiar to me, that's all," he mumbled.
She couldn't get anything out of him after that.

Had these people used the press break in to their advantage? Yaoyorozu turned to Thirteen. "Sensei, are those villains?" she asked, her voice wobbling despite her trying to put on a brave front. She was president, dammit, she had to at least act like she had everything under control. Panicking was not an option. "What happened to the trespasser sensors?"

"We have them, of course..." Thirteen trailed off.

Todoroki picked up Thirteen's statement. "Did they only appear here, or around the whole school?" He paused as the attention was moved onto him, and he watched with a careful eye as the villains pressed in toward Midoriya and Aizawa. He felt a pang of something flash through him, something that told him that he had to act, now.
"Either way, if the sensors aren't responding, that means they have someone with a quirk that has prevented such." His frown deepened. "An isolated area separated from the main campus during a time when a class is supposed to be here—they might be fools, but they're not dumb." He narrowed his eyes and felt his right side cool considerably. Aizawa flung a man into three others with his scarf, knocking them unconscious with practiced ease. "This surprise attack was carefully planned with some sort of goal in mind."

Yaoyorozu let out a noise of frustration. "Kaminari, can you attempt to reach the school with your quirk? It's possible someone with a radio-wave quirk is interfering."

Kaminari let out a small confirmation as he pressed his fingers against the radio receptor on his ear.

Thirteen turned to All Might. "You've used up your time," Thirteen hissed as they watched All Might crouch. The man turned and shot them a smile.

"Don't worry. I shall take them out in a flash. Thirteen, you must take the students out of here and to safety. I shall get Young Midoriya and Aizawa as soon as possible." He sent them a thumbs up before jumping toward the fountain, and Yaoyorozu watched in amazement at his speed as her bangs whipped in her face. The amount of force that all of that had to take...

Her awe turned to horror as the black creature, which stood beside the man with the shaggy hair and hand-covered body, crouched as well before shooting up from the ground. Its trajectory was almost parallel to that of All Might's, and she felt her body freeze as the creature swung a clawed fist into All Might's stomach midair. The two hit the ground and rolled, tearing up concrete and dirt from the landslide zone. All Might soon got to his feet a little ways away from the monster, though she noticed the blood trickling from the side of his mouth. The thing got to its feet as well, almost mechanically as its expressionless eyes bulged.

It said nothing, even as it ran toward All Might. Yaoyorozu wanted to continue watching, if only for the sake of knowing if the man was going to be all right, when Iida grabbed her arm and tugged her toward the entrance. A glance showed her that she wasn't the only one frozen in place. But no, she couldn't leave, not when...

Not when...

"Midoriya!" she yelled, and the boy below glanced up at her. He was too far away to actually see his expression, but she could see him pause. He whacked another villain upside the head, sending him sprawling before he suddenly reached his weapon upward. She had no time to react as something metal was ripped from the surface and whizzed by her face. She could feel the air move past her face, not as violently as All Might's jump had been, but quick all the same.

Were those... chains?

She watched as the linked metal parts shot toward the mist villain she hadn't noticed was there. Situational awareness was another factor that she'd have to do better on, apparently.

The villain merely avoided it with his mist, the chains disappearing inside before safely leaving on the other side. She looked back to see Midoriya say something before retracting the metal, and she hissed as one of the thugs sent a kick to his gut.

She turned around, ignoring the burning sensation in her eyes as she did so. This wasn't fair to him, he shouldn't even be in that position...

"I'm afraid that I can't let you leave," the mist villain said in his echoing tone. "I won't let you."
(At the bottom, Aizawa punched another man in the face when he noticed the dark shape in front of his students. *Shit! I just blinked once and he got away!* He turned toward the staircase, as if to run up it, when more villains blocked his way through. Off to the side, Midoriya was panting as he slung a man to the ground with his legs alone.)

"We are the League of Villains," the villain continued. "It may be presumptuous of us, but we have invited ourselves into the home of the heroes, U.A. High School, in order to have All Might—the Symbol of Peace—take his last breath." Yaoyorozu froze as the words comprehended in her mind. She felt her breath get knocked out of her by the words alone.

**Kill... All Might?**

She thought about the black creature which had pummeled the No. 1 hero from the air. Was that... was that how they were going to try...? But they couldn't! All Might was leagues ahead of all of these villains. His immense power brought down buildings, created craters with a single punch...

Her mind was whizzing a mile a second as the mist-like villain spoke again. "It's my pleasure to say that this will be an effortless ending for all of you..." His smokey body shot outward. "—since no one will be able to save you." His voice grew darker. "This is my role to play."

Thirteen unlocked one of the caps on their fingers, ready to point it at the villain when Kirishima and Bakugo stepped forward, simultaneously striking against him. Smoke erupted from Bakugo's explosion, sending smoke billowing between them. Yaoyorozu coughed as she held a hand over her face, trying to see through the smokescreen Bakugo created.

**Did that... did that even work?**

She squashed down her hope before it could bloom. She didn't want to lead herself into a false trap that would end her worse off than before. Gritting her teeth, she looked ahead, listening to Kirishima boast.

"Did you even consider that you'd get beaten by us before you did it?" he asked, arms crossed in an "X" shape as his arms hardened. Bakugo stood beside him, stance at the ready as he smirked.

They waited for a second, the smoke still heavy as no sound prevailed.

"Oh dear," the deep voice echoed ominously, "that's dangerous." His tone had a slight tilt to it, as if he was mocking them, but Yaoyorozu heard the faint apprehension in his voice behind the pounding in her ears. The smoke swerved outward from the dark gas body as a glint of metal became visible. "That's right. Even if you are students, you are excellent golden eggs." The floating golden of his eyes narrowed as they formed back into place, stray tendrils of light seeping from the corners of his slitted eyes.

"No!" Thirteen shouted. "Move away, both of you!"

The villain ignored them. "My job is to scatter you all—" A thick mist seeped from his body and shot toward them, surrounding the group they formed at the center of the entrance. The dark purple pulled and twisted around them, swirling in between each of their figures and pushing them with an unknown force. "—and torture you to death!"

Kirishima could be heard from where Yaoyorozu was, just barely over the swarm of gaseous particles that created a low hissing sound. "What the—!?" he choked out. From beside her, Yaoyorozu felt movement, as if someone was pulled out of the cloud twisting around her. She held her arms in front of her face, her hair blowing in the wind before the cold strings of the mist curled
around her and pulled. She looked back, just in time to see All Might between the slits of purple gas as he punched the black creature from before. The mindless monster shrieked in pain as it flew backward, and—

"Midoriya!" she shrieked again, because the boy was right in the line of getting crushed by it.

The boy turned to him, eyes wide. Sweat rolled down the side of his face as he panted, and a fearful expression came over him.

And then the black consumed her entirely.

=====

Todoroki felt the coldness seep into his body, swallowing him whole. He bared through it with a scowl, burying his discomfort before the feeling ended. He was dumped legs-first, and he winced as his knees stung at his not-so-graceful landing. Before he even had time to turn around, there was a villain running up to him, trying to decapitate him with a club.

Todoroki ducked under it, glaring at the woman as he sent a wave of ice at her. She shrieked at the freezing temperature as he twisted his torso around, sliding his right foot into the ground. Ice sprung across the floor, freezing several more solid within seconds within the landslide zone.

"It's pathetic," he started, "to lose against a single child." The frozen villains' teeth chattered noisily as he glared down at them.

(Mocking opponents when they were beneath you; it was pretty effective to lower their morale into the dirt. It was too bad that his father used it as well.)

Todoroki scoffed. "'Scatter you and kill you,' huh?" He exhaled sharply, his breath visible. "I hate to say this..." He looked at all of them without a shred of sympathy. "... but you just look like guys with quirks they didn't know what to do with." He stepped smoothly through their frozen forms, walking past all of them with ease. He didn't humor the man who whined in pain.

"Th-this guy... the instant we warped here..." one stammered. "Is he really a kid?"

Todoroki ignored what they had to say as he made his way down the landslide. Killing All Might... At first glance, I thought they had gathered all their elite and would overpower him by numbers...

A man with a green bandanna around his eyes leapt out from behind a rock, aiming to hit him with a dagger. Todoroki shot a wave of ice at him, freezing him solid at the same time he moved slightly to the right. A spear missed his head just slightly, which came from another man trying to sneak up on him from behind as the other attacked. He grabbed onto the metal handle with his right hand. Immediately, the handle turned to ice, freezing the man thoroughly.

The two men stared at one another, shocked that they could both be shut down in less than five seconds by the same boy. They made choked sounds as the ice cooled them considerably.

... but a closer look shows that the pawns they prepared for us were just a ragtag bunch of thugs.

He pulled the frozen spear from the man's iced body, letting him fall to the ground face-first without any way to protect himself.

From what I saw, there were only four or five truly dangerous people. He looked upward, toward the plaza in the center of the USJ building. If that's the case, then the next step I should take is...
His smile hid something dangerous as he looked to the man in front of him, who was still standing. "Hey," he said, ignoring the bitter taste in his mouth as he let his smug tone seep through. "Just so you know, that ice is colder than what you might expect it to be. At this rate, your cells will slowly die." The man's expression grew tearful as his eyes widened. The one on the floor let out a pitiful whine. "I want to be a hero," Todoroki continued, his smile disappearing from his face altogether. He turned to the man fully, letting his blue eye stare the man still standing down. "I would like to avoid something so cruel if possible."

He stepped closer to the man, ignoring the tears pooling in his eyes. Raising his right hand up to the man's face, he let a cold burst of air run from his palm directly to him. The man let out a small, pathetic sound of distress. Todoroki stared down at him, his tone growing dark and frosty.

"On what basis do you think you can kill All Might?" His eyes narrowed as the tinkling of ice rung in his ears. "What's your plan?"

======

Bakugo yelled angrily as he sent an explosion to a villain's face, knocking him back. He was standing back-to-back with Kirishima as they were surrounded with villains. Hidden deep within the collapse zone, the two began to fight tooth and nail.

"Keep up with me, why don't you, shitty hair!?" the blonde spat as he sent an explosion over the hardening user's shoulder, pushing another villain through the wall.

And Kirishima grinned. "Aren't I?"

=====

In the mountain zone, Yaoyorozu blinked open her eyes and paled. The thugs were everywhere, too many to count. Jirou and Kaminari stood behind her as she pulled a metal pole out from her arm, gripping it tightly with two hands. She grimaced as she attempted to put on a false mask of determination, and she pushed away her fear.

God dammit. She knew being a hero had its bad sides, but to meet villains now? When they were only a couple days in?

A villain ran up to her, and she swung the pole around before jabbing it straight into his forehead. He collapsed to the ground, and Yaoyorozu turned to the next, her anger rekindling.

Like hell I'm going down today.

("You guys can't count on me! I can't do anything with my quirk at the moment except let electricity flow around my body! All of my other abilities are useless!"

"Fine, then I'll use you as a human stun gun!"

"Seriously!? Idiot— Oh, it's working. I'm strong! You two can count on me!"

"Please take this more seriously!")

=====

In the fire zone, Ojiro fell into a fighting stance as his tail vibrated. In the squall zone, Kouda and Tokoyami stood back-to-back.
And in the flood zone, Tsuyu and Mineta hid on the boat, trying to wrack their brain for any sort of idea.

=====*

The fear was starting to become overrun, Sero noted. He didn't bother even trying to keep up his smile as he clenched his fist, trying to calm the seething rage that bubbled in him, hiding just beneath the surface. He hissed as he stared down the mist villain, his elbows twitching at the urge to use his tape.

How dare they... how dare they attack us...

His fist tightened even further.

How can people be so... so...

He looked at the huge half-sphere of dark mist that covered his classmates. He gritted his teeth as he heard the cries of shock and fear from them before they altogether disappeared, the dome collapsing into itself. Sero shut his eyes tightly, trying to get the image out of his head before he snapped his head toward the villain.

Inhumane!?

He watched as Uraraka and Ashido got up onto their two feet, the former helping Iida as well. Sato cracked his knuckles as he move to the middle of the entryway, gaze hardened and jaw tight. Sero positioned himself so they were standing side-by-side, Thirteen not too far in front of them.

"Shouji," Iida started, "is everyone here? Can you check?" He was tense as the other male's tentacle arms began to turn into extra eyes and ears, searching for their fellow classmates.

After a moment of hesitation, Shouji responded. "Everyone's scattered, but they're all in this building," he replied.

Their makeshift group sighed in relief, and Sero glanced back to see that Mina and Uraraka were standing behind him. His comfort immediately turned back to worry and upset, however. The fact that they were all separated, stuck with several villains...

Who knew what could happen?

"Damn it," he said, "physical attacks can't hit him, and he can warp things..." Sero gritted his teeth as another curse escaped him. "His quirk's the worst!"

A moment of silence followed his exclamation as they all stared at the mist villain. In front of him, Thirteen tensed before turned slightly toward them. "Iida?" they asked.

Iida looked surprised as he glanced up. "Yes?"

Thirteen let out a small sigh before speaking again. "I entrust this duty to you." They shifted again, moving one step forward. "Run to the school and tell them about what is happening here." Shock warped over Iida's features as they continued to speak, alongside a hint of denial in his eyes. "The alarms are not sounding, and our phones don't have signal. The alarm system is based on infrared rays." Thirteen's tone turned morose. "Even though Eraserhead is erasing people's quirks left and right, they are still not working, which means they must have someone with an interference quirk who hid right when they arrived."
Thirteen ducked their head slightly as the mist villain took form again. "It would be faster for you to run than for us to find that person."

Sero gulped as he thought about that responsibility. Iida was strong, but to know that you had to run in order to save everyone... and to know that, if you didn't run fast enough, someone could get hurt, or worse, killed.

Iida immediately interrupted. "But it would be a disgrace to leave everyone behind—" he started, indignant.

"Go, Emergency Exit," Satou cut off as he moved in front of the runner, almost no room for argument in his voice. "If you can get outside, there'll be alarms." Sero took a deep breath before joining Satou, brows set in a determined angle. "That's why these guys are only doing this inside, right?"

Sero picked up from where he left off. "As long as you go outside, they won't follow you!" He felt his tape stirring in his elbows as he glared at the mist villain. It was a hard responsibility... but Iida was strong. Iida could do it. He could get them help, he could save them. "Blow away this fog with your legs!"

Iida frowned, his brow furrowed. He turned toward the entrance, a whirlwind of emotions in his eyes and his jaw clenched. There was a flash of pain in his eyes, though, hidden behind the bright glare of his glasses as his engines began to heat up.

"Even if you have no other choice," the mist villain began, "are there really idiots who talk about their plans in front of the enemy!??"

"We did it because it doesn't matter if we're found out!" Thirteen rebutted, holding up their finger higher than before. As the mist began to spread upward, Thirteen began to suck in the gas. "Black Hole!" they yelled.

And it didn't take but half a second for it all to go wrong.

"Thirteen..." the villain said. A short sound that almost seemed like a chuckle came from him as his body twisted. Suddenly, a dark portal appeared right behind Thirteen, taking their winds and throwing it right back at them. Sero felt his stomach drop down to his feet, his body frozen despite his mind screeching for him to do something.

"A warp gate!" Thirteen exclaimed breathlessly as Iida reached forward instinctively. The mist villain's eyes slimmed with smug glee as the back of Thirteen's suit began to shatter and crumble. They stumbled as their quirk came to a halt. Thirteen gasped for breath, shuddering as the back of their suit was left wide open. Sero felt bile rise into his throat as dark particles began to taint the edges of the torn fabric. "H-he got... me..." they mumbled as they tilted forward.

"Sensei!" Ashido cried, tears forming in her eyes. She caught the falling hero, gently placing them onto the ground. Sero felt his own tears forming in his eyes as he looked away, the burning in his
chest growing with each passing second. These... these people thought that they could do whatever
they wanted... Sero's brow twitched as he kept himself from running at the villain without second
thought.

_What kind of person could maim another and laugh at it?_

A single tear fell from his eye.

_What kind of person... could... could find enjoyment in the pain of others!?_

Sero felt his anger flare, brighter and hotter than ever before. Vigilantes were one thing, because they
sometimes fought for reasons more than greed and selfishness... but for people to attack innocent
lives just because they wanted to...

_It pissed him off!_

Iida stood, staring in silent shock. Satou was the first to react, and he placed a hand on Iida's arm, his
eyes pleading. "Iida, run!" he said, his grip tightening, and he pushed the engine-quirk user closer to
the doors. "Hurry!"

Iida set his jaw as he looked toward the doorway. He still looked split, still not sure of himself.

"Go, Iida!"

Iida's head snapped toward Sero, whose expression was dark, fury hidden in his eyes. "We need you
more then ever before. We need you, Iida! Our classmates need you!" He let out a choked sob that
he was obviously trying to suppress as he ducked his head. A shadow fell over his eyes. "You have
to help all of us. You have to run!"

Iida pressed his lips together, but he finally nodded. "Alright," he said, his determined gaze holding
more steel than before.

Sero let a smile finally don his face, though anyone could see the pain and ire in it. He let out a shaky
sigh before nodding to Iida. "Ashido," he called while he still faced the mist villain. He bent his
knees as he formed his fighting stance, his arms in front of his face. "Aim your acid at him to distract
him." His eyes narrowed. "I'm going to wrap my tape around that body of his that he's hiding like a
fucking burrito."

The villain tensed. "How did you—?"

Iida burst past him. Uraraka, floating above the unsuspecting villain, pressed her five fingers
together. Her face was green, even as she sent a hard kick to the mist guy's head. The villain hissed
as he moved further away from her. "Pretty obvious," she growled, "when Bakugo and Kirishima
attacked you. I saw the glimpse of your body then."

"Which means—" Ashido cried angrily as she slid around him, hands raised and acid flying, "—
you're not as indestructible as you made yourself out to be!" She growled, her golden eyes glowing.
"This is for hurting my teacher!" She yelled as a massive burst of acid erupted from her palms and
toward the villain. He shot upward, avoiding the attack as his golden eyes widened. He looked up,
finding Iida already halfway to the door.

"No!" he cried, trying to move past the two girls when Sero's tape wrapped around his middle.
Uraraka pressed her hand against the metal covering, and Sero broke off his piece of tape to hand it
to Satou. As Shouji handed a fierce punch to the mist villain, Sero let his smile grow into a grin.
"Let 'em rip."

Satou's eyes widened for a second before an equally determined smile came onto his face. "Of course," he said as he grabbed onto the tape and began to swing it around, watching as the mist villain twirled in large circles. Just as Satou was beginning to feel his head spin, he let go, watching as the mist villain flew into the middle of the dome before disappearing.

Behind him, the door was cracked open, light spilling through.

======

Midoriya kicked a woman across the face, pushing her back as he ducked beneath a punch that was sent for the back of his head. Grabbing the forearm it belonged to, he twisted his weight and pulled them over his shoulder, slamming them onto the ground. As they gasped for breath, he grabbed the metal piece from his belt, letting three thick chains wrap around the four sprinting toward him. They all were pulled together into a furious bundle, and one of the girls huffed and complained when an arm was knocked into her face. He pulled them forward before sending one to the ground with a high kick, the other three following his movement. The four were stuck on the ground, making snarky comments to one another.

He didn't bother to hear their argument as he punched a woman smaller than him in the throat. She made several gargling sounds as she fell to her knees, clutching where he hit her. He would feel bad if she wasn't trying to stab him with her blade-tipped hair.

Wiping a bit of blood from his split lip, he tried to ignore the pounding of his head. He wasn't injured terribly, but several times he was hit by stray attacks that he hadn't seen coming. Taking in several deep breaths as he tried to regulate his heartbeat, he looked over to Aizawa, who had just knocked out two more villains. He was also breathing heavily, though he hid it better.

Midoriya winced as he moved his shoulder wrong. He placed shaking fingers over the wound.

"Midoriya!" Yaoyorozu shrieked. He looked up to see her expression; she was looking horrifyingly at something behind him. Instinctively, he dove to the side, but not before something scraped against his shoulder blade. He hissed as he brought a hand to the wound while still on the ground, watching with wide eyes as the Nomu and All Might flung past him. Aizawa was by his side, pulling him to his feet.

"Don't die," he ordered before swinging a man into the air and throwing him into the flood zone.

Midoriya brought his hand back, clenching his teeth at the sight of blood coating his fingers. All Might had disappeared into the flood zone at the order of Aizawa to get Asui and Mineta to safety.

"I can't let this creature hurt you or anyone else," he had said as his shaking arms held the nomu's in a sort of arm lock.

"And I can't let my students die," Aizawa had snapped back. "It's only going after you, and you're wasting your time trying to defeat it! It'll stay here if you aren't there to fight it!" He punctuated his sentences with a blow to a villain's face. "Save my students first. Then worry about it for fuck's sake!"

All Might had hesitated but nodded, jumping around the dome as to confuse the creature that couldn't compute well enough.

Midoriya tried not to let his pain grow so visible on his face as he glanced toward Shigaraki. His left hand twitched as he tried to clench it to little to no avail. The man had a much smaller frame than
when he remembered, and his hair fell in shaggy waves down the front of his face and around him. A hand rested, perfectly sculptured to fit on his face. One red eye peeked out from the cold fingers.

Midoriya felt his heart skip a beat when he noticed that there weren't any hands that resembled his own. Bile rose in his throat.

Without warning, Shigaraki leaped forward, moving quickly at the still form of Aizawa. He aimed several punches and strikes at the man, who ducked lower to the ground. Aizawa dodged them, elbowing Shigaraki in the stomach as he was left wide open. Shigaraki coughed, the breath knocked out of him, as he twisted to the side so he was facing Aizawa's back, gripping the end of Aizawa's elbow. Midoriya's heart went into his throat as he sprinted forward. A small chortle escaped Shigaraki.

"Geez, Eraserhead. You're so cool," he said. His grin widened, the tilt of his lips visible on either side of his mask, and Aizawa tensed under his hold as his jacket sleeve began to break away, and then those dry fingertips were touching the skin of his elbow, and then Aizawa felt a tingling, numbing sensation as his skin began to crack. His eyes widened as they began to crumble away, and he tried to jerk away from him; Shigaraki's grip was strong, though, and it only continued to grow tighter with each passing second.

Midoriya hunched his shoulders and ran forward, knocking Shigaraki with his whole body weight, who wasn't expecting the attack and was caught off guard. He was sent rolling, and the man pressed his hands into the ground to slow his movement. The man growled lightly under his breath as he pushed his arms from underneath him, forcing himself back up.

He swayed on his feet before lurching back forward, aiming a hand right at his face. Midoriya ducked, grabbing onto the outstretched arm and holding Shigaraki still for just long enough that he could send a high kick up to his chin. Shigaraki groaned at the impact, but he landed his other hand on Midoriya's shoulder. Midoriya's eyes widened, and he yelped as he felt the cloth of his vest and then his jumpsuit start to turn to dust. Grabbing the wrist, he twisted it until the man let go of him, and he pedaled backward to put some distance between the two.

Shigaraki made a guttural scoffing sound as his nails found the part of his neck that wasn't covered in hands, and he scratched deeply. Aizawa took a step back, pulling Midoriya even farther with him.

"You kids," the unstable man muttered. His scratching dug deeper into his skin. "You're all so annoying. All I want is to kill All Might, and yet you keep on getting in my way—"

He stopped scratching as he glanced over to the side, at the edge of the platform, where All Might was setting down a nauseous-looking Mineta and a pale Asui. There was blood in the latter's hair, and pink, blood-tinted water rolled down the side of her face.

"Ah," he said, a smile appearing on his face. "There you are." He giggled. "Go, Nomu."

All Might didn't even hesitate to reciprocate the challenge, and he dove right back in with a punch to the nomu's head. A blast of air pressure sent Midoriya's hair swirling around his head, and he blew some of it out of his face as it covered his eyes. Aizawa suddenly grabbed him by his arm, pulling him to the side where Asui and Mineta were. "You and those two need to go and get out of here, now," he ordered.

"You need to go, Midoriya," Aizawa said, looking into his eyes. "Go by the entrance. All Might and I have it taken care of."

"His grip tightened before he released him. Midoriya stood, frozen, before nodding. He turned and ran; he sprinted up the stairs. If he could stop Kurogiri, that would solve many of their problems—"
He heard crunching. Midoriya paused as he turned.


The nomu grabbed his head and shoved it into the ground, another loud crunching sound reverberating around the room.

Aizawa's brain trauma was too severe. He didn't make it.

Midoriya dug in his heels. He whipped his head around so he was facing the man, panic in his eyes. He felt his breath hitch as the possibility arose again. Even if these were at totally different times, the fact still remained that Aizawa wasn't ready and he could be killed and no, no, he couldn't let that happen! "I can't leave you alone with them," he hissed. "You'll die out there."

Aizawa snarled back at him. "And what am I supposed to let you do, get yourself killed? This is not your job, it's mine. I'm meant to protect you, not the other way around, and I'm not going to let a future hero get himself killed."

CRACK!

Midoriya had tripped. Aizawa had to save him. The thug snapped his back.

He didn't make it.

"And what is that future hero supposed to do without his teacher, huh?" Midoriya snapped back. "What about the other nineteen people in my class who need you?"

"There are more teachers than heroes," Aizawa retaliated. "I can be replaced. You can't."

"Oh really?" Midoriya barked. "Then tell me, Aizawa-sensei, how many new-time heroes die a year because their teachers fed them lies? Because they weren't prepared for the job?" He could feel his eyes tearing up as his voice turned into a hushed, venomous whisper. "And how many have died early after you taught them? Our class doesn't need a replacement, they need Eraserhead."

Aizawa's grip on his arm tightened considerably. "My teaching skills is beside the point," he replied. "Don't argue with me, Problem Child."

Midoriya felt a pang of hurt go through him at the familiar nickname.

"Don't... die," Aizawa choked out. "... damn... Problem Child."

He didn't make it.

"You—"

"It doesn't matter about me!" Aizawa snapped loudly. "Your safety is what I care about! So stop worrying about me and worry about yourself!" He pushed him toward the other two students, who were already heading toward the entrance. (Asui was swaying, though, and Mineta had to help keep her up.)

"How touching, Eraserhead." Aizawa zipped around, and Midoriya instinctively pulled out his escrisma stick. He shot out a single thick chain that wrapped around Shigaraki's ankle, pulling with
what little strength he had left in his arms. The man stumbled slightly, but he pulled back equally hard, barely affected by Midoriya's intervention.

"Go!" Aizawa hissed, his hair already floating above his head and his scarf growing lighter in weight. Midoriya hesitated. He didn't want to go, not when Aizawa had died so many times already. The last thing he wanted was for him to get hurt again. But, if he stayed, then chances were that Aizawa would get distracted with his attention split. If he got caught up with Shigaraki, then that would just make everything worse than before.

But he didn't want to leave him. If Aizawa died... then what? He was just as big a piece of Class 1-A as the class itself. What would happen if he was killed? Would a replacement really fix things?

He ducked his head in frustration but nodded, and he turned to face the stairs and ran. He got halfway there, panting as his tired legs pushed him to go further. His adrenaline was starting to wear off when the sounds of explosions caught him off guard, and he slid to a stop before twisting around. Bakugo had Kurogiri pinned down on the ground, smirking, while Kirishima pounced on Shigaraki. Todoroki was just running from the last part of his zone, which seemed to be the landslide area.

Kirishima sent a wide swing of his fist toward the man's face, wearing his smile all the while he shot punches. Kirishima then, with some stroke of confidence, jumped on top of Shigaraki, sending him to the ground as he wrapped his hardened hands around the man's wrists. Aizawa was shouting something at the redhead—likely telling him to get out of the fight—when Shigaraki yelled out for Nomu, who was staring back at a panting All Might.

"Nomu! Get this thing off of me!"

No.

Kirishima paled as he looked over to the nomu, eyes wide. "Huh?" slipped from his mouth.

Midoriya blinked once.

Kirishima was as red as his hair.

"Nomu! Get this thing off of me!" Shigaraki yelled.

Without thinking, Midoriya aimed the ends of both his escrima sticks at the dark hulking figure. He felt his skin burst into tingles as nine thick, dark chains whipped around the nomu's open chest and abdomen. The nomu instantly looked up to him. It raised its hand, pulling against the chains as it grabbed one and squeezed. Its muscles tensed as it continued to try to break the link, but the metal stayed and refused to bend under its will.

Midoriya clenched his teeth as the nomu tried to pull out of his chain's grip, and he dug his heels into the ground. Even so, he felt himself moving forward, his strength little compared to the creature's. Nomu's hand remained tightly around one of the chain links, squeezing it harder, harder, harder—Midoriya felt white take over his vision. He gasped, feeling like something deep inside him had snapped and left him thoughtless. All comprehension fell out the window as a period of blank nothingness came over him. Before he could even see again, his head pounded angrily, a stabbing beat of constant pressure. He let out a small noise of pain as he blinked, trying to refocus his vision. When everything stopped spinning, he made out the broken chains on the ground and the saliva and blood at his feet. He tasted a slight tang of iron on his tongue as something trickled from the corner of his mouth.
So he got backlash if the chains broke. Good to know.

Stumbling as he tried to regain his balance, he blinked around at his surroundings. Kirishima was standing behind Aizawa, who was pale.

But where was the nomu?

Midoriya felt static ring in his ears for a second, the sensation familiar. It reminded him of when Kurogiri's quirk was activated, when it made the hair on his arms stand up. Midoriya blinked as something cold centered near his back, and he tensed.

His felt his eyes grow blank with shock.

Todoroki turned to stare at him. His lips parted as something akin to dread flashed in his eyes. His right foot immediately sprung up ice, the cold, sharp texture crawling along the ground and closer toward him, but it was too slow. Aizawa was there, just a feet away, and Midoriya glanced toward him, terror thrumming under his skin. Even more static piled in his ears, in his eyes, and he felt his left hand grow still.

I'm not going to let a future hero get themselves killed.

Aizawa's goggles had been partially broken. Midoriya wondered when that happened. He also wondered why that red eye was so horror-stricken. A shadow fell over him, blocking out the lights from the top of the dome.

Time travel, he frantically thought. Use it. Use it now. Use it now, now, you have to use it now—

He could feel his stomach twisting as Todoroki's ice came within a few meters from him. But it took time to successfully travel back, several precious seconds that he usually always had.

You have to use it, you have to use it, faster faster faster faster faster faster faster

There was no way he had enough time. He didn't have enough time. He didn't have enough time. He didn't have enough time.

The nomu's shadow grew even longer as it finally exited the warp gate completely. Its clawed hand grabbed onto his shoulder, which smarted slightly from his wound. He wanted to look back, he wanted to fight, but the creature was so fast and he couldn't see and why wasn't his body moving any quicker than before?

It took the nomu a tenth of a second to appear behind Midoriya. Midoriya felt his eyes grow wide in stupor at the speed, not able to comprehend the hitch in his breath as he slowly turned his head. His heart was low and almost still in his chest, beating faintly and with hours in length between them. He glanced upward, feeling his shock just start to bleed into the beginnings of panic, but he needed time to actually feel something, and he didn't have that time. He looked at the thing in the eye, watched as its arm reached back, watched as its muscles stretched taught, watched as he felt his eyes continue to widen.

Three more tenths of a second passed.

Hurry up and move, change time, don't let him hurt you don't let him hurt you, don't let him hurt you, you're going to be okay stop please stop please stop stop stop stop stop stop

He felt ice underneath his feet as the nomu reared its arm back. Its muscles were stretched taught as it reached the end of its range. And then it came flinging back as if it were a boomerang, and Midoriya watched as it came ever closer, closer, closer.
He exhaled.

A blinding pain erupted from his side. He felt his feet lift off the ground as cold, frigid air rushing past him. Oxygen refused to refill his lungs as he flew backward. From the corner of his vision, he saw the man with the blonde hair next to the nomu, arm reached out as if to stop the attack from happening.

He was too late.

*Your safety is what I care about!*

Midoriya glanced to Aizawa, who was frozen still. They locked gazes. Midoriya felt tears forming in the corner of his eyes.

Sometime, somewhere, his back finally hit a wall. His head snapped back, causing a harsh impact to the base of his skull. Stars danced in his eyes as he slumped over. He felt lightheaded.

Colors meshed into a swirl of pictures that didn't add up. He blinked several times to clear it, but he only found himself nodding off. There was an acorn-shaped blob in the corner of his vision. His eyes closed.

*Don't die... damn... Problem Child.*

=====

"You're the only one that matters, Daizō."

=====

Midoriya is curled up next to a man with long dark hair. The two are watching a movie that Midoriya had never seen before. Squished between the two of them, a small gray cat purrs happily. There are ungraded papers sitting on the coffee table in front of them, but neither of the two pay attention to it.

*The man brings an arm around Midoriya's shoulders, bringing him closer. "I promised I'd keep you safe," he says suddenly, breaking the silence. "I plan on keeping it."*

*Midoriya nods.*

*(He believes him.)*

=====

It was a tense three-day weekend. U.A gave the students an extra day off as they recovered. Yaoyorozu had to stop by Recovery Girl's office. She had used a lot of her extra fat cells in the exercises they did previous to the attack, and creating even more objects to use against the villains just exacerbated her condition. By the time the entire thing was over, she was a lot thinner than she usually should be. She was joined by Asui, who suffered a bleeding head injury while she held off several villains from the flood zone until All Might arrived.

The two remained silent until Asui finally spoke up.

"You look sad, Yaoyorozu," she said bluntly.

Yaoyorozu rubbed her arm. "I suppose I am, Asui."
"Call me Tsuyu," Asui corrected. "And, if I may ask, is this about Midoriya?"

Yaoyorozu flinched. A memory of blood and a limp form being carried on a stretcher flashed through her mind. "That is correct," she said quietly.

Asui stared at her for a long moment before she turned away. "Don't worry," she said. "He's strong. And I'm sure you'll be able to see him in no time."

Yaoyorozu nodded, though she didn't feel any more relieved. "Yeah..."

As they approached the gate, Yaoyorozu looked up at the sky. For all that happened, it was a clear day with little to no clouds. She blinked as the sun burned her eyes for a second. They watered, and she did her best to blink it away as she headed home.

She unlocked her phone, ready to ask Midoriya if they could talk—if he could help her out because terrible things happened that day.

And then she remembered what happened to him. Her eyes began to water again, though for an entirely different reason.

And she burst into tears, letting herself sob as tears hit the screen of her phone.

=-=-

Tsukauchi Naomasa came for a statement later that day. She said very little words.

She didn't cry at all.

(She didn't have any tears left.)

=-=-

Translation:

It's weird to say this, but... I'm forgetting a lot of the little details I remembered when I was younger. I guess it's a combination of all the past years and new experiences. Recently, I've just been writing whatever pops into my head, but I guess I should actually put everything into order, you know? At least that way, when... if I don't make it, and when if I leave this for someone to find, they can decode what I'm writing and make sense of it. And like I said, I'm forgetting the details, so I should probably write this sooner rather than later. Maybe I'll leave it behind for Nedzu, yeah? He's smart enough to figure out and translate what this all means.

Anyway, I should start with the original timeline, I guess. Before I actually time traveled?

From what I know, Class 1-A was entirely the same, except Uraraka was crippled from the entrance exams (as I've previously mentioned), and Monoma Neito was in my place. Shinsou took Monoma's place in Class 1-B, though I guess he's in General Education now.

At the end of Class 1-A's first year, the League of Villains attacked. I'm not sure where, though I think it was during an exercise where everyone was spread out in U.A.'s different training fields. I can't be sure though, but this is what I remember what I was told. The League attacked two more times, though it was at the beginning of the second year.

After those three attacks, All for One lead an army of hundreds of nomus into U.A.'s campus, which was later called U.A. Judgement Day. Supposedly. But just recently, I got a... flash of a memory? I
don't remember ever having this conversation, but I hear Maiko's voice speaking to me... and she's saying that All for One wasn't the one to lead the invasion? Which leads me to believe it was someone else, but I have no idea who'd it be. But then she added that there was a reason I went back. Maybe the person who led the invasion has some sort of relationship with me? I'm not sure. Anyway, during the attack, All for One and All Might supposedly had a confrontation. The latter was killed, and All for One successfully massacred all of U.A.; apparently, that was when One for All was cut off and its legacy ended, though rumors have been spread about it continuously being passed down in secret. Class 1-A (then Class 2-A after they moved into their second year) put up quite a fight, or as much of a fight as you can get against All for One. They were the first to encounter him and the last to go down, even including some of the present third years. There was some talk about how it would be different if the last batch of third years, including someone named Mirio Togata, hadn't graduated yet.

After U.A. and All Might fell, All for One then started to wipe out heroes. It was individual hits against heroes who were lower in the rankings, but they eventually took their toll. Heroes up to the new number one were run into the ground, and eventually the biggest were taken out. The ranking system fell into shambles, and Japan's government collapsed. The police force were nothing against the League of Villains. Meanwhile, thousands of people flocked to the group. Even everyday people joined, smart enough that they knew they would get special benefits if they just surrendered. A lot of those families continued to stay in power down the road, but at the time, many were just tired of the constant bloodshed and wanted some kind of peace. There were a few debates that, if all of Japan unanimously attacked the League of Villains, it could be destroyed. However, All for One was nothing but good with his words, and so Japan crumbled.

Other nations started to grow worried, and so they sent their own heroes and supplies to the country and police force. There was already a shortage in other countries of heroes, however, and just left even more open holes. It took a few years, but All for One managed to take over Japan and started rebuilding it, fighting back against other nations that continued to try to overthrow him. As he waited for Japan to get its feet back underneath it, he began to teach the new generations about what honor it meant to be under his rule, and what was expected of them.

(Like I said—he's really good with his words.)

At the same time he waited for Japan to regain its strength, he... uhm, he created a "breeding ground." He'd find people with excellent quirks, sometimes even young teens, and force them into... into procreating. At the time, he was trying to find enough effective age-resistant quirks that he could gift to Shigaraki and his highest followers (like Kurogiri and Dabi and such), but there weren't many of them. The quirk was highly sought after and rare, and so he had to find a more... efficient way of getting them. The program wasn't known to the public, and the family and friends who knew the person selected would often be paid or fed lies about what kind of... role they were fulfilling. Once his successor's life and ability to reign was established, he moved on to other kinds of quirks, such as powerful emitter-type ones or regeneration kinds. He also created a different program to figure out how to give someone multiple quirks without the backlash. It was rough for the first few years, and they just barely managed to give Shigaraki and everyone else their age quirks. After centuries of studying, they found several new techniques and such, which eventually led to the improvement of nomus. So they were... stronger than before.

Anyway, back to when Japan was regaining their strength, All for One sent Shigaraki and his League to take over parts of Asia, or areas close to it. While Shigaraki wasn't as good of a speaker as All for One was, he still was extremely effective and brutal in planning effectively. Shigaraki took, if I remember correctly, parts of Korea and Taiwan. Then they struck the Philippines, Indonesia, and huge chunks of China and Mongolia. Within thirty years, they had become a huge threat to the rest of the world—and even more so to the nations when the sort of "utopia" that All for One created
drew in a lot of support. People from all across the world came to Japan and Shigaraki's strongholds, asking to help their cause. All for One's grand influence was even stronger because of the tensions between countries and the people. With so much battling going on, there were huge repercussions to the economy. Overall, the people were worse off than they had been in decades. Twenty years later, Shigaraki had doubled the amount they had taken in before. And then, like some kind of explosion, they managed to take over all of China and India and half of Russia in seven years. It's known in the history books as the Domino Revolution. They named it that because the following countries after that fell faster and faster, each battle next fought over land less like a battle and more like a massacre. I guess it's supposed to be named after the domino effect.

The last two countries to go down were Mexico and Brazil. It took centuries to fully gain control of them, even after they surrendered. And even then, All for One's power and influence over the people there were restrained. People lied to the troops that came into the country about their quirks, they would disappear off the map before launching attacks on them, they refused to obey to several policies that were passed... Though both were equally resistant, however, Mexico had a lot more power than Brazil did. Unlike Mexico, who fought in clustered waves and in the shadows, Brazil made it clear that they'd rather die than be under All for One's rule. They openly fought tooth-and-nail against All for One's troops, and half the population was slaughtered. Because there weren't as many people there, their power was simply weaker than Mexico's was. So, the rebellion, which hadn't yet conformed into one group, were placed in Mexico.

This became extremely ironic after a few hundred years and after the rebellion formed together; All for One's wife was a Spanish woman herself. Her family was a huge resistant force against All for One's rule, though they were all killed before she truly had any understanding of what was going on. She was too young. She grew up in Central America, Guatemala. All for One, who still suffered from the scars from his first battle with All Might, decided to try to use her quirk (which allowed a person to recover completely from anything as long as they truly loved her) to his advantage. He hadn't actually expected to fall in love with her, but he did; a lot of people were unhappy with his marriage, including Shigaraki. If they had a child, then he wouldn't become the next successor to the throne, whenever All for One decided that time had come.

Anyway, All for One was completely healed and stronger than ever before. The Spanish woman, my grandmother, gave birth to my birth mother and Maiko (they were twins; however, the world only knew that my birth mother existed, and had no idea that Maiko did as well.) My mother was quirkless, while my aunt, Maiko, was not. All for One forced a shapeshifting quirk onto my mother, and then she eventually ran away in her teens. Around the same time, Maiko asked for permission from All for One to infiltrate the rebellion. She did successfully, and was soon placed on the council for her prowess. Once again, around the exact same time, my mother and my father met. They eventually had Kimoto Daizō, me, on July 15th, 3019.

My mother, who I wish I knew the name of, had burned me in 3023, approximately. I used my quirk in front of her on our single cat (it had a vaulting quirk or something and hated it with a passion) and she freaked out. Reminded her too much of All for One. My mother and father fled. Maiko found me, took me into the rebellion, and from here on out is what my entries are usually based on.

Addition from Future-Self: Maiko and my father met up. They had some sort of conversation, and my father gave up his quirk, Memory Exchange, to Maiko. Maiko's quirk, Contaminate, allows her to link a person's quirk of her choosing with herself. After a period of time, the person's quirk will start to grow unstable. The person's body or mind will reject the quirk, and it shuts down, degrading itself until there's nothing left. At the same time the quirk is leaving the person's body, it is building in hers.

While I was there, I made friends with Seiya. (Quirk: Time Manipulation.) He was assigned the duty
of turning back time to prevent All for One from killing Class 1-A. I was assigned to kill present All for One if it didn't work out correctly. Maiko leaked our base's coordinates to All for One when I was six, which was placed in Mexico. That was where Seiya was paralyzed from the waist down, and where I was captured by Shigaraki. A quarter to a half of our people were killed, and we had to flee to Brazil for a new base. For a year I was in their hands... so yeah. Maiko and the council eventually managed to launch an attack on the headquarters of All for One and get me back. It was a huge blow to All for One's power, who was having a literal ball in his capital for the nobility.

And... it was kind of epic? Not going to lie, I was practically the court's jester as I stood by All for One the entire time, getting laughed at and petted like an animal. And then the windows just burst open, and in they came, wrecking fucking havoc. I was over the moon that they managed to get me out of there.

But back to the subject at hand. When I came home, things sort of settled down, even after Seiya committed... committed suicide and gave me his quirk. The rebellion got a little bit of support after their little stunt. Things actually seemed to be getting better, and we were gaining a little strength. (Though the first few months were slow, and a lot of our peoplestarved to death from how little food we got. It took around a year before this incline of support actually happened, so I was around eight.) Some of the council members were actually confident that we'd be able to do something—

And then Maiko betrayed us for a second time. She... it was a mess. It was like U.A. Judgement Day all over again. There were hundreds of nomus again, ones more powerful than you'd ever seen. Shigaraki and All for One were there too. Maiko and I hid, and we just... watched. It was horrifying. And then, when Maiko took a stand against All for One...

Even after all she did, watching her die was awful.

The thing with Seiya's quirk, though... well, it's odd about these kinds of things. Using it in any other circumstance, I could and can only use it for a few minutes at best, maybe a few hours if I'm lucky. And using it more than three times in a short period of time hurts like a bitch. But... I guess when you're super emotional and stressed, or when you lose everything, it makes it easier to use. I myself have no idea how the hell I managed to travel back all those hundreds of years, but damn it I'm not complaining. I did it, even if it was shitty to get to that point.

Anyway, with Time Manipulation, my body doesn't move back; my mind does, however. For example, if I were to go back eight years ago, I would have the body of a fifteen-year-old in a seven-year-old's body. If my body did go back, you'd have a seven-year-old me staring up at an older version of myself, wondering where the hell I came from. This is also why during the entrance exam, I didn't suddenly disappear from fighting robots to appearing where the zero-pointer was supposed to show up. Instead, my mind traveled back, and so I was in the middle of fighting robots, froze, and then had less than thirty-seven seconds to get my behind over to where Uraraka was.

This is a long explanation to basically say that, hey, I don't have a body in the twenty-third century. So, in order to preserve myself from basically disappearing into thin air, I had to break the "Universal Strings" (Seiya called them that) instead of just following them backward. So hey, if shit hits the fan because I did that, well shit! Oops! My bad! Sorry guys, that was my fault. But anyway, that's why I was stuck in Brazil for a while. So... yeah? For a couple months I hung out under a bridge when Midoriya Hisashi (Quirk: Fire Breathing; Alias: Ignition) found me. He named me Midoriya Izuku, gave me the birthday of March the twelfth, and then we were done.

Eventually, Inko, who couldn't handle Hisashi's bullshit, left. And when Ignition and his infamous organization was revealed, he put me in a random apartment somewhere far away and then disappeared off the map as to not get caught. How did he find me in the first place, however? Well, when I broke my "Universal String," I sent off a lot of wavelengths that his group picked up. (He had
his own small stronghold and business in Brazil as well.) He spent years trying to figure me out, but none of his calculations were working out. When he realized that the core of his problem relied on the fact that I was in Brazil despite my obvious relation to Japan, he managed to narrow down the possibilities. Though he'll never be able to fully understand the concept of time and how to warp it himself, he managed to find similar readings with other experiments; this includes the time when, in space travel, time moved at different speeds.

Of course, the bastard never could've figured it out if it weren't for his buddies, but whatever. He eventually managed to connect the dots that I had to do something, though I don't think he knows what that something is.

Damn, that was way too fucking long. My hand hurts so badly. I thought this was going to a simple explanation, not a freaking history lesson. What happened to not writing essays for journal entries??? Anyway, as of right now, I have nothing else to say. Except for the fact when I felt time changing. It wasn't me. But, now that I've mentioned it, I feel like some Universal String snapped.

Which really worries me, because nothing changed on my end. So they couldn't have gone further back than my time period, or else I would've known if something changed. Maybe? Hopefully. Or would I even feel the Universal String break if it already happened?

Why is time so damn confusing????????

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Midoriya Izuku was a bit of an anomaly. That, Todoroki Shouto could admit. Did he support the boy? No, not really. Was he hostile toward him? Again, no. Midoriya simply existed, just like the rest of his classmates did.

And then Todoroki watched as Midoriya, who he had never seen use his quirk before, trap the anti-All Might with his power. Though the villain's weapon had escaped from Midoriya's grip, the boy still had managed to delay him, if only slightly. (Todoroki still couldn't get the blank look on his face out of his head as he whipped around, only to be sent flying like a limp doll. His impact in the wall farthest was painful to the ears of everyone who saw it happen, spiderweb-like cracks forming around the area he hit.)

Midoriya spent four hours in surgery as they gave him several blood transfusions. It would be longer, but U.A. had a contract with a hospital that specialized in the injuries of heroes. Several of its most effective doctors had been in working hours at the right time, and Midoriya was in some of the best hands in the country. Recovery Girl had arrived later, speeding the process even further.

He spent another day and then some in a medically-induced coma. They just took the last of his sedatives off, waiting for him to finally wake up from the last effects of the medication. They left him on his pain medicine, though, most likely because he would be in pain when he woke up.

Todoroki himself didn't know the full extent of his injuries. His stomach and lungs suffered some damage, which was to be expected. He had bruised at least half of his ribs on the side he was punched in, and a few had even shattered under the pressure. Luckily, his spinal cord didn't snap, and his skull hadn't fractured either.

However, he suffered some serious bruising to the the side of his head, and the doctors apparently said that he shouldn't move his neck too much after he began his recovery. Plus he would suffer from a lot of headaches from the head wound, and that someone should keep an eye out on how much pain medication Midoriya took. (Todoroki had a feeling that they believed he would try to take more than he should and get addicted to it.)
It took Todoroki a lot of cautious working to get all of his answers. Because Endeavor was the No. 2 Hero, and his son was in Midoriya's class, he was privy to much of the information that was gathered. He had to constantly toe the line of his father's patience to get them. As a result, training with him was even harder than it could have been if he kept his mouth shut, but it was worth it. Though the old man growled at him, calling Midoriya a weak chain in their class if he couldn't even protect himself, Todoroki knew better. There were some things that people simply weren't prepared for.

It wasn't until his third day off that he finally got the courage to leave outside. While it was unlikely, it would be dangerous if the villains decided to attack each student individually instead of altogether. Todoroki was confident enough in his abilities that he knew he could defend himself long enough for help to arrive, but he'd rather not have his father get irritated with him because he was caught off-guard. (He also would rather not get hurt, either; he had enough pain to deal with, thank you very much.) At the moment, however, Endeavor had been called out to a job somewhere far away, and he wouldn't be back for another few hours.

Todoroki left with a goodbye from Fuyumi and a promise to not get hurt. She watched his receding form with worry, but she didn't try to stop him. She knew how important and precious time alone meant to Todoroki, especially if it meant time away from his father. Though it was cold out, Todoroki had little to worry and didn't bring a jacket. While he hated using his fire, his body would subconsciously heat his right side up when he was cold.

Though it was only a few degrees, or even less so, it was still enough to balance out his temperature. (However, he'd always be warmer on his left and colder on his right, not matter how hard he tried otherwise. He always had to be careful which side he used when he grabbed something, especially another person. Several times he had slightly burned Fuyumi when he used his left rather than his right; she had a slight sensitivity to hot things because of her quirk.)

Todoroki sighed as he passed a bakery. The smell that wafted from the open doorway made his mouth water, though he refused to stop by it. He remembered having pastries as a little kid, but food like that was unhealthy to his diet. So Endeavor, of course, prohibited him from eating anything like that. (Natsuo sometimes snuck some in for Fuyumi and him, though, and he couldn't deny his brother then. Not when he gave him those puppy dog eyes.)

The day was reasonably nice, not that he really paid any attention to where he was going. Which was maybe why he found himself subconsciously walking toward the hospital Midoriya was at. Maybe. Kind of. Perhaps.

He sighed as he recognized the sign above the entrance of the sliding doors. Of course he came here of all places the day he was trying to relax. It wasn't like talking with people stressed him out or anything, no. He was just awful at it and it made him cringe. Rubbing the bridge of his nose, he entered through the doorway, walking into the heated room. Almost immediately he could feel his right side cooling himself off so he wouldn't get too hot. He stood there awkwardly for a few seconds as several people glanced up to look at him before going back to what they were doing.

Todoroki sighed again as he made his way to the desk. The man who sat behind it was humming lightly to himself as he tended to another patient. He waited patiently (okay, so maybe not that patiently, but he knew that it was disrespectful to speak out and demand attention when clearly there were people who needed this more than he did.) As the two talked, he looked around the lobby for a moment, which almost seemed overdone with how extravagant it was. Of course, U.A. had a little bit to do with it, so it was expected.

The woman who was talking with the receptionist finally nodded before saying a quick "thanks" as
she walked away. Todoroki was then put in the spotlight of the man's smile.

"How may I help you today, sir?" he asked, bright as always. Todoroki noticed the way his eyelashes almost seemed to flicker in and out of focus as the light hit it.

Todoroki leaned toward the man, resting his crossed arms on top of the desk.

"I was wondering if you could tell me which room Midoriya Izuku is in."

Midoriya wasn't expecting any visitors. His parents obviously weren't going to be there, and none of his classmates were allowed to come in. Tsukauchi had entered the room when he first woke up, asking him a few questions then, but he left as soon as he came.

From what he heard, Aizawa was in the room across from his. He wasn't sure what kind of injuries he received. He had asked the doctors and nurses that had stopped by to check up on him about his condition, but they refused to say. Apparently, the man had went as far to tell the staff to not say a word about it to Midoriya. (It was annoying how Aizawa seemed to know what he was going to do before he did it.) He had also tried to ask them about his classmates, but they too refused to say a word.

He was pretty sure it was because they didn't want to worry him. If anything, it was annoying. How was he supposed to even rest if he didn't have any idea what was going on? He was wasting time as he waited. If someone had died or received permanently damaged, he could rewind time and fix it. But the longer time passed, the harder it would get to go back that far.

(He was also tempted to rewind time to keep himself from getting hurt in the first place, but decided that he'd rather not risk someone else getting killed, assuming that no one did. On top of that, that would just be selfish of him; while recovery would be a pain, it was just that—something that he could recover from. To use it to his own advantage... (He was terrified that he'd become corrupt and use it for worse things than he was meant for.))

It took him a few minutes to sit himself up. His side hurt like hell, even with the medication, and several times when he tried to push himself up he fell back down, panting as he struggled to breathe properly. With the help of a nurse, he managed to get his back against the headboard, leaning against several fluffed-up pillows.

He liked the nurse. His name was Alex, and he was born in the USA. He was pretty sure the man said he was from North Carolina, or maybe it was Virginia. He wasn't positive. The man had chatted with him for a little bit when he was free, and he managed to slip him a book to read.

"It's my favorite," he admitted. "It's a little hard to read, though."

Midoriya recognized the title. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The man explained a bit of its background to him. When Midoriya didn't know a word, he would mark its place with a sticky note and ask the man when he stopped by. They chatted in a mix between English and Japanese. Midoriya, whose pronunciation was mediocre at best, spoke in English as the man talked him through it. Alex would speak in Japanese, and Midoriya would give him a few tips as well (though Alex needed very little of it. He had lived in Japan for almost seven years now, so it was mostly little things.)

Alex was nice though. Midoriya appreciated it a lot, especially since he wasn't so bland and obviously faked like others were. Though all of the nurses were kind and respectful, very few were as bright and bubbly as Alex was. (Although, Alex was a bit of a mess. Several times he walked in,
blinked at Midoriya, and then devolved into a fit of sobbing as he proclaimed that he forgot to pick up what he was meant to give to him. Or that he forgot to give a patient something.)

Midoriya finished the page he was reading within a few minutes. He marked two new words before writing them down on a notepad to his left, which had definitions written on it for him to use as he read. He turned the thick page, cheering to himself as the chapter was almost over. The last page was only filled halfway with words.

He was about to start it when there was a knocking sound by his doorway, and he lifted his head toward the noise. He made sure to keep his movements slow, lest he hurt or aggravate his wounds.

He was greeted with white and red hair. Midoriya blinked in surprise before he shut his book, setting it on top of his notepad on the bedside table. He waved the boy in with his hand, clearing his throat as he tried to raise his voice over the humming of the oxygen tank beside him. Though he was starting to breathe easier, they still wanted to keep him on it for another day. The doctor gave him permission to take it off for a few minutes if he wanted to talk, and so he pulled the mask from his face as he dragged the straps along the back of his head downward so it rested around his neck. He brushed against the bruises along his head, and he flinched slightly, though the pain was manageable.

"I'm surprised you're here," he said, wincing as his voice cracked slightly. "I didn't think that anyone but family was allowed clearance."

Todoroki awkwardly took a seat by his bedside. He cleared his throat and refused to look directly at him. "Being the son of the number two hero has its perks, I suppose."

Midoriya snorted, ignoring the slight twinge of pain from his side. "That explains a bit," he agreed, before his face turned solemn. Silence came over them, a sort of tense kind since neither of them knew what to say. Finally, Midoriya spoke up. "The staff won't tell me anything that happened," he said, rubbing his hands together. "Can you... tell me if everyone's okay?"

Todoroki nodded. "None of the students got too badly injured except for you. Yaoyorozu overworked her quirk, though, so she had to stop by Recovery Girl's office. One of the other girls had a minor head injury." He shrugged after. "All the other students only got minor scratches or bruises."

Midoriya sighed in relief and let the tension in his shoulders go. "And the teachers?" he asked, hopeful.

Todoroki cocked his head to the side but spoke either way. "Aizawa got both his arms injured by Shigaraki, the hand villain. I don't know when the first arm happened, but Shigaraki got his second arm by the mist villain. He used a portal to separate Aizawa's top half from his bottom, and Shigaraki managed to hold him down that way. Took advantage of him too, and injured his left eye pretty badly. I doubt it was enough to make him go blind in that eye, but it was enough." He frowned. "All Might sent the "last boss," as Shigaraki called it, through the top of the dome."

Midoriya's eyes brightened. "Through the roof?" he asked.

Todoroki hummed in agreement. "Shigaraki got knocked around a bit, and he was shot several times by Snipe when reinforcements arrived. Nowhere lethal, of course, but still. Mist villain was barely hurt, and he and Shigaraki used his quirk to escape. The anti-All Might had frostbite and was beaten heavily."

Midoriya raised an eyebrow. "Frostbite?"
Todoroki looked away, a bit of color filling his cheeks. He coughed awkwardly. "I stuck him in a
glacier after you got hit."

Midoriya stared blankly at him. "You know, if I could laugh right now without hurting myself, I'd be
in a fit."

Todoroki looked faintly alarmed. "I'd rather you not."

Midoriya snorted again. "I'll do my best."

Todoroki shook his head but continued. "Anyway, after I froze the thing, All Might managed to
easily take care of it. Aizawa... well, the best way to describe it is a rampage. Practically broke
Shigaraki's face in."

Midoriya sighed. "I will never be able to understand that man," he lamented. "But everyone's doing
all right?"

Todoroki hesitated. "I don't know. Physically? Probably. But whether or not they're okay mentally is
up in the air. I don't think they were ready for this."

Midoriya was quiet for a moment before glancing at him. "But you were?"

Todoroki shrugged. "I wasn't not prepared."

"And is that why you were able to immediately react when you saw the nomu?" Midoriya asked.

Todoroki tensed. "I wasn't fast enough."

"Neither was All Might," Midoriya replied. He turned his head so he was facing the wall in front of
him, his neck starting to ache from looking at Todoroki. More pieces started to click together. There
was no reason that Todoroki would bother himself and try and strike up a conversation with
Midoriya unless there was a reason. "Is that why you're here? To apologize?"

"I could've saved you," Todoroki said.

"And you could've saved yourself," Midoriya replied. "But you didn't. You joined the fight."

Todoroki's hands clenched tightly into fists. "I didn't do it to save anyone. I did it to stop the
villains."

Midoriya played with the back of his hand. "And yet you still tried to save me anyway."

Todoroki let out a long sigh. "'Tried' doesn't cut it."

Midoriya hesitated before placing a hand on Todoroki's shoulder. His own stung slightly from the
movement, but it was dulled and easy to ignore. "'Tried' is better than nothing, Todoroki. You were
faster than Bakugo and I. Neither of us moved at all to stop it."

"You didn't even see it coming."

"I should've."

"How?"

Midoriya froze and let go of Todoroki, looking away from him. That was a good question. How?
Well, if he had a better grasp on his Time Manipulation, then he'd be able to slow time around him
long enough to get his wits about him. Or, at least, long enough to have a knee-jerk reaction and protect himself. But that wasn't something he was about to tell Todoroki; that secret was dangerous, and he was just speaking with his classmate for the first time. There was no way that he could trust him with that just yet.

Maybe another day, then.

(He then remembered his promise to Yaoyorozu that he'd explain everything to her. He planned on keeping that promise, but he had no idea when.)

Todoroki seemed to notice his stillness and changed the subject, though it wasn't that much better. "Your burn scar..." Midoriya flinched as Todoroki looked at the side of his neck, which was on full display without anything to hide it. "... I'm guessing that's why you wear scarfs all the time. That makes sense."

Midoriya looked back at him, eyebrow raised. "But...?"

Todoroki seemed uncomfortable as he spoke. "Correct me if I'm wrong, but I thought you had green eyes."

And Midoriya felt his stomach drop low, low, low.

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Todoroki would never admit it, but it was weird seeing Midoriya with light coppery-orange eyes. Not that it was bad-looking, just... different. When he pointed it out to him, the boy paled before flushing from the tips of his ears down to his chest.

"O-oh," he squeaked. "I wear contacts is all! M-my dad thought I-I suited my m-mom's eyes more th-than his!"

(Unbeknownst to Todoroki, Midoriya lied. It was true that Midoriya got his eye color from his real father, but it was Hisashi—his "adoptive" father—that asked for Midoriya to wear the contacts. And they were Inko's eyes' color, not his birth mother's, whose eyes were onyx black.)

Todoroki hummed. (He still didn't understand why his parents weren't even there.)

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"Aizawa, are you sure that you want to teach tomorrow?" It was Nedzu speaking. "Perhaps you ought to take a day off. We want the best experience for our students, and your health is important to their education!"

Aizawa grunted. "I'm fine." He didn't elaborate any, and kept his words straight to the point.

It was something that Yamada could appreciate, really. While he himself always had to keep a smile on his face and his energetic persona up, sometimes he found himself wishing to just be... normal. And, as a host for a radio show, he also had to sound animated and always be ready to give people some love. He was approached by many people and heroes during his time on and off duty, and many used fancy words to express themselves. And sometimes, he couldn't keep up with what everyone was saying when they continued to ramble on and on. Were they trying to be mean? Were they being nice but just sounded gruff? While he prided himself in being a good friend to everyone, he was known not to read a situation or a person very well.

Which is why he enjoyed Aizawa. He said what he wanted, when he wanted, how he wanted, and
meant pretty much every word of it. He was blunt and to the point, and Yamada, while he often didn't listen to the man, understood every word of it.

(But he also knew that Aizawa was not fine, and that he was actually in a lot of pain. He didn't say anything about it, but the thought was still there.)

"Are you sure?" Midnight asked. It was one of the few times she actually outwardly expressed concern. She had to keep up her persona, after all, and sadistic women like her couldn't be doting on her friends like a mother hen in public.

"Yes, I'm sure," Aizawa snapped back, and everyone's arguments disappeared from the tips of their tongues. Aizawa sounded tired and ready to punch someone in the face. He had bandages covering both his arms and a brace around his left ankle from falling awkwardly while in Kurogiri's portal. He also had several casts on his fingers—many of which had been broken somewhere somehow. Aizawa refused to mention where he got most of his wounds, only explaining that Shigaraki messed up his right eye, which was covered in bandages that wrapped around his head.

Yamada sighed but cleared his throat. "So, you called for us for a reason in this meeting, Principal Nedzu?"

Nedzu pressed his paws together. "Ah, indeed I did!" His smile, though ever-present on his face, had a dark undertone to it. "First of all, the elephant in the room: the USJ attack." There were a few flinches in the room. "A breach in our security, and a failure on Yuuei's end. Already we are receiving backlash for what happened, especially because of the severe injuries that one of Class 1-A's students had gotten." The principal rested the end of his snout on his two paws, the usual glimmer in his eyes long since petered out. "As a result, we have much to discuss on both upcoming events and the stability of the students harmed."

Snipe leaned forward in his chair. "Does this mean we're gonna skip the Sports Festival? That would be another blow to Yuuei's reputation. We're on thin ice as it is now."

"But should we really put so much pressure on them when such an event like this has happened?" Midnight countered. "While the mind is a flexible thing, they are still knew to the idea of heroics. At this time, they should be worrying more about showing off their quirks instead of the holes in hero protection. Putting too much strain at on time can make them break."

"Or it can make them stronger," Cementoss said. "Bouncing back from things like this is part of being a hero."

"But they're not heroes," Yamada butted in. "They're little kids who aren't supposed to even be seeing this kind of stuff until their second or third year. First year is meant to ease them into the idea of heroics and getting all the basics lined out. It's about understanding what kind of hero you're going to be and how you're going to be it. This is not one of those skills."

"But it happened," Vlad King stated. "And now we have to teach them so they can become prepared."

"Is a sports festival really the way to teach them this skill, though?" Yagi asked. "And is it the right way to go, where they'll be under the pressure of thousands of people watching?"

Midnight grumbled under her breath as she crossed her arms. "And we still have Yuuei's reputation to worry about. It's true that this could help us recover from the negativity from the attack."

"If we're going to do the sports festival," Aizawa finally interjected, "at least give the students time to
prepare. Give them a few weeks to steel themselves."

Recovery Girl huffed. "And give your students a lesson about self-preservation, please. I don't need them overworking themselves just because."

Nedzu laughed, a chipper sound that didn't reach his eyes. "Well of course, Recovery Girl. If we postpone the Sports Festival for a few weeks, would everyone reach an agreement to let the event happen? Of course, in order to add a little bit of flair, we'll have All Might hand out the awards while Midnight will serve as the announcer. Present Mic, you'll be our commentator."

There was hesitation, but everyone in the room eventually nodded. "Good! Now then, to my next point."

_Next point?_

"It is Yuuei's duty to create a new batch of heroes that people can look up to every year. However," he added, "we also have the assignment of protecting our students' safety. Though hero work will never be safe for anyone, we have to create an environment where our heroes-in-training can learn without getting permanently hurt." Nedzu pulled a few papers from who-knew-where and placed them on the table. "That is why I am suggesting a new idea to protect our students, and to keep them from harm. Any other suggestions are welcome, but I've gone through most of them, and each are ineffective at best and are little help to our current situation."

The mouse-bear-rodent creature handed the papers, which were blueprints, to Cementoss. He didn't show any outward reaction, though his voice showed a slight surprise at what he saw.

"A... dorm system?"

Nedzu smiled. "Well, of course!" His smile grew wider. "I had been planning to send out forms and requests this coming week. While you, Cementoss, would be building all of the dorms within the weeks leading up to the Sports Festival and during said event, I will let parents and guardians give their own responses. Even if some refuse, it would be vital in securing the well-being of most of the students."

Aizawa seemed tense. "And when would the dorms be opened to the students?"

"Glad you asked!" Nedzu said. "I had planned the students to view and move some of their necessary items into the dorms before their internships. After the internships are over, they would be required to completely move in."

"Would parents be willing to give up seeing them so early on in their high school years?" Yamada asked.

"We would have to create some kind of visiting system," Midnight agreed. "Or something of the kind where students can go back home over the weekends."

"Of course, of course," Nedzu said airily. "I can easily sort that out within no time!"

Right. Yamada forgot that the creature was smarter than eight humans combined, maybe even more if he wracked his brain hard enough.

"Is that all?" Vlad King asked.

"I believe it is, Kan," Nedzu said as he stood up on his chair. "Thank each and every one of you for coming to this meeting. I will call you again if adjustments are required."
There were a few confirmations, and most of the teachers stood up when Aizawa suddenly spoke. "Nemuri, Hizashi, stay please." He hesitated before adding, "You too, Yagi."

Kayama Nemuri, or Midnight, blinked but smiled. "Of course," she said, and she plopped back down into her chair. Yagi hadn't even stood up yet, and so he remained right where he was. Yamada moved so that he was sitting closer to the remaining group.

"Hmm." Nedzu pressed his paws together. "This must be pretty important if you of all people want to talk about it," he stated as the rest of the teachers left the room. "I hope you don't mind if I stay; it would make things much easier."

Aizawa still seemed tense but nodded. "Of course. That might just make things easier, actually." He pulled the stack of files that he had with him so it would sit directly across from him. He usually always brought notes or papers with him that he was too lazy to put away before he came to the meetings. (He was always at least two minutes late every time.)

Yamada had no idea what Aizawa was trying to point out as he pulled out Midoriya's files, however. He also pulled out a few laminated pictures and some records, though it didn't seem to make sense.

"I'm... confused," Kayama admitted as she stared at the pile of paper growing.

Aizawa ignored her. "In all the time I was in the hospital, there was one thing that struck me as odd." He pointed to a packet of paper, and Yamada recognized it as registered visitors who came into the hospital. "As of right now, Midoriya has gotten two visitors: one from the police, and one of his classmates."

"And...?" Kayama said, raising an eyebrow.

Aizawa was... oddly patient with these kinds of things. It was why he was such a good teacher. He was strict, and he required a lot of effort in his class, but he was patient beyond words. "Tell me this: where are his parents in the picture?"

Silence. Yamada had a sinking feeling in his stomach.

"I did some digging these past few days," Aizawa added. "His father, Midoriya Hisashi, apparently works abroad. His mother, on the other hand, has recently fell off the map. She was reported as missing, but several of her friends that were interviewed always said the exact same thing: she wanted a new name, and she wanted a new life."

Aizawa placed a picture on the table, which was of a woman with wide green eyes and matching hair. He tapped the side of the picture as he continued to speak. "It was also recorded that she filed a restraining order against him around the time that Midoriya was eleven before she promptly moved out and divorced him."


Yamada started to bite his fingernails, a bad habit he had picked up during fighting. "Are you saying that Midoriya Hisashi is abusive?"

"Perhaps," Aizawa said. "It can't be ruled out. However, that wasn't the only odd thing I found." He pointed to yet another stack of files. "Midoriya Hisashi rented an apartment for him and Midoriya Izuku. However, I've received the same response every time I questioned a neighbor or the receptionist at the front desk: "Midoriya-kun is a quiet but sweet boy. I've never me the father or mother, though." The owner stated that he'd met the man once, when they were first moving in, but that was it."

Aizawa nodded. "All the bills are automatically paid by a bank account under Midoriya Hisashi's name, though that same account has little to no connections. It gets restocked once every month. Enough money is always set out that everything required can be paid. Extra money is spent through a credit card, also under Midoriya Hisashi's name."

"Does that mean we can track him down through his purchases?" Yagi asked.

Aizawa shook his head. "No. I got a search warrant, and the purchases were being made by my student, not Midoriya Hisashi, through a credit card I'm guessing he left behind."

Yamada crossed his arms. "Are we sure though that we aren't making a huge mistake? Maybe this is just a misunderstanding."

"True," Aizawa admitted. "Or it would be, if I hadn't found this." He pulled out a plastic bag from inside the vanilla folder, which the corners were peeking out just slightly before, and inside was a phone. He let it sit on the table.

"A phone?" Kayama asked. "What does that have to do with anything?"

Aizawa leaned back in his chair. "Tell me, Nemuri, what is Midoriya Izuku's emergency contact number?"

Her lips pinched as she glanced at Midoriya's files. "Shit," she cursed under her breath. "They're the same, aren't they?"

"On top of that," he added, "I've interviewed anyone he's spent time with the most. He's been taking classes for years with certain instructors, and each one of them have all told me that they've never met any parental figure of his." He pulled out two last documents. "And, if that doesn't convince you, I'm hoping this does."

He set one on the table. It was simple, really. It was Midoriya Izuku and Midoriya Hisashi's signatures on forms that both guardians and future students were required to sign. It had to do with honor code or something.

"At first glance, it isn't obvious that Midoriya Hisashi's signature is forged. Both my student's and his are in different colors, different penmanship, different size, etc. However, that still doesn't account for this." Aizawa placed yet another document on the table. "This was something that I managed to scrounge up with the help of a few underground heroes. This document was signed somewhere in Beijing, China, four months ago, by none other than Midoriya Hisashi." Aizawa adjusted the two so they were sitting side-by-side for a comparison.

"They're different," Yagi said. "Neither of the two look alike, at all." While the forged on was more curled and "loopy" as Yamada would call it, the second was tiny and in harsh strokes.

"Shit," Kayama cursed again.

"Shit indeed." Everyone's attentions turned back to Nedzu, who hadn't spoken at all during the conversation. "Midoriya had suffered terribly in the attack on USJ. To think that he cannot even receive support to heal from what happened to him..." Nedzu sighed and shook his head. "This is why I cannot stand you humans. You have no compassion for your own borne."

Kayama shut her eyes and rubbed her forehead. "It's dangerous for him to be out on his own," she said quietly. "He can reside at my place in the meantime, if you want. Child abandonment is unacceptable, and if we have to bring Midoriya Hisashi to justice, well..." She reached for the cup sitting in front of her, taking a sip of water from it to clear her throat as Yagi spoke.
"Are you sure that you don't want to put him into foster care?" Yagi asked.

Kayama slammed the cup onto the table, and she glanced toward him with cold eyes. Her grip on the cup tightened before she breathed in deeply. She snatched her hand back into her lap. "Foster care isn't like it used to be in your time, All Might," Kayama said frostily. "That is the last place he should go."

Yagi seemed surprised. "My apologies," he said softly, and she nodded stiffly.

Yamada cleared his throat. "We're still forgetting that Midoriya hasn't agreed to this," he said quietly. "If he's... supportive of his parents, he may try to stop us."

"Then we should ask him. Tonight," Aizawa said. "The longer he's alone, the more damage he suffers from."

"But there's also the fact that we'd have to interview him ourselves to see if there really is something else going on," Yagi said. "While the evidence is overpowering, there might really just be some kind of mistake."

Yamada sighed. "Of course. When will he be released from the hospital?"

Aizawa grumbled. "Tonight."

Kayama's head snapped towards him. "That's impossible. His injuries were too severe."

Aizawa shrugged. "From the reports I collected, Midoriya has been hiding a little secret from us. Her name's Juni, apparently—she's a slug that hides in Midoriya's costume and scarf."

Yamada blinked. "What."

Aizawa rolled his eyes. "Don't ask me. The slug supposedly has a quirk that negated almost half the damage done to him by the anti-All Might. It also helped a little with his recovery by closing up some of his wounds. They're not sure of the specifics of the quirk, but some testing revealed that it can tweak and adjust the world around it."

"Dang," Yamada murmured. "So he's really leaving tonight?"

"With how successful his recovery was, he could've left this morning. The doctors just kept him for a while to make sure he was going to be okay."

"He'll be required to be checked up on by an official doctor at least once every two days to see how he's doing, and he'll have to go through physical therapy. But they're hopeful that he can get back on his feet by the Sports Festival."

Kayama sighed. "Thank goodness for people like Recovery Girl."

"But that raises another question," Yamada said. "When are we going to address him? We can't just walk up to his apartment and say, "Hey, pack your bags, you're going to live with the R-rated Heroine for a while." That's suicide."

Silence followed his remark.

"Actually..." Nedzu's eyes gleamed. "I think you're onto something, Hizashi."

=====*

Midoriya wanted to sleep. He had already finished a cup of tea as he and Juni watched a cringe-
worthy TV show about superpowers that had been created before the development of quirks. The last episode finally ended, and in its place was a movie about a heroine called Wonder Woman.

The beginning animation scene was just starting to begin when a knock was heard on his door. Huffing, he pushed himself off his couch, feeling himself sway slightly. Though his stomach protested any movements, he managed to shuffle over to the entrance. (His side hurt slightly from drinking the tea—though he was cleared to drink liquids, it still sometimes hurt to stomach anything. He was going to be drinking pretty much everything in replacement for food for a while.)

The person at the door knocked again, and he grumbled. "I'm coming, I'm coming, Jesus, give me some time—"

He flung the door open to find a bandaged Aizawa, a smiling Yamada, and a grim-looking Kayama. He blinked thrice.

"Not to be rude," he stated blandly, "but you guys chose the worst possible time to come over. I am the literal definition of a mess at the moment."

Yamada rubbed the back of his head sheepishly. "Sorry bud, I thought that your parents would answer the door, not you. Are they here, by the way? I- we would like to speak with them."

Midoriya felt his stomach turn to ice. "They're... not here. They work abroad, and Dad hasn't gotten the chance to come home." His mouth tasted bitter at the word of his missing parental figure, but he did his best to ignore it.

"So it's just you at the moment?" Kayama sounded incredibly sad.

"U-uh, yeah, it is..." He trailed off when the three passed knowing looks.

"So," Aizawa started, "when's he coming home?"

"I'm not sure," Midoriya said slowly. "He didn't specify. Just said that he'd come home as soon as he could."

Aizawa hummed, and there was something about that look that made Midoriya feel like he was transparent. "Oh really?"

Midoriya swallowed heavily. "Y-yeah," he squeaked out. "I-I can call him again, if you'd like?" He was sure that he'd left "Hisashi's" phone on the table (which is what he used to put on his emergency contact files.) Plus, he always kept it on silent, so it wasn't as if they could actually hear it, right?

Yamada sent him a smile that almost seemed sad. "Sure, you should do that, kiddo."

Midoriya was... terrified. And suspicious. But mostly thing. He grabbed his phone, and old version which was battered around the edges—though he hadn't cracked the screen yet—and unlocked it. It took a few seconds before he found "Hisashi's" contact, and he pressed on it before holding it to his ear. Obviously, "Hisashi" wouldn't be able to pick up, but he could blame it on the fact that Hisashi was always busy—

Midoriya heard buzzing. His face paled.

"Sorry," Aizawa said, "that's mine." And he pulled something from his pocket, a familiar phone that Midoriya recognized, because of course he recognized it, he bought it and that was his emergency contact phone and shit!
Aizawa slid his finger across the screen and held it to his ear. He stared Midoriya directly in the eye. "So," he said, and it was odd to hear him both over the phone and face-to-face at the same time, "may we come in? We have quite a bit to talk about."

Chapter End Notes

Sero needs more love, tbh. And finally, we're going to be chipping away at some of the bad parts of Midoriya's life and fixing the problem instead of layering more fluff on top of it to hide it.

ALSO: I GOT JUNI FANART IT'S BEAUTIFUL THANK SEPULCRE FOR IT THEY'RE AMAZING!! Oh, but I have no idea how to link it, so you're just going to have to copy and paste. Sorry!

https://cdn.discordapp.com/attachments/278367288791400448/514682508000886785/20181121_000416.jpg
okay so this is such a huge mess and i'm sorry but i'm super tired and i have spent way too much time on this chapter and i give up on trying to fix it

also, i'm pretty sure i fricked up all the characters and it probably doesn't make sense, but frick it all

but don't worry, sports festival will be better, and i promise i'm going to be doing something special with it; well, multiple specials. I've been waiting for this for forever, to be honest

thank you for reading, though

Aizawa knew that he was going to have to step carefully in the upcoming talk. The minute he pulled out the phone, Midoriya had grown extremely jumpy and quiet. He ushered the three of them inside his small apartment, leading them to the tiny living room near the kitchen.

He could tell that Midoriya had just been sitting there before they interrupted him—there was an empty mug on the small coffee table alongside some open journals. He noticed that the pages were written in a language that he didn't recognize, which he stored away for later. The TV was playing some old show that he couldn't care for. Clearly, Midoriya didn't care for it either, seeing how he turned it off immediately when they were all situated. Or maybe he just wanted his full concentration on the subject at hand.

Midoriya was sitting in the only armchair, leaving the long couch to the other three. They just happened to be situated across from one another, which made it easier for Aizawa to read the boy. (Not that the boy had ever been particularly easy to read. Emotions such as embarrassment or shy and timid were obvious, as the times when he was overwhelmed. But other emotions of his were hard to dissect, especially when he was lost in thought. There were too many things going on in his eyes at once to make out anything.)

Midoriya was obviously in a little bit of pain, and that made Aizawa feel slightly guilty. The teen was carefully slow as he moved, and he winced as he sat down in the chair with an almost-silent grunt. The boy's shoulders were tense, and he was sitting rigidly as he rubbed his hands together nervously. Aizawa was about to begin speaking when a beep could be heard, and Midoriya flushed.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled as he made to get up. "That's the chicken broth I was making."

Kayama laid a hand on his shoulder gently. "I'll get it," she promised before moving into the kitchen. "What's it for?" she called over her shoulder.

Midoriya cleared his throat awkwardly and ran a hand through his hair. (It was getting pretty long, and it almost reached his shoulders.) "I can't eat any solids for the next few days. It hurts to stomach
it. The broth was my best idea for a pseudo-dinner instead of just drinking a bunch of juice."

Kayama nodded and came out of the kitchen not but half a minute later, a steaming bowl in hand. She set it in front of him, and he uttered a quiet "thank you" before she sat back down. Aizawa only just noticed the brown blob on Midoriya's thigh—Juni was the slug's name, right?

Midoriya started fidgeting with the scarf around his neck. "If I may ask before we start," he said quietly, "how did you get my phone in the first place?"

"Search warrant," Aizawa said. "I called the number from your emergency contact list and it buzzed. I bagged it and took it with me as evidence."

Midoriya swallowed heavily. "I see." His voice warbled slightly as he rubbed his palms around his knees. "I-I suppose you had some kind of... suspicions if you thought to do that."

"I had a feeling," was all Aizawa allowed himself to say. Midoriya continued to squirm underneath his gaze as another pregnant silence fell over them.

Kayama cleared her throat. "Would it be easier for us to ask questions, and then you answer them? Or perhaps you want to say something before we begin?"

Midoriya evaded her gaze as he shuffled his feet. "Questions, please."

Kayama nodded. "First of all, we wanted to clarify something." She took in a deep breath. "Your quirk obviously has to do with metal and chains, though we don't know the specifics." Midoriya grew even tenser, if that was possible. "However, your parents' quirks include fire breathing and mild telekinesis. No other family members of yours have quirks that resemble yours." Kayama clasped her hands together. "We were wondering if you had been adopted, or if your quirk was a mutation that caused this to happen."

Midoriya fidgeted slightly before speaking. "Y-you're right about me being adopted," he finally admitted. "I don't remember much of my childhood before them, though... I lived out in the streets."

He cleared his throat again. "My quirk is called Chain Conjuring. It allows me to create chains from metals with skin contact. I can control their movement as long as physical touch remains. They meld back into the metal after a period of time."

Kayama nodded. "Thank you."

Aizawa crossed his arms over his chest. "Your official documentation says that you were born in Tokyo by Midoriya Inko. Obviously, the latter part of that isn't true, but are you from Tokyo?"

Midoriya shook his head. "Like I said, I don't know much about my background before they took me in, but... I lived in a Spanish-speaking country before we even met."

Well, that explains the slight accent.

"And is there a reason that they randomly decided to take you in?" Aizawa asked.

Midoriya flinched. His eyes turned stormy, full of emotions and a jumbled mess of explanations before stilling. "I'm... not sure myself," he said quietly. Half-lie. "I think... he mentioned something about a... a successor, but..."

"Did he have a company?" Yamada asked. "A business?"

Kayama leaned forward. "Or was it something illegal?"
Midoriya seemed to curl up even further into himself. Aizawa placed a hand on Kayama's shoulder, firm enough to get his message across. Don't overwhelm him.

"I-I-" he started. "I don't... know. I... He had a group of friends that he would hang out with all the time... and sometimes I'd hear them- planning? Yeah, I think that's what they were doing..."

Aizawa looked over to Yamada, his queue to ask a specific question. Kayama didn't have much tact, and Aizawa would say it too bluntly. Yamada, who was experienced with asking these specific questions, nodded back.

"We found some evidence that Midoriya Hisashi may have been in contact with a villain named Ignition," Yamada started slowly. Aizawa watched as Midoriya's left hand, which had been trembling, stopped moving altogether. The boy froze. "Had it ever occurred to you before that he could have been involved with activities not particularly legal?"

"No." Lie. "I never thought that... I mean, it would make sense... He was gone for long periods of time, you know? Up to two to three months before he finally reached out to us."

"So he doesn't work overseas?" Aizawa said. Midoriya's wording was too off for his liking, and he made it seem like his disappearances weren't for work—or, at least, the kind of work that he claimed it to be beforehand.

Midoriya shook his head. "I don't think so."

Hm. Midoriya Hisashi already had several run-ins with the police, though he was never caught or charged with anything illegal. However, it seemed like he was up to more than what he seemed and would have to go under further investigation. Now if only they could find the bastard, especially if he had contact with the infamous Ignition...

Kayama tapped the side of his wrist, a sign that he was supposed to be asking questions. It was supposed to be Kayama this time with these certain ones, seeing how she would do best with this kind of topic, but he could tell that she was on the verge of hurting someone and would lose her grip.

Aizawa stopped himself from sighing last second. He couldn't very well just ask him upfront how his parents treated him—Hiroji, someone he'd interviewed first when he was released from the hospital, said that Midoriya often downplayed things to an extent. He explained that it was mostly due to the fact that he wanted to get over it and try to forget it as soon as he could, which ended with mixed results. Sometimes it helped, other times it added fuel to the fire.

"Your mother," he began, "Midoriya Inko." It was a simple statement, but he watched as Midoriya flinched. "Was there a reason she left when she did?"

That wasn't the right question to ask, apparently. Shit.

Midoriya looked down at his lap and pursed his lips. Aizawa watched as his eyes watered. "I..." A shadow fell over his eyes. "I scared her off."

"How?" Kayama spoke this time. Her voice was carefully neutral, though Aizawa could see the anger flickering in her eyes. She clearly didn't believe him.

"I just..." He took in a shuddering breath. "I kept asking questions, kept pushing her about things that she was clearly suffering from... She was always suffering at his hand—"

"So he was abusive," Kayama said. Aizawa wanted to hit her upside the head.
"Y-yeah, to her—"

"And did he hurt you?"

Midoriya flinched. "N-no, not really—" Lie.

Kayama opened her mouth again, but Aizawa gripped her arm. Tightly. "Midoriya." The boy didn't respond. "Please understand me when I say that Inko made a mistake."

Immediately, Midoriya's face whipped upward. He glared at Aizawa, though it was weak and there were conflicting emotions in his eyes. "She left because she had to."

"And yet she didn't alert anyone else about you?" Aizawa shot back.

Midoriya's eyes narrowed, even as his lower lip began to tremble. "Hisashi would have hurt her. He told her not to."

"Clearly, she didn't care what Hisashi had to say though, did he?" Aizawa said. "Whether or not she was your birth parent, she took you in. It was her job as a parent to protect you, even if her own husband was the cause of your problems."

"She didn't decide to take me in, that was all Hisashi—!"

"Does it really matter, though?" Yamada interjected, his voice softer than either of theirs. "She could have easily alerted the police, a hero, anyone about you after she left. Any one of them could have helped you out of that situation. Instead, she refused you help for her own needs."

Midoriya's hands tightened into fists. "She cared about me," he said in a hushed tone. "She took care of me the best she could, she protected me from—" Midoriya's frown deepened as he cut himself off.

"Hisashi," Kayama finished. "She protected you from Hisashi." She clasped her hands tightly. "But who protected you from her?"

Midoriya opened his mouth, ready to snap back when Aizawa cut in. "Hiroji Chikara. He's your gymnastics instructor, correct?" Aizawa didn't even wait for Midoriya to confirm it when he continued speaking again. "All parents are different in how they raise their kids, but Hiroji is the core of what a parent should be." Aizawa leaned forward. "He's dependable. He's always open to question. He respects you."

Yamada cleared his throat. "What he's trying to say—"

"—if you replaced Inko with Hiroji," Kayama said, "would the circumstances be the same?"

Silence followed their statements. Midoriya clamped his mouth shut. Aizawa took over the flow of the conversation again. "We're asking you to accept our help. Whether or not they held some semblance of love for you, the outcome is still the same. They abandoned you, left you to fend for yourself, and never reached out for someone to help you."

Aizawa was expecting a lot of things to come out of his mouth as the boy's jaw clenched. Maybe he'd reject the statement, or maybe he'd put the blame on Hisashi again.

"Just- just stop."

"Midoriya—" Kayama started.
"I don't get it," he said, his voice once again growing small and wobbly. "I don't... I don't get it. Just—why? Why are you... why are you doing this? Why do even care?" His shoulders shook as his voice grew tight. "I don't—I've been li-living with myself for years now, so why—?"

_Shoot. I forgot that he's still a fifteen-year-old kid. This is not the same person at USJ._

"We're heroes, Midoriya," Aizawa said patiently. "It's what we do. But even above that, we're your teachers. This—" He pointed to the empty apartment around them. "—is not okay. And we're here to help you because we care about you."

Midoriya ducked his head, and Aizawa watched as his shoulders shook and splotches of tears hit the back of his hands.

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At the end of the day, they didn't find much more about Midoriya's predicament. Aizawa showed him everything that he gathered while he was stuck in the hospital and after he was released, and Midoriya confirmed all of it. They had to lightly reprimand him for forging Hisashi's signatures, but it was halfhearted and it was obvious that they didn't care.

Aizawa had a feeling, though, that Hisashi was more than just "someone who dabbled with crime."

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"So, your name's Daizō, huh?"

The aforementioned boy was curled into a small ball in the empty hallway, arms wrapped around his legs as he tried to keep warm. Or rather, the hallway was empty, but there was a new visitor there. Daizō glanced at the man who sat beside him, his crazy, wild hair spiked up around his head. He had dark scars that covered his lower jaw, parts of his chest, and his arms. His baggy clothing probably hid more, but Daizō couldn't tell from where he was sitting.

The man sighed as he pulled one of his legs up toward his chest. He rested his elbow on his knee, staring off into a place that Daizō couldn't see. "That's a nice name. Yeah, I think I like that."

Daizō pursed his lips as he stared at the man's bright blue eyes. "Are you... are you Dabi?"

The man's eyes snapped down to him, and he stared at him for a long moment before he eventually sighed. He leaned backward until his back hit the cold stone wall behind the two of them. "Dang. I didn't think that my reputation would spread this far," he muttered. Then, louder, "Yeah, that's me."

Another silence fell over the two as the seconds ticked away. As night time fell and the hallways began to get ever so slightly colder, Daizō shivered. He was wearing light clothing despite it being in the middle of winter, clothing that Shigaraki had given him after his last got ruined.

Dabi huffed as he noticed. "Shigaraki's an asshole, isn't he?" he said as he brought an arm around Daizō. He flinched at the movement, but Dabi was gentle as he brought him closer to his side. He was oddly... warm. "My quirk causes me to release more heat than the average person," Dabi explained. As an example, he held his other hand out in front of Daizō, letting a small blue flame flicker in his palm.

Daizō bit his lower lip as he wracked his brain. "People tell me that you're supposed to be harsh and cruel," he whispered. His lips were pulled into a frown as he shrunk into himself, obviously scared of the man's reaction from beside him.
Dabi hummed. "Of course I am. I'm always scaring others."

"You're not scaring me," Daizō said quietly, mostly without thinking. Dabi glanced at him with his electric blue eyes.

"That's because I don't want to scare you," Dabi said as if it were obvious. He twirled the flame around in his palm so that it created a small sort of tunnel-like figure, almost like tornado.

"But why not?" Daizō asked. "Why don't you want to scare me?"

Dabi was quiet for a while. Eventually he spoke, though the gruffness of his words softened. "I have a few regrets I have to pay back."

Daizō tilted his head to the side. "What kind of regrets?"

Dabi clicked his tongue. He was scowling now, and Daizō was pretty sure he was stepping over lines that never should have been crossed. "I failed a person who should have been close to me."

Daizō frowned and, despite his better judgement, asked his bugging question. "Who?"

A sigh escaped Dabi's mouth. The flame in his hand flickered out, stray tendrils of smoke climbing through the air. Those cobalt eyes flickered with an emotion Daizō had never, ever seen on a villain before.

"Someone I should've helped," fell from his mouth, and Daizō took it in quietly. He pursed his lips as he glanced away. He felt the heat continue to warm his side as he wracked his brain. And then those dark scars caught his eye again, and he felt a question burn at the tip of his tongue. He had a feeling that Dabi wasn't going to answer it.

"Where—" Daizō began weakly. He cleared his throat as his voice cracked. He looked up into Dabi's eyes.

"Where did you get your scars from?"

"Would you like to see anyone else before we go to my place?" Kayama asked quietly. The atmosphere was tense, and Midoriya had been silent the entire time he was in the passenger seat.

Midoriya was silent for a second before he finally nodded. Kayama felt torn between relief that there even was someone he wanted to see and sad that he clearly didn't want to leave his apartment and go to hers.

"Do you know where they live?" Kayama prodded gently as she started the engine of her car.

Midoriya nodded. "Yeah... Just take a right here—"

Hiroji and Aika were cooking dinner with one another. Aika giggled as Hiroji threw a chunk of bread into the air and tried to catch it in his mouth. He almost missed, but he managed to get it. Aika giggled and shook her head.

"I don't know how you do that," she admitted. "Every time I try, I end up missing... or almost choking when I do get it."
Hiroji laughed and patted her on the back. "Practice makes progress, girly."

Aika laughed but rolled her eyes as she knocked the side of her hip with his. "What happened to perfect?"

Hiroji ran a hand through her hair. "You're already perfect."

Aika smiled brilliantly as she tucked a piece of hair behind her hair. "Not as perfect as you," she whispered before standing on her tiptoes, kissing his forehead. Hiroji chuckled.

"If you say so."

Before Aika could say something, the doorbell rang. Hiroji blinked in surprise before setting the spoon in his hand into the pot over the oven. He wiped his hands on the apron that said "Hug the No. 1 Dad" and kissed Aika's head. "Make sure nothing burns, all right?" Aika nodded.

Not bothering to take his apron off, he made his way to their front door. He looked through the peephole to see—

Hiroji swung the door open, blinking at the two figures standing there. There was Midoriya, whose eyes were red and puffy as if he'd been crying. And then there was Kayama Nemuri, also known as the R-Rated Heroine: Midnight. He hadn't seen her in years since he retired from the police force.

"What happened." He knew that he was being too demanding in this situation, but then he remembered Eraserhead speaking with him a few days back, and he couldn't help the worry building in his chest. The man had asked him all sorts of questions, from what he liked to do in his free time, the hobbies he had taken up, and what kind of home life he lived in. The man claimed that he wanted to know his student better, but Hiroji had a sinking feeling that Eraserhead had more things up his sleeve. The man was all about practicality, and he had no care for social repercussions because of it. Why was he trying to "get to know his student" so much?

Kayama placed a hand on Midoriya's shoulder, her hold gentle. "Midoriya wanted to see you before he moved in with me," she explained.

"Moved in," Hiroji echoed. "What—?"

"Is something going on, Dad?" Hiroji turned to see Aika there, her hair pulled up into a messy ponytail. She blinked.

"Izuku?" Her brows furrowed. "What are you doing here?"

"He's moving in with Kayama-san," Hiroji relayed to her.

Aika blinked. "Eh? But why?"

Midoriya flinched. He still had yet to say anything. Kayama sighed lightly through her nose. "Unfortunately, I cannot say unless I have Midoriya's permission—"

"They want me to stay with a hero because my parents aren't around."

Hiroji glanced toward him. "Because... the USJ attack?" he asked weakly.

Aika's voice was frosty as she spoke up. "How long have they been gone for?" she asked, ignoring Hiroji's question.

Midoriya frowned. A few seconds of silence passed before he finally spoke. "Years."
Aika's eyes watered. She clenched her jaw and twisted on her heel, storming back into their house.

"Aika—" Hiroji started.

"Shut up!" she hissed. "Goddammit, just shut up and let me get the fucking ice cream!"

Hiroji sighed as she disappeared from his view. Aika had her own problems with her mother, and he couldn't even imagine how she felt knowing that Midoriya, someone she was incredibly close to, also had family problems. "Shut up and let me get the fucking ice cream" was their code for "I need a minute to relax and sort this through and eat my problems away until I'm calm enough."

Hiroji felt his stomach turn into knots as he turned back toward Midoriya. The boy refused to look at him, his gaze frozen on his shoes. Kayama looked incredibly solemn, but there was also a hint of protectiveness and disapproval in her eyes. Hiroji felt his mouth grow dry as the realization crashed into him. Was he happy that Midoriya was finally getting help, or was he bitter at the fact that the abandonment was true?

"Why don't you come inside," he offered softly. Midoriya nodded, and Kayama, clearly looking hesitant at the idea, gave a hum of confirmation. He was sure that she would have dragged Midoriya away if he hadn't agreed. Hiroji gently ushered them inside, where Aika was scooping large amounts of ice cream into two bowls. She stomped over to the three before shoving one of the bowls into Midoriya's hands. She stabbed a spoon into the mound of frozen milk fat.

"Eat the fucking ice cream," she snapped at Midoriya's bewildered face before aggressively sitting on the couch. Hiroji noticed that she had already taken the pot off the top of the oven and had moved it to the side, ready to be served.

"Ice cream is our way of making us feel better and to show our compassion," Hiroji explained as he gently steered them toward the other couches. "Stay here, I'll get you something to actually eat."

Midoriya seemed too numb and shocked to say anything or protest as Hiroji shuffled into the kitchen. Aika was eating her ice cream like her life depended on it. Midnight was sitting awkwardly off to the side, though she seemed a bit more comfortable than before.

By the time Hiroji appeared back into the living room, bowl in hand and the contents steaming, Aika had Midoriya in a bear hug as they were curled on the couch. Hiroji shook his head as he sat on Aika's side before pulling the two of them into a hug. Midoriya huffed as he was squeezed tighter.

Midnight, after a little bit of convincing, joined in on Midoriya's side.

It was nice, if a bit clumsy, all things considering.

"We're going to have more ice cream parties after this," Aika declared later. "And you better visit me, Izuku, or we'll have grave problems."

Midoriya just smiled lightly.

====

Translation:

So... things have changed around here a bit. I packed my bag with all of my necessities the night that Aizawa and the other teachers visited. They promised that they were going to come back with me later over the week to help me move whatever else I wanted to bring. I don't really have anything I
want to bring other than my piano, but I'm not sure I'll be able to fit it in Kayama's apartment.

Of course, I'm a wreck at the moment, so it was a bit awkward trying to get all of my stuff. Especially so because of my injuries, and the process was super slow. They were nice about it though, and they took up my offer of making themselves tea while they waited. Yamada-sensei also made a bit of food from my leftovers for the other two since I explained I didn't want too much of what I bought to spoil. He's a pretty good cook, by the way. He just gets distracted a lot.

I moved in with Kayama-sensei. I still remember when I first did her bio all those years ago, and when I tried to decide if she was really as sadistic and sexual in her personal life as a hero. It's a bit weird seeing that she had indeed somewhat grown out of her younger phase of life, one where she happily flaunted herself. I guess that's the price of becoming a hero like that-you have to stick with the gig, even after you grow older.

Kayama-sensei wears a lot of conservative clothing, actually. She likes turtlenecks too, which is a surprise. She says that it helps her blend into the background when she's off duty, but she also admitted that the clothes are more comfortable.

Kayama-sensei's apartment has an extra bedroom that she was more than willing to give up to me. I felt bad because she had obviously been using it as a storage room, but she waved it off. She said something about her needing to clean it out anyway, which was meant to make me feel better. I guess it kind of did, in a way.

Uhm, so... I had a nightmare about the nomu attack. It wasn't... bad or anything. It just sort of scared me a little. I'm assuming it reminded me of the nomu invasions from back when (forward when, since it's the future?), and I guess I made some kind of noise because Kayama came in. Maybe it was her reflexes as a hero or something, and she's a light sleeper? I don't know. She helped me through it until I fell asleep again. She told me a few funny stories about the time when she, Aizawa, Yamada, and Iida's older brother, Tensei, were friends in U.A. Some of the things they did were utterly ridiculous, and it's no wonder that our class gets away with the stuff we do.

Speaking of Aizawa and Yamada, I was totally surprised by the fact that they live together. Apparently Aizawa didn't get paid a lot at first for being an underground hero. One, because he wasn't public, and two, because he was a solo hero. Yamada was in a slightly better condition at the time, though he was struggling too because his radio show was just starting and hadn't had many listeners. Since Aizawa almost starved his cats on several occasions because he was so busy, Yamada decided to ask Aizawa to move in with him. That way, they could share rent and Aizawa wouldn't end up killing the cats (or himself, really) from lack of care.

Aizawa was going to move into his own apartment a couple years ago when Yamada took in a kid from foster care, and Aizawa decided to stay. Mainly because, as Kayama said, while Yamada was a great guardian to have, he wouldn't have the guts to reprimand his "kid" and teach him good from bad properly. And so Aizawa stayed to make sure Yamada wouldn't fuck up. I would almost feel bad for the kid, except the dynamic is actually... really exceptional? Though Yamada and Aizawa are total opposite ends of the spectrum, the two of them work together nicely. I'm sure the kid learns a lot from the two. Though I wonder which guardian he takes after the most?

(It's Aizawa. Definitely Aizawa.)

=====

It was a bit awkward to see Midoriya sitting in her living room at six in the morning, quietly reading a book that he had brought with him. She was used to the solidarity that accompanied her every time she walked through her apartment, and so seeing the boy there was a surprise.
Was it a bad surprise? Not necessarily. She was just caught off-guard; she had thought the boy would be sleeping in after his nightmare, but he looked... normal.

Okay then. So he knew how to deal with nightmares easily already. That was... an uncomfortable thought.

She cleared her throat, and he jumped in surprise. "Shouldn't you be in bed right now?" she asked, her hands on her hips.

He blinked at her owlishly. "Isn't it Monday?" he asked, confused.

_He... what? No, he cannot seriously be thinking about going to school today._

"Don't you think your injuries would bother you?" she said instead, raising an eyebrow at his wide-eyed stare.

He bit his lower lip. "Uhm, maybe a little? I'll be fine, though."

She stared at him. "Okay," she said suspiciously. "But you'll tell me if you're in pain, right? I can bring you back here any time."

Midoriya nodded. "Of course, Kayama-sensei."

She squinted her eyes at him but sighed. "All right." She turned to go make herself a little bit of breakfast, humming quietly to herself as she entered the kitchen. Her worry didn't fade any, even as she distracted herself with cooking two eggs for herself. She handed Midoriya a cup of yogurt and a spoon as she walked by him with her own plate. "See if you can eat that, yeah? And if you have problems still, we'll move to smoothies."

He seemed a little surprised as he took the two into each hand. He pursed his lips, thinking, before he nodded. He peeled the lid off the container, and he began to spoon small amounts into his mouth. They ate in relative silence, just verging on uncomfortable enough to seem awkward but not enough to try to break it with small talk. Such as the weather.

Kayama turned on the TV as she ate, crossing her fingers that villain activity hadn't spiked since the attack on USJ. The police force had doubled their efforts ever since the confident leap the villains took into the heroes' lives. Speaking of the police force, they just reported to Nedzu that they had yet to find any clues on Hisashi's location. The man was as slippery as an eel, and the only recent piece of evidence they managed to scrounge up was the paperwork Hisashi had signed four months ago in Beijing—but that still left four months of unaccounted absence, and no one had a clue as to where he could have gone to.

The only idea that came to mind was their Ignition theory, that Hisashi worked closely with the man and was high up in his favor. Which gave Kayama hives just thinking about it. Ignition was a terrifying villain, one who forged an entire underground organization that eluded the police for years with almost just his words. He killed and tortured to make a statement, taunted heroes with lies and truths that were too much to bear, and gleefully led innocent bystanders to their deaths for his own amusement. He was cold, vicious, and outright cruel. The only thing that matched his brutality was his utter brilliance.

Of course, they managed to uncover the organization a few years ago, and they caught most of Ignition's most valuable allies. Horror's Dove, his right hand man, was one of those people. Though Ignition himself had disappeared through the cracks, and was no doubt trying to regain his power now, it was a huge blow to the villain community. The organized crime rate peaked slightly before
plummeting down to almost a third of what it had been before. The fact that Hisashi was a follower of ally of Ignition was worrying, however, seeing how the man's influence was starting to spread to lower families. After all, the only thing worse in the world's eyes than being an ally of Ignition was the man himself.

Kayama sighed as she recognized the headlines that cross the bottom of the TV screen. Midoriya hummed from beside her. "So they're making this into a political battle?" he asked quietly, gesturing to television.

Kayama finished chewing before she answered. "Yeah. They keep on focusing more on U.A. than the actual villains themselves. And we already learned our lesson, really." She began to move her food around her plate, an expression of unease flitting across her face. "We're already making the necessary adjustments to make sure you guys are safe and that nothing like this happens again. But to think that the news is more interested in further pushing us into the ground rather than talking about the actual problem itself..." She sighed again and shook her head. "It's nothing, though. Don't worry too much about it, we've got it handled."

Midoriya was quiet for a few minutes before he spoke up. "What if something like this happens again? What then?"

Kayama paused. "What then?" she echoed to herself. "Well, that depends. That means that the League of Villains is a growing threat." She pointed at him with her chopsticks. "One that we'll take care of."

Midoriya stared at her for a long, long time before he finally turned back to his breakfast. She had hoped that she was reassuring, but he just looked even more worried than he had before.

"Who do you think we'll get for our substitute?" someone asked.

Sero wracked his brain for any hero that might make sense. He hadn't thought about their teachers being absent, now that he thought about it. For example, what if one of them got hurt off-campus due to a villain attack they were on the scene for? Or what if they got sick? Sure, they were heroes and put up with a lot of pain, but surely even they were human. Something that a majority of them forgot often, really.

Sero opened his mouth to say something along the lines of "Maybe we'll get someone nice, like All Might" when the door creaked open. Everyone fell silent until the form of a bandaged Aizawa walked inside the classroom.

"Aizawa-sensei!? Shouldn't you be resting!?"

"Are you okay? You took quite a few bad hits back there."

"I'm pretty sure what you're doing is not good for your health, sir."

Aizawa growled. "Quiet, all of you. I have—"

The door creaked open again, and Sero glanced over to see—

"Oh god, not you too!"

Sero stood up in shock. "Midoriya, what are you doing? Why aren't you at home!?"
"Yeah, dude, you got fricken' pummeled!"

Midoriya blinked at all of them, face blank before he turned away to face Aizawa. He ignored all of their protests. "Sorry I'm late," was all he said before he walked over to his desk, slowly sitting down.

"What is up with you two and not getting any rest?" Sero heard Ashido mutter. "Do you have a death wish or something?"

Sero couldn't find it in himself to respond, even though he so badly wanted to. Because she was right, how could they even think about going to school with those injuries? USJ was horrific, and the two of them (minus Thirteen) had suffered the most wounds. Midoriya himself had to be carried out on a stretcher, his still form covered in blood as they shoved an oxygen mask on his face—

Sero shook his head to wipe the thought away. He focused on Aizawa, who was shuffling papers in front of the class.

"The annual Sports Festival will be coming up in two weeks," he said, also ignoring the shocked looks that were passed between the class. "You will be competing against one another to show off your powers. This is one of your best chances to show yourself to the world and gain interest from different agencies. You only get to do it once a year." He cleared his throat. "It isn't just hero agencies, either. These Sports Festivals replaced the Olympics years ago with the rise of quirks, and most of Japan will be watching your abilities. The rest of the country that doesn't watch it will definitely hear about it from others." He looked up to all of them, his glare increasing tenfold. "So don't screw up."

Sero frowned. The Sports Festival... so soon after the USJ attack? He knew that U.A. was crazy with the way they pushed their students, but to think that they would even ignore—

No, a part of his mind interjected. There's no way they're ignoring this. I bet you this is their way of saying, "You may have caught us off-guard, but we're not going to stay down" to the villains. And what better way to keep the Sports Festival? Even if it's a bit much, they're still giving us time. It's not like it's in two days or anything. And plus, the entire event has to cost a bunch of money. Imagine trying to postpone it...

Sero smiled as whoops and excited cheering broke out. Though it hurt his ears a little, he kept on smiling anyway—it wasn't too bad to deal with. Ashido began shaking him, and Kaminari leaped on top of him, to which he grunted in surprise, laughing all the while.

And he kept on smiling.

(He was always smiling.)

======

Translation:

Yeah. I think I'll give this to Nedzu. Maybe I should start directing my entries towards him, huh?

Well, Nedzu, first of all, I think you might need to up your security. Say Juni was a villain who had a transformation quirk, who later managed to cling onto me as I was walking to school. She could then hop off of me and then find a good hiding place until she made her move. Think about it—all the information in U.A. was at her fingertips.

Also, I hacked into your security system anonymously this weekend. Of course, I lied low and didn't
really do much other than enter the system itself, but still. It only took a few (dozen) tries.

Or maybe that's just me. I don't know, we learned a lot of tips back in my time period, and they were for technology that had only the tiniest chinks. You'd be lucky to get a little string of coding after four days of attempted hacking without break.

Speaking of technology, Nedzu, did you know that they had fully-fledged artificial intelligence networks then? I think it'd be cool to see you and an AI go head-to-head. Who knows? Maybe you'd actually be able to defeat them in a battle of knowledge.

Excuse me if I sound rude, but I think the AI would win, personally. Don't get me wrong, you're probably the smartest person I've seen. But the first fully self-sufficient AI was created in 2786, and let me tell you something: that one has had centuries to learn and grow. And you want to know something?

The newer models were eight times more superior to the last.

It's a terrifying thought, really.

=====

Translation:

Nedzu,

I've been wondering about this for a while, now. After all, the rumor of this never quite died, even when I was born eight hundred years later.

Do you think there's a traitor among us?

... I hope it's not true.

(I especially hope they're not in Class 1-A.)

=====

"You want... group training?" Yaoyorozu asked. She was sitting next to Midoriya, their arms interlinked. (She had been worried sick and had wanted to hug him, and yet his injury made her too nervous to do so; he humored her by letting her link their arms as they walked toward the lunchroom. She had yet to let go, even if they weren't walking any longer and the position was awkward.) Midoriya himself was slumped over, forehead placed on a pillow the creation girl had made for him. He was breathing softly as he napped, too worn out from his injury and medication to stay awake much longer.

Kirishima and Sero stood by their table, and they were the ones to bring up the topic. Iida and Tokoyami (a new friend who joined shortly after the hero vs. villain simulation) had obvious mixed views. Dark Shadow hovered over Tokoyami's shoulder, staring at the redhead and tape user with bright yellow eyes.

Uraraka seemed open to the idea. Beside her, Asui—yet another new friend who sat with them after she became friends with Uraraka, who had helped tend to her head injury at USJ before the reinforcements arrived—didn't have any expression at all. She simply let out a small croak.

Yaoyorozu tilted her head toward the two boys. "Is there a specific reason why?" she asked. "I mean, I understand it's for the Sports Festival, but for what reason would there be to train with one
Kirishima placed his hands on his hips. "Well, I find that it's too easy to give up when there's no one else around you to cheer you on or challenge you, you know? But when someone else is there, you have to push yourself to be as good as them. It's a great way to get really strong!" He punched the air with his fist. "Plus, it's super manly to help your friends out so they can get stronger as well. Dual purpose, right?"

Asui placed a finger by her chin. "You say "manly" a lot, don't you?"

Kirishima stuttered to a stop as his cheeks grew warm. "Well yeah, I think it's a great adjective. But I'd like to put a new meaning to the word, you know?" He smiled brightly at all of them. "Manly is usually meant as courageous and strength and stuff, but it's normally only used with men. I want to change that and use it for all genders, you know?" He flushed as he rubbed the back of his head. "I guess what I'm trying to say is to not take offense when I call you "manly" or whatever. It's a compliment."

Uraraka's eyes glittered as she punched the air right back at him. "Well I think you're manly too, Kirshima! Heck, all of us are!"

There was a groan, and all eyes were glued onto Midoriya, who looked up from his nap. "Manly? No, I'm queen dammit, get it right," he mumbled before falling face-first into the pillow, almost immediately falling back asleep.

Sero snorted before laughing, while Tokoyami stared at Midoriya as if he'd seen a ghost.

Yaoyorozu herself laughed before she smiled at the two boys. "Well, I think I'd love to join you."

"Count me in!" Uraraka said.

Iida sighed. "I suppose I should join you as well. It'd be a good bonding exercise for us as well."

Tokoyami nodded. "I believe it would be a great experience," he said. "Especially to learn how to fight without my quirk." At this, Dark Shadow sent him his attempt at puppy dog eyes, curling up next to Tokoyami's side and pouting. Tokoyami did not seem amused.

"I'll come too," Asui said.

Midoriya grumbled into the pillow. "Me three. Four. Five. Whatever number this is. Someone has to make sure none of you get killed."

Sero's brows furrowed as he looked at the green-headed teen. "Are you sure? I don't think you should really be exercising at all after..." He didn't continue, but the mood had already dampened severely.

Midoriya moved his head up from the pillow, opening one eye to glance at Sero. "Like I'd actually be stupid enough to go full out with you guys. No, I'll be doing my physical therapy exercises I got from my doctor and then doing a few extra stretches."

Uraraka sent him a pitying glance. "Are you going to be able to participate in the Sports Festival?"

Midoriya nodded. "Yeah, I'll be fully recovered by then. Maybe a few days earlier with how my recovery is going, so I might be able to cram in a little bit of work before the actual event comes."

"I find it odd that you'd be able to recovery from your injury so fast," Asui said. "Perhaps you know
someone who's been saving you time?"

Yaoyorozu frowned. "Well—" Her eyes widened as she cut herself off, and her head shot toward Midoriya's. "Wait, you told me—Juni—" At Midoriya's nod, she fell silent, staring at her food with wide eyes.

"Am I missing something?" Iida asked. He pushed his glasses further up his nose. "I don't know who this "Juni" person is..."

Midoriya sighed before reaching into the folds of his scarf. He placed hand back before slowly opening his palm.

Sero shrieked. Uraraka grew green in the face as she saw it.

"I-I-Is that a slug!?" Kirishima gasped, reeling backward.

Midoriya's face grew guilty as he looked down at the brown blob. At first, Yaoyorozu thought that he was going to respond to them, but instead, he spoke to her.

"I'm sorry Juni," he said, "I didn't think that they'd react this way, promise."

Yaoyorozu was sure that she was seeing things when Juni the slug waved one of her antennae in his face. His eyes watered. Definitely the medication. It had to be the medication. He pet her back, running the pad of his finger along her back.

"Oh, don't be like that, I didn't mean—" Suddenly, Yaoyorozu's chopstick flung upward from its position laying across her bowl, and it whacked him directly in the forehead. He yelped as his hand flung up to his head, massaging the tender skin. "Juni!" he cried out.

"Wait, it—she—whatever can understand you?" Sero blurted out.

Midoriya opened his mouth to answer when Dark Shadow leered over the table. "Mm, looks like a good snack to me."

Juni turned, and a small glow ran over her body before she began to swell. "Juni," he hissed. "Don't you dare." Whatever it was, however, she refused to listen to him. Midoriya dropped her onto the table as she grew bigger and bigger, now the size of a watermelon rather than a penny. Dark Shadow's eyes grew wider and wider, slowly disappearing beneath the table. As Juni finally stopped growing, he gulped and chuckled weakly.

"Eheheh, I think I'm good. Thanks for clearing that up, yep."

Midoriya was flushed pink. "Juni, you can't just do that, especially at school," he scolded. Juni tilted her head. "Yes, I understand, Dark Shadow was threatening you. But do you really think I'd just let him eat you?" Juni's "head" drooped. "No, you can't do that, I'm sorry. And please stop giving me that kicked-puppy look." He sighed heavily.

"Wha-what even is its quirk?" Uraraka stuttered. "It can't both change sizes and fling stuff around..." She gestured to Yaoyorozu's chopstick, which was sitting a ways away on the floor.

Yaoyorozu took over the explanation as Midoriya coaxed Juni into a smaller size. "She can alter reality, though only small bits every so often before she hurts herself." She glanced toward the slug, which was now near her original size. "Using it too often makes her lose her memory. Or, what little bits of it she can have as a slug."
"But..." Sero waved his arms around. "How can she even understand us?"

Midoriya shrugged. "She can understand little bits and pieces the rest together. I'm sure she's lived a very long time with her quirk, since she can make it so she doesn't die of old age. I wouldn't be surprised if she was hundreds of years old, to be honest." Juni apparently made a face at him, and he scrunched up his nose. "Well I'm sorry for revealing your age, Juni. Nobody cares if you're an old lady—" Yaoyorozu's second chopstick shot at his forehead, and he screeched. "Would you stop it—!"

"Anyway," Yaoyorozu stepped in, "I'm guessing that Juni used her quirk to help heal his injuries, which is why we got into this whole mess in the first place."

Midoriya clicked his tongue as he rubbed his forehead. "Yeah, she did. Which was nice of her, though every time I try to compliment her, she just—" Uraraka's chopstick was snapped against his forehead. He winced. "That. She does that."

Yaoyorozu frowned. "I thought you said that she could only use her quirk a few times a week at most before she began to shut down?"

Midoriya blinked before he actually smiled. "A couple of years ago that was true, Yaochan. But we began training so she could use her quirk more often."

"Training?" Kirishima's eyes sparkled.

Iida coughed awkwardly. "Not to be offensive, but I can't think of any way you can efficiently train with a..." He waved vaguely in Juni's direction.

Midoriya shrugged. "It's a different kind of training than you'd think." Midoriya picked Juni up with his fingers—earning a few shudders from the grossness of it all—and then...

"Don't tell me you're going to throw her across the room," Tokoyami said, actually looking slightly nauseous.

In response, Midoriya threw her as hard as he could, watching her little form careen through the air. Seconds later, she plopped onto the desk, sliding slightly as she shivered.

"She can't enjoy that," Uraraka said in horror. But then Juni perked up, sliding back toward Midoriya's hands.

"She enjoys it," Asui confirmed.

"Lemme try this," Kirishima said, reaching his hand out to her.

"Oo! I call next!" Sero exclaimed.

They just barely remembered their plans for group training by the time lunch ended.

===== Translation: =====

Apparently, Juni likes the thrill of flying through the air. After everyone at my table (including Kirishima and Sero) had gotten over their disgust, they began to participate with "Juni Training," or where we basically throw her through the air. She has to teleport back before she lands, and if she can't, then she hardens the outer layer of her skin so she doesn't get hurt on impact.
Usually when that happens, that means she's too tired to do it anymore.

But anyway, she was very happy today. She was tired too, exhausted even, but I usually don't get to throw her around as much like that. And usually not in large, open places like the cafeteria. Sometimes I go to the park to throw her, but it's rare.

Honestly... this kind of sounds horrifying, now that I think about it. But it's just something we've always done, you know?

Uh, shit. Nedzu, you're going to be reading this and asking what the hell's wrong with me. I forget that you're technically an animal. Which is not an insult on my part, really.

But if you do doubt me, ask Juni. She'll definitely say that she enjoys it. (Hopefully. She's the one who recommended the exercise in the first place, so...)

=====

Apparently, Midnight had alerted all the teachers to the fact that Midoriya was probably going to fall asleep during class. She explained to just let it happen, especially because she had full faith that he could catch up later. That, and she knew that coming to school was really pushing himself already.

So, she basically told the teachers that they were lucky he came to school and their class at all, and that they should be thankful and if it happens, leave him be.

(He slept for one and a half classes straight without interruption. It was awkward to wake up to have yet another pillow underneath his head and blankets pulled around him.

"You are the cutest sleeper ever," Uraraka later gushed to him. "You were totally dead to the world.")

He was awake, thankfully, for their hero class. Obviously, he wasn't allowed to do anything, but it allowed him a chance to start on his classmates' bios. He got the basic layout for all of them (miraculously), leaving spare pages between each for their own information. He cringed at the sight of only having a few pages left in his notebook due to the amount of space his classmates took up, and he reminded himself to start on his teachers and the staff in his next book. He had managed rough outlines of each of their bodies when class was called to a close.

All Might told him that he'd mostly be doing stretches and little things as they waited for him to recover. He would be largely participating during discussions and observations, but, for now, there was not much else he could do. He'd probably be finishing their bios the next few days, or, at the very least, the basics of them. He didn't know a lot about them and their strengths and weaknesses, other than most of the obvious ones. For example, Bakugo was too prideful and angry to accept help, Todoroki refused to use the fire side of his quirk, Hagakure was still not as strong as she could be to make up for her quirk (though she was strong, and she could defeat most of the boys like Kirishima and Satou in an arm wrestle).

Just as All Might had called everyone back into the observation room for discussion, Midoriya stood up, closing his notebook as he rose. There was a moment of awkward silence before All Might cleared his throat, still facing the screens in front of him. Midoriya was standing just a few meters away from him to his southeast.

"Are you all right, Young Midoriya?"

Midoriya blinked. "I'm fine, thank you for asking." He kept his tone polite, though he wasn't sure how successful he was when All Might frowned. "Is there something wrong?"
All Might seemed surprised that Midoriya asked. He had a feeling that the man didn't participate in conversations more than "Oh, you're All Might, please sign my book!" and "Well of course!" or "You'll be okay, just don't panic!" Not that the man was particularly bad with holding a conversation or anything, he just didn't pick up on social queues as much as any human being really should.

"Of course there's nothing wrong," All Might said. "Why would there be?"

"Is that why you're here? To apologize?"

"I could've saved you."

Midoriya frowned as he glanced away for a moment. "All Might—" he began, only to get cut off when the door opened. In piled several students, all laughing or, in Bakugo's case, grumbling about something that happened. Midoriya closed his mouth, looking away from All Might's back altogether. He didn't pay attention to what All Might said as he corralled the students, or the breakdown of what happened after. Several thoughts swirled around in his mind, trying to find some kind of ground to work on. One rang in his head like a light tinkle among low rumbles, and he latched onto it.

*Could All Might... be guilty for not saving me?*

"You guys ready?" Kirishima asked, a fierce glint already in his eyes.

Beside him, Uraraka was bouncing on her feet. Sero was stretching his arms, and Ashido and Kaminari (who were last-minute joiners to their group) were running around in circles. Yaoyorozu and Iida were chatting amiably.

Tokoyami felt like he was a third wheel, to be honest. Or eighth wheel. He didn't fit in with this group very well. Midoriya helped blend the lines between bright as the sun and energetic as puppies and tranquil as the swans and dark as the midnight sky.

And Tokoyami was the midnight sky. And, to be honest, he was the only one here like that, other than Dark Shadow. But the two of them didn't necessarily mean as much as his other friendships at the moment. Not that he didn't care for his quirk, because they both did; they were practically long-lost siblings. But even Dark Shadow admitted that Tokoyami needed a good, sturdy friend to rely on.

While Midoriya wasn't the definition of "sturdy" (Shouji fit that role better), he was still kind and sweet and cared for him, so it was good enough. Even if Tokoyami didn't share chemistry with the rest of his friends, it was good enough because Midoriya made everything easier, really.

Tokoyami knew that that easiness would disappear and the hardships would hit tenfold when that look in Midoriya's eyes came to light. Tokoyami promised himself that he'd be there when that time came, but he grew worried. Would Midoriya really feel better in his presence? He had always been told that he was a little intimidating, if cold and hard to speak with with the darkness around him. He wouldn't know for sure unless Midoriya came to him.

Speaking of him, Yaoyorozu had said that she received a text message from the boy telling her that he'd be late. Apparently, he had some business with Midnight that had to be taken care of.

Tokoyami followed their large group into the gym from behind, Kirishima and Uraraka in the lead. They were all already in their athletic clothing, and Kirishima waved them toward an open spot in the gym floor that no one was using. They began with simple stretches, Ashido showing off with
doing most of them while in the splits. Tokoyami was pretty sure she said she took dancing classes ever since she was a little girl, so that would probably explain it.

Then they did Kirishima's version of jogging, which was literal hell. Tokoyami was not weak, and he was actually very fit. But Kirishima was the definition of "I'm working you dry on the easiest things and I don't even realize it as I laugh and smile." Iida didn't even seem drained, nor did Asui or Ashido. Yaoyorozu was breathing heavily, but overall she seemed mostly untouched.

Tokoyami hadn't realized how much work he needed to put in to catch up with his classmates until now.

At least he was better than Kaminari, who was on the floor, pretending to be dead. Or dying. Maybe that was why he was groaning like he was in pure agony.

Then they did weight exercises, which, surprisingly, Yaoyorozu won. She explained that she'd done a lot of muscle workout after an event several years ago when I guy tried to track her down while she was with Midoriya. Neither of the two were quite sure what he actually wanted with her, other than it was something probably bad due to the fact that the man was fired from her parents' company. So, in order to protect herself, she picked up weight lifting in her free time.

And, in Sero's words, she was "hella strong." (He shuddered, unable to even fathom the idea of saying such slang terms.) They moved onto sparring with one another since they didn't get to focus on it as much in heroics training. You learned a bit each time during training, but it was mostly learning situational occurrences an how to deal with them.

Each of them shone in their own way, though. Iida was a great runner, obviously, Yaoyorozu with her strength, Ashido with her flexibility, Asui with her great stamina, Uraraka with her pure willpower, Kirishima with his inspiration and power, Sero with his rounded abilities (he didn't quite excel at specifically anything, though he was good at everything), and Kaminari...

Kaminari was just an unexplainable factor. He wasn't bad, per say, but he just... didn't have anything really special to say about him. Well, excluding the sudden bouts of passion he'd have and the excellent skill of noticing things on the spot that others didn't. It was an interesting development that Tokoyami hadn't expected at all—the boy would suddenly look up and say, "Right, forgot, Yaoyorozu, you might want to adjust the way you hold onto the weights. You could sprain your wrist that way if you're not careful." That, or some kind of feedback like, "Ashido, you're going to hurt yourself like that, and you should've moved right, not left, you cornered yourself," or, "Iida, you're going to break your ankle if you keep on ducking to the side like you're doing now."

It wasn't something that Tokoyami had expected from the boy, if he were to be honest. Especially because the blonde was awful when it came his turns in the spotlight, where he seemed to forget everything he told his classmates. He was reckless, didn't think out what he did, and often was slammed into the ground groaning.

It was kind of... weird, to be honest.

"Hey, does anyone know when Midoriya is gonna arrive?" Sero asked.

Asui blinked. "Oh," she said. "He came in a while ago. He's over there." She pointed toward the uneven bars in the corner of the gym, which was usually used for pull ups. Instead, there was Midoriya, who was—

"What the actual hell," Kaminari said. Tokoyami couldn't blame him.
Midoriya had pulled himself up on the highest bar and pushed himself above it. His arms were barely straining as he held his body perfectly perpendicular to the bar. His legs, however, were in a full split in the air.

"He looks like a statue," Sero said.

"Oh my god," Ashido gushed, "a fellow flexi-friend!"

"I thought he was supposed to be taking it easy?" Uraraka asked worriedly.

Asui shrugged. "It's probably his definition of easy."

Yaoyorozu knocked her fist on the bar lightly to get his attention—also, when had she walked over to his side? He opened his eyes and smiled at her, slowly swinging himself around so he was hanging down from the bar. Tokoyami realized how careful he was with stretching his wound, and he murmured quietly to Yaoyorozu. The girl nodded, and he let go of the bar. Yaoyorozu caught him easily in her arms, and they grunted at the sudden change in weight.

Yaoyorozu carefully set him down onto the ground, and he smiled brightly at her. Tokoyami was pretty sure he gave her a thanks before he was practically pounced upon by Ashido, who barraged him with questions about how he managed to get so flexible.

Tokoyami felt a twinge of guilt go through him as Midoriya inconspicuously held his arm over his side. The minute the two girls turned away, a pained look flashed across his face.

"He hurt himself," Dark Shadow said quietly next to him.

Tokoyami nodded and averted his gaze.

=====

"You're Yagi-san, aren't you?" Yagi's head shot up from the papers in his lap and onto the boy standing just a bit away from his side. Yagi was sitting on a bench on U.A.'s grounds, getting a bit of fresh air as he looked over the work that his students' had completed.

He had asked for an analysis from each of them on a fight that had taken place not too long ago. It wasn't a big assignment, and he asked all of them to spend roughly ten minutes on it at most. The entire idea of it was to see what his students could see in a fight and where both heroes and villains went wrong. While analysis was often downplayed, it was the most effective tool in a fight. Though All Might himself didn't have much tact in that area of expertise, long since growing out of it with his immense power alone, he knew what a good strategy could do—and how damaging it could be.

"Yes," Yagi said slowly. "I am. And you're Midoriya Izuku, correct?" Of course, he already knew his student well, but not in this form. In this form, he was mostly clueless about All Might got up to other than what the man supposedly told him.

Midoriya nodded. "I'm assuming that you know me from being All Might's... assistant, right?"

"But of course." Yagi gestured to the bench. "Why don't you sit down? I don't bite, I promise."

Midoriya seemed to hesitate before he sat to Yagi's right, leaving about two feet in between them in space. Midoriya was quiet as he looked out over the small pond, fat koi fish swimming in the clear water.

"It's a nice day, isn't it?" Yagi asked.
"Well then, why are you here?" Yagi asked. "You should be out of school, having fun, playing games..." He gestured to the campus around him. "Why stay here? School had to have been let out half an hour ago."

Yagi took notice of the light quirk of Midoriya's lips. "Actually, I'm in Kayama-sensei's care at the moment," he admitted. "I live alone, and due to my—" He faltered for a moment. "... injury, U.A. thought it would be best to have someone keep an eye on me. And since Kayama-sensei is a teacher, she won't be leaving until another hour or so."

Yagi digested that information for a moment. He hadn't been aware of that. Or, rather, no one told him that. This had to have happened recently if it was the case. "Well, is your injury doing better?" he asked, crossing his fingers for good news.

Midoriya shrugged. "The pain is on-an-off," he admitted. "But Recovery Girl thinks that I'll be mostly recovered enough by mid-next week. So that's good news." He huffed. "It'll scar, but at least it's better than All Might's injury, you know?"

Yagi froze. He felt his blood ran cold as his eyes widened. And yet Midoriya continued to stare off at the pond, watching the fish swim without really seeing. The boy raised a hand to his side, dropping it a second later.

"All Might lost his stomach in that fight, didn't he?" Midoriya murmured. He rested his elbows on his thighs as he brought his hands together, interlacing his fingers into a tent-like shape. His chin leaned on his fingers as his eyes gained a faraway look to them. "All for One really is a pain, isn't he?"

Midoriya slowly glanced toward Yagi. "You know, All Might mentioned something about time to Aizawa during the USJ fight" He tilted his head. "So, is this the form you take when you've run out of said time?"

Yagi blinked. He wanted to make some excuse, some kind of surprised reaction that would try and protect his identity, but it died on his tongue when he saw the certainty on Midoriya's face. He cleared his throat awkwardly. "Yes," he finally said. "I have a three hour time limit. But how—?"

"—did I know about it?" Midoriya finished. There was a moment of silence before Midoriya turned away completely. A sigh escaped him. He pushed himself upward, exhaling heavily as he got to his feet. "I heard about All for One. By accident." He paused. "I'll explain it. One day." He turned and bowed toward Yagi. "Thank you for answering my questions. That's all I wanted to ask."

Midoriya glanced one last time toward the pond before he turned and began to walk away. Yagi was soon left alone as the boy approached Kayama, who was nothing but a small dot in the distance as she stood by the entrance gate to U.A. Yagi was left to his own thoughts, nothing but the chirping of the birds and the rustling of the wind left to accompany him.

Thank... you?

Yagi glanced down at the papers in his lap. He shuffled them until Midoriya's was on top, and he glanced over the neatly written kanji that took up most of the page.

Why are you thanking me?

-----

"I'm super sorry about this," Kayama said. "But I'm going to be gone all afternoon for hero business. You won't mind if I drop you off at Aizawa and Yamada's apartment, will you?"
Midoriya shook his head. "Of course not." He hesitated. "Stay safe, okay?"

Kayama smiled. "Thanks, kiddo. Now," she pointed her fist outward and posed, "let's go!"

Midoriya felt a smile quirk his lips. Aizawa's apartment was barely a block away, so the walk was extremely short. Kayama rang the doorbell, waiting as she bounced on her feet. The door flew open to reveal Yamada with his hair pulled into a messy bun. His eyes brightened.

"Oh, hey you two!" he exclaimed. "Come on in, Midoriya, we'll be right with you."

Midoriya fidgeted awkwardly as he stepped in. The smell of something cooking permeated the air. Soft pop music was playing in the background—presumably for Yamada. Off to the side, Midoriya saw Aizawa. He had stack upon stack of papers in front of him. At the moment, it looked like he was grading their most recent essays.

The man... looked like he was on the verge of death, really. The bags beneath his eyes were even darker than usual. Aizawa looked up toward him. "You're not where you need to be," he stated.

Midoriya ignored the statement's blunt rudeness and sat across from him. "In what?"

"Health," Aizawa said as he looked back down at the paper in his lap. He circled a word in red pen and wrote something off to the side. "You're too thin."

"I can't eat much due to my injury," Midoriya replied.

"What can you eat?"

Midoriya shrugged. "I'm eating soft things, like yogurt and mashed-up fruits. Smoothies on occasion." He pondered for a moment before continuing. "I've been eating noodles here and there."

Aizawa hummed. "Okay. Then let me rephrase what I said before." He placed his papers off to the side. "You weren't where you needed to be before the attack, and now you're worse."

Midoriya frowned. "What makes you say that?"

Aizawa rolled his eyes. "You were thin enough as it was. I hadn't said anything before because it could have had to do with your quirk, but clearly that isn't the case. So I'm asking you to put on a bit of weight."

Midoriya pursed his lips before glancing away. Aizawa noticed. He sighed. "Are you starving yourself?"

"No."

"Do you forget to eat when you're alone?"

"No."

"Then why were you so thin?" Aizawa asked.

Midoriya pressed the pads of his fingers together nervously. "I... get nauseous at the thought of food sometimes. I throw it all back up when I try to ignore it and eat anyway."

Aizawa's nose scrunched up for a second. "When does this happen?"

Midoriya hesitated. "Nightmares, usually. The really bad ones."
Aizawa hummed. "Go talk to Recovery Girl tomorrow. I'm sure she can give you some medication for that."

Midoriya blinked. "What?"


Midoriya frowned but took it, blinking when he saw the essay he wrote just a few days prior. "Why are you giving this to me now?"

Aizawa sighed. "Makes it easier on me. Plus, I don't have time for one-on-one explanations on what you need to do and how. I don't plan to tell your classmates where I live, either. So take it and if you have questions, ask me." He twirled the red pen in his hands. "Now shoo. I have to fix Ashido's essay, and who knows how long that's going to take."

Midoriya blinked and looked down at his own. A big ninety-four was written at the top. "Thanks."

Aizawa didn't respond, just waved his hand. Midoriya stood up and was greeted by a loud Yamada, who ushered them further into the house.

"I hope you don't mind meeting my foster kid," Yamada exclaimed. Even if Midoriya said no, it was obvious that he would be dragged in anyway.

Midoriya swallowed nervously as they stood outside the bedroom of the kid. Midoriya tried to clear the itchiness in his throat as Yamada knocked on the door. The jittery man rocked back and forth on his heels, clearly excited. The door creaked open, and Midoriya blinked as wavy purple hair came into view.

"Heya, Hitoshi!" Yamada chirped. "Midoriya's here now, as you can obviously see. Think you guys can hang out until Midnight comes back thank you!"

Before Midoriya could comprehend what was happening, he was shoved forward and into the room. Hitoshi didn't even blink as Yamada slammed the door behind the two of them.

"Is he always like that?" Midoriya asked.

The other boy shrugged. "You get used to it after a while." There was a moment of awkward silence before he spoke up. "You're Midoriya Izuku, right? I think I remember you. People had a lot to say about USJ."

Midoriya flinched but tried not to humor it. "Yeah. That's me." He cleared his throat. "And you?"

The boy huffed. "I'm Shinsou Hitoshi." He turned away from Midoriya, walking further into the room. A few cats curled around his feet as he avoided stepping on their toes.

The name rang a bell in Midoriya's head. He blinked in surprise as he recognized the boy, whose hair waved around his face as if it was wind-swept. He had large bags under his eyes that were almost identical to Aizawa's. "You're from General Education, right?"

Shinsou froze momentarily before he replied. "Yeah."

Midoriya crossed his arms awkwardly. "Aren't you the one with the Brainwashing quirk?"

Shinsou stopped in his tracks completely. There was a moment of complete silence before he spoke up. His voice was quiet. "That's me."
Midoriya clicked his tongue. "Shame." He saw Shinsou flinch from the corner of his eye, apparently ready to take whatever he said negatively and with a grain of salt. "You would have done well in one of the Heroics classes."

Shinsou remained still for a moment before he turned around. There was a hint of surprise in his eyes, though he coughed to cover it up. "Uh, thanks, I guess," he muttered.

Midoriya hummed. "Not that I really know anything about human interaction, but I don't think you're supposed to be unsure of a simple compliment."

Shinsou snorted softly. "Well, that makes two of us, I guess." He looked up toward the lights embedded into his ceiling. "All I know how to do is talk about cats."

Midoriya let a small smile onto his face as he sat down onto the floor. A few of Shinsou's cats came up to him, sniffing his fingers. "Well, I think that's something I can talk about too."

Shinsou, after a moment of hesitation, sat down in front of him. "Well," he started, "the cat licking your fingers is Penny..."

=====

Kayama was giggling as Yamada steadied the phone in his hands. "Come on, take a picture before they wake up," Kayama hissed as she tried to hold in her laughing.

On the floor of Shinsou's room, he and Midoriya were laying on their backs, fast asleep. All three of Shinsou's cats were curled around them, though a fourth of Aizawa's had slipped into the room, and he laid across both of the boys' chests.

"This blackmail is going to be amazing," Aizawa admitted quietly.

Yamada giggled as he stuffed his phone in his pocket. "Come on," he whispered, shoving the other two out the door. "Let's go, let's go!"

Kayama shut off the lights. "Goodnight, boys," she whispered before the door shut behind her.

=-=-=

Midoriya tapped his bottom lip as he looked between the two boxes of noodles in front of him. He and Kayama were cooking together tonight at Midoriya's insistence. He felt bad that she had to cook for him every night without him doing anything but twiddling his thumbs, and so they finally reached an agreement to cook together.

Kayama had asked him to buy a few more ingredients that they didn't have on hand while she prepped everything else. At the moment, Midoriya was debating on which kind of noodles to buy—Kayama had a specific kind written down on the shopping list she gave him, but the brand sold two different kinds... and he was still debating which to buy.

He sighed as he picked one up, reading the back. He didn't have many allergies to speak of, though he wasn't quite sure about Kayama herself. She didn't say anything about the subject, but he honestly couldn't be sure. It would be easier to text her and ask her, but he forgot his phone at Kayama's apartment.

From beside him, a voice spoke up. "I'd just get the original, if I ask you. The one with the flavor tastes artificial, in my opinion."
Midoriya felt relief wash over him as he turned to the owner of the voice. "Thank you—" All of the relief that came over him disappeared instantly. He felt himself freeze. The box in his hand dropped to the ground.

The woman glanced toward him in surprise. "Something the matte—" She cut herself off as well as she stared at him. Her dark brown eyes, holding hints of amber, widened considerably. Her short blonde hair fell around her face in soft waves, a few bangs gracing her right brow. Her knee-high leather boots came up to her knees, and they had silver buckles that lined the sides.

"Shit," Maiko said. "Fuck." Her hands flew up to her temples as another slew of cuss words escaped her mouth. "Daizō, fucking help me," she hissed as she paled even further.

Midoriya opened his mouth to respond. Why on earth would I want to help you? a part of him wanted to ask. Another part of him was screaming, what the hell are you doing here!? and I thought you were dead!

"Oh, deary me," another, familiar voice called out. Midoriya froze before whipping around, still too shocked to even let words come out of his mouth. The boy standing there had dark hair and tanned skin with pale orange-coppery eyes. Freckles dotted his cheeks.

"What an odd circumstance," future-him said. He was smiling lightly as he spoke. He seemed amused. "I never would've thought that this could have happened."

We both went back, Midoriya realized. It was both of us. It was Maiko and me. But how—

Why!? Why both of us?!

Why am I trusting her!?

Future-him just chuckled. "I guess now's better than ever, huh?" he said. "It would be too hard to give you these later."

"What—" Midoriya stumbled over his words. "What later? What—how—why—?"

Future-him just kept on smiling as he reached a hand out toward him. Midoriya stumbled back as he felt everything slow down to a snail's pace. I'm not doing that.

"Don't worry," he said. "You won't ever remember this."

Midoriya felt his skin heat up beneath future-him's touch.

It was both.

It was both of us.

We both went back.

why did the both of us team up? why did we do this

why? why? whywhywhywhy?
Midoriya looked between the two boxes of noodles. Kayama had written the specific kind that she wanted, but the brand sold two different types. He had no idea which to pick, and he sighed. He wished he remembered his phone—maybe then he could text Kayama which one she would prefer.

Both!

Midoriya blinked as the thought zipped through his mind. "Both, huh?" he muttered to himself. He shrugged to himself and grabbed one of each of each kind. "I guess it wouldn't hurt." He picked up the basket at his feet, placing both boxes carefully inside.

He felt his stomach growl, and he held a hand over the desperate organ. Dang, I'm starving.

Letting out a puff of air, he readjusted the basket's handles on his arm. He would have to eat a lot tonight if he was going to be prepared for tomorrow. Which was the day of the Sports Festival, something that he was definitely not ready for.

As he was checking out, a pair in the corner of the store caught his attention. One, presumably a female, had a hoodie pulled over her head as she stifled giggles. She was wearing boots. The boy beside her was whispering something to her. Midoriya couldn't really see much of his face, since he was turned away.

Huh.

They seemed familiar.

Chapter End Notes

ugghhhhhhhh

im dying
Slumbering Luminescence

Chapter Notes

Readers last chapter:

WHAT

THE

FUCK

Me:

Good. Be confused. I relish in it.

Also, I copy and pasted this into google docs... and its 462 pages. lord save me

And! It's the tenth chapter! So yay, I guess this is special and stuff?? I hope this is special. AND IT FRICKING IS BECAUSE HOLY JESUS HAVE YOU SEEN HOW LONG THIS BISH IS????????

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The night of the Sports Festival, Midoriya dreamt about a hill and a vine-covered bench and a large oak tree with a large canopy. He dreamed about the sea and its soft waves and the swirling clouds. He dreamed about the clouds growing darker, darker, darker, and lightning flashed, and thunder boomed, and the waves of the sea crashed angrily.

In his ear, the wind and shadows whispered quietly.

i'm here, i'm here, why can't you see me?

oh daizō, oh daizō, please look! you must, you must

you see, little echo, there's a traitor among us

Midoriya watched as lightning flickered, closer, closer, closer.

my daizō, my daizō, they are circling now,

oh daizō, my daizō, they want to take you away!

oh daizō, your parents' plan is underway!

Midoriya felt a blinding pain shoot through him as lightning struck. He shot up in his bed, panting, a small ache in his head and deep in his bones.

He was sick. He knew he was.
But the pain was oddly dulled.

=====

**Quirk — Recipience:** The ability to receive quirks with the original owner's full consent; can GIVE quirks received, but only back to their original owner.

**Warning:** Consent can still be achieved forcefully through torture, as seen by example three.

**Quirks Received:**

#1: (XXX, Seiya): Time Manipulation—can manipulate time at will on both objects and self; stress can cause it to activate; will sometimes replace dreams with visions

#2: (XXX, Maiko): Chain Conjuring—with skin contact, can summon chains; also controls their movements until contact is relinquished

#3: (XXX, XXX): ???

#4: (XXX, XXX): Pain Concentration—naturally lowers the amount of pain the user goes through

#5: (XXX, XXX): Faerie Whisperer—will hear messages in inner ear canal, often warnings; the more wind and shadows present, the more frequent and clear the messages are; user can sometimes control what they wish to hear

*Note: One quirk that had been received was a vaulting-type quirk from the user's cat. This quirk was given back to its owner after an incident with the family.*

=====

Midoriya splashed cold water on his face as he tried to ignore the heat emanating from his flushed cheeks. He was obviously coming down with a fever, but today was too important to give it too much notice. Scrounging around the bathroom, he found a bit of medicine that would hopefully help him ignore most of the effect.

_todoroki, toodoroki, fire fire fire_

todoroki, toodoroki, will you use yours?

_d aizō, d aizō, more, more, more!_

Midoriya shook his head to get rid of the words and tinkling in his head. He had absolutely no idea where they came from, other than it had to be a quirk. His dream from last night was almost always the same as the ones he got whenever he received any. But when? When had he been given any quirks? He hadn't remembered anything.

*Both!*

Midoriya hissed under his breath as he rubbed his eyes harshly with the palms of his hands.

What the hell did both mean?

XX==XX==XX

"You look awful," Maiko said as she stared through the window. Beside her, Daizō sat upright and rigid. The two were looking at his younger self carefully, both on guard. "Seriously, you look like you haven't slept in eight days."
Daizō sighed as he pressed the tips of his fingers against the glass. "Tomorrow's the sports festival," he reminded her. "Plus, I'm pretty sure I'm still recovering from the nomu attack."

Maiko huffed sharply through her nose as she turned away from Midoriya's sleeping form. "Right. Forgot that happened."

Daizō raised an eyebrow. "How could you even forget about that? We were both there when it happened. You literally made us invisible as we got up close and personal."

Maiko jabbed him in the stomach with her elbow, earning a soft yelp from the boy. "Oh, shut up. Says the one who forgot that you were living by yourself for four years."

Daizō stuck his tongue out at her. "I didn't forget that, dumbass. It slipped my mind one time." He rolled his eyes.

Maiko side-glanced him. "Yeah, and you also forgot to mention to me that we were going to meet your past self in a damn grocery store."

"What do you mean!?" Daizō whisper-yelled in an attempt to not wake up the boy in the room they were watching. "Your future self wiped my memory as well when it happened to me, how was I supposed to know that that was going to happen!?"

Maiko hummed, unimpressed. "In the noodle section."

Daizō groaned. "You are damn impossible, woman."

Maiko laughed. "Sure thing, eco pequeño. Let's ignore the fact that you were an utter asshole to your past-self back there."

Daizō sighed. "Woman, I was not being an butthole, jeez louise."

"Yeah? So what was that whole, "Oh deary me, don't worry, you won't remember any of this," huh?"

"I panicked!"

"And so that was the first thing that came to mind?"

"Well what else would you have said to a smaller version of yourself!? "Hey dude, we're just here to make sure you don't off and kill yourself, watch out for your parents by the way, they're insane and they're going to try to kidnap you in a few weeks!" Because yeah, that sounds brilliant!" Daizō exclaimed, throwing his hands up in aggravation.

Maiko tutted as she shook her head. She peered back into the room, cupping her hands around her eyes so she could see better. "Just be glad that I was able to erase his memory with your father's quirk," she said. "If I hadn't had it, we would've been in a heap of trouble."

"No kidding," Daizō grumbled. A moment of silence fell over the two as Daizō adjusted himself so he was more comfortable. As Maiko continued to peer into the bedroom, he looked outward and around the block. They exchanged a bit more of harmless banter to pass the time as they stood guard. While they weren't expecting anything tonight, there were a few close calls that they couldn't ignore. Close calls that would have caused huge amounts of changes, enough to completely alter the flow of time.

Turning back to her, he knocked his head against the stone behind him to gain her attention. She
looked up at him. "I'm going to do a few rounds," he explained as he pulled out a small device from the inside of one of his pockets at his belt. He pressed the two small buttons on either end of it, and adjusted his grip as it expanded in size rapidly until it formed a mask. Made of thick metal with seemingly no holes for the eyes. Pulling it over his face, he watched her nod as he adjusted the settings on the goggles built within it that allowed him to see. It grew blurry for a few seconds as it tried to focus while he stood. As soon as it was clear, he shot up from the fire escape and onto the roof, landing almost silently.

*danger?* he asked quietly under his breath.*any danger to speak of?*

There was another moment of silence before the ringing in his ears grew.

come come, right right, come face our light,

*the stars are bright, and so are you,*

*and the shadows are hiding tonight*

*careful, carefully, step step step,*

*their agreement must be kept*

Daizō waited for anything, any extra rhyme that could be of use. When none came, he slunk across the roof, careful not to make a sound. He had long since learned to take what was said to him to heart. His soft footsteps were drowned out by the whispering of the wind. He jumped from the lip of the roof to another, quickly crossing that one as well.

*they're coming.*

Daizō faltered for a second. His mouth went dry as he froze before his body went into overdrive. Cursing silently, he he tripled his speed, hopping from one place to another, leaving nothing but a faint echo in his wake. His sharp, deep breaths as he ran were the loudest sounds that came from him, rivaled only by the frantic beat of his heart. Whether or not he was using his time manipulation to his advantage was debatable, but not impossible.

(After all, Daizō was seventeen now. You could learn quite a bit in two years—even mastering a few unruly quirks here and there.)

======

Shigaraki swirled the dark liquid in his cup around in slow circles as he thought. He was sitting by the booth of the bar, resting his chin on his upright while Kurogiri stood on the other side. The mist villain was cleaning a glass cup with a rag even though it was already spotless. The man—if you could even call him that—was a clean-freak, no doubt. Shigaraki was also guessing that it was Kurogiri's way of passing time, or perhaps a nervous tick. He watched from the corner of his eye as he placed the cup he had just been wiping into one of the cupboards before picking up another.

Definitely a nervous tick. Kurogiri was probably stalling to tell him his two cents or something.

Shigaraki sighed as he downed his drink, the cup hitting the counter with a loud *clink.* From behind him, the TV was playing quietly. The Sports Festival was today, and it was the perfect way for Shigaraki to gain more intel on Class 1-A and U.A. as a whole. While it was true that the nomu Sensei created hadn't been able to defeat All Might, it was also clear that the hero's victory was partly due to the students. They were a pain in the behind, especially the one with the green eyes; Shigaraki was sure that he could have disintegrated Eraserhead's arms if it weren't for the brat.
He smiled to himself as he remembered the look on the kid's face when the nomu appeared behind him. It was priceless, seeing the pure terror in his eyes. Shigaraki would have replayed that scene several times just to laugh at it all.

His hands twitched as he barely refrained himself from scratching his neck. And yet, facts were facts, and they still lost. He wasn't planning on it again, and he was going to use every chess piece on the board to his advantage.

Including one from the other side.

Kurogiri seemed to read his mind and finally brought up the reason for his nervous fiddling. "I must say, I do have concerns about this plan that you have, Shigaraki," he said. "Having a traitor who isn't loyal to us will surely cause complications down the road."

Shigaraki clicked his tongue as his irritation spiked. It was just like Kurogiri to state the obvious. "Oh shut up," he snapped back. "You don't think I haven't thought about that already? Why else would I have threatened his family, for my own amusement?" He tsked. "You really look at me as a child, don't you? I'm not an idiot, no matter what conceptions you may have about me."

"My apologies," Kurogiri said. "But what will happen when he eventually betrays us? That outcome is inevitable, I'm afraid."

Shigaraki huffed in laughter. "What will happen?" He squeezed the cup tightly between his fingers and watched with glee as the surface cracked like spiderwebs. It collapsed into dust on the counter. "I'll kill his family and force him to watch it as I do it. I'll ostracize him at U.A., where he will no longer be welcome." He twisted around in his chair, pointing lazily at the TV screen. The boy in mention was shown on the screen as he walked past the camera. The Sports Festival was just beginning. "And then I'll torture him slowly, on and on for hours or for days until he begs to die."

"And then?" Kurogiri asked. To his credit, he didn't seem all that horrified or scared at Shigaraki's rant. He continued to be level-headed, even though Shigaraki noticed the small hesitation he had before speaking up.

He snorted as he stood up, careful not to press all five of his fingers on one surface at a time. Ignoring the way his bullet wounds, still healing, ached and smarted, he approached the television. He took a moment to try and find the boy in mention, eyes scanning the large crowd of U.A. students ready to participate in the upcoming events. When he did, he pointed at his face. "And when all's said and done, I'll send the remains to U.A." He smiled.

"It wouldn't be fair for them to have a funeral without the body."

=====  

Midoriya was nervous as he and Kayama ate breakfast together. The latter seemed to notice the bags under his eyes but didn't comment as she tried to ease the obvious tension.

"Don't worry too much about the festival," she said calmly. "Heck, I never really did that well in them at all. The first events would always make my quirk useless in assisting me, and it wasn't until my third year that I was strong enough to make it to the final rounds. Of course, with the one-on-one battles my quirk was effective as all hell, and few managed to rival against me." She took a sip of water from her glass. "And yet, despite my first failures, here I am, a successful hero with nice pay and thousands of followers."

Midoriya looked up at her from where he was picking at his food nervously. "Do you like what
you're doing, though?" he asked.

She blinked. "Hm? Of course I love being a hero, why wouldn't I be?"

Midoriya shook his head. "I didn't mean it like that, I know you enjoy it. But do you enjoy the sadistic, "sexy" persona you usually take up?"

Kayama smiled softly as she placed her chopsticks on the table. "Well..." She paused. "It's not like I don't enjoy it, really. I do. It's a part of me that I relish in, and one that will always be a part of me." She reached her hand across the table and ruffled his hair. "But you're right, sometimes I appreciate the calmer, more modest points of life. Ones that being the R-Rated Heroine can't provide."

Midoriya nodded as he ate another small bite. Kayama stretched her arms far above her head. "But anyway, as I was saying, don't worry about a thing," she said. "You'll have another two chances, and it's not like it's the end of the world if you don't end up impressing everyone who sees you." She grinned up at him. "And anyways, you'd make me proud no matter what place you get! Just keep on shining, you know?"

Midoriya felt his cheeks flush as he ducked his head. It was so cheesy and stupid, but he couldn't help the smile that crawled onto his face. He felt his chest flutter with barely-suppressed happiness. "Okay," he said. "I will."

Kayama smiled brightly. It was one of her "Momnight" smiles, not her Midnight one.

It looked pretty on her, if he were to be honest.

=====

Most of the time before the Sports Festival officially began was spent clinging to Yaoyorozu's side as they both attempted to calm their racing hearts. The two exchanged stories and memes and vines, anything to keep their minds off of the upcoming event.

Class 1-A was the first to be called out by Present Mic. 1-B was shortly after, and then the other classes. There was the business class, the support class, and general education classes. Midoriya spotted a head of purple hair in the crowd, and he sent the boy a small wave. Shinsou simply raised an eyebrow in return.

Bakugo was called to the stage shortly after. Standing up on stage already was Midnight in her hero outfit. He preferred it when she was wearing her hoodie with the puppy on the front. It was two sizes too big on her, and it went down to her upper thighs. She always wore sweatpants with them. (She bought him a matching one that was also too big. Aizawa barged in one day to ask if he should push the due date for a project since his class was complaining about Midnight's workload already. He found the two when they were both wearing their respective hoodies, and he asked what the hell was wrong with them.)

"I'm going to win," was all he said for his speech. In all honesty, Midoriya wasn't expecting much more from the cocky male. It wasn't like Bakugo wasn't capable of making a better one, because the boy was a lot smarter than people took him for. But the size of his ego practically cut his likability into quarters. Heck, if his quirk was any worse, Midoriya was sure that he would have been expelled by now. But that was the thing—Bakugo knew his quirk wasn't worse, and so he didn't care to be kind. At all. The students from the other departments, however, were clearly pissed and sent out scathing remarks to Bakugo, who looked like he was listening to a bunch of dogs barking angrily.
Midnight seemed a little surprised at the "speech," but to her credit she quickly recovered. Midoriya wondered how many kids she'd seen before that had to be debunked from their high perches with the word humility.

She cleared her throat to silence the crowd and the students. "Now then!" she announced into her microphone, her voice echoing loudly. "The first event will soon be beginning. I hope all you chitlins are ready!" She snapped her whip toward the screen behind her. "A randomizer will pick our first event!"

Midoriya bit his lip, pondering which event would be chosen. He was pretty sure that they did an obstacle course in the original timeline, but maybe it would be different? He watched as the wheels began to spin, faster and faster before coming to an abrupt stop. Midoriya had no idea what was on the side shown, other than the fact that it was a picture and it clearly wasn't descriptive. Midnight grinned as she saw it.

"And here we have it: our first event!" Midoriya crossed his fingers, hoping against hope that it would be an event he could do well in. A moment of complete silence fell over the arena as Midnight geared up to yell out the event.

"I hope you're ready for The Floor Is Lava!"

What.

Loud cheers burst from the crowds as Midnight's grin grew even larger, if that was possible. "The rules are simple," she said as she pointed around the arena grounds. "Music will be playing in the background as the event begins." At this, Present Mic played a small clip of some kind of catchy music... was that the chicken dance song? Midnight began to speak over the tune.

"However, the music will cut shortly before I call "The Floor is Lava!" You have five seconds to get into the safe zones that appear around the area before you burn in the pits of hell." She placed the back of her wrist against her hip. "I don't care if you have a quirk that can make you fly or get several feet off the ground, if you're not in or directly above the safe zone, you're dead meat." At this, Uraraka grimaced, and a boy that Midoriya was pretty sure was from Class 1-B looked incredibly disappointed.

She then pointed to the box at the back where Present Mic and Eraserhead were sitting. "After each round passes, the amount of safe zones will decrease. Each safe zone may only hold up to seven people at a time; it's first come first serve, and anyone who thinks they can shove another person out of the safe zone will be killed by a random stray burst of lava, no questions asked. No quirks are allowed to be used offensively against another while in the zones. Present Mic will be watching all of you carefully, so don't even think about it."

Midnight winked at the crowd. "While the music is playing, obstacles will take form and aim to keep you down until the floor "becomes" lava. When that happens, they will temporarily pause. Use your quirks against one another and them to rise up on top; it's all free game." Her tone suddenly changed. "However, there's a catch: you're not allowed to use your quirk more than three times. For mutant quirks, that means not using those extra parts of your body. If you do, you'll be frozen to the spot for the rest of the event. Good luck trying to last for very long—the safe zones' placement are randomized every turn." At this, the entire student body winced collectively, except for a few here and there whose quirks weren't very useful in the event.

She cleared her throat into the microphone as the chicken dance music began playing louder in the
"Any questions?" When no one said anything, her smirk grew till it nearly split her face in two. "Good! The first forty-two people remaining will move on to the next round. Now," she snapped her whip downward, and the music cut abruptly, "The Floor Is Lava!"

==

Daizō bit his lip as Toga bounced around him eagerly. "Oo!" she said. "Maybe we should put him into a dress! He'd look cute in that, right?" She leaned forward, inches away from his face as she pinched his cheeks. He held still despite his urge to flinch back—although they weren't very visible, the woman had several knives hidden beneath her skirt.

"Like hell he's going to wear a dress." Leaning against the wall, bored out of his mind, Dabi stood. He clicked his tongue in annoyance as Toga pouted. "As if it would go well with the Boss if we dressed him up like that. You know he asked for Daizō to be in a suit."

Toga whined. "But look at his slim figure!" she griped. "It would look so good—"

"Enough, Toga," Dabi interrupted. Toga sighed in disappointment. She grumbled as he went back to the clothing racks, searching for one that would match Daizō without taking too much away from the makeup he had on his face.

(Fun fact: eight hundred years does a lot to fashion. And a huge chunk of men wore makeup on occasion. While they still wore significantly less than women did, who would sometimes color their entire faces, men still used light and neutral colors, mostly on their cheeks and eyes.

And goddammit, it was painful to wear. Daizō hated it with a passion, enough so that Toga had to give up after using foundation to cover his minor scars and a soft pearl-color eye shadow for the lids of his, well, eyes. She had wanted to put lipstick on him, but Dabi, who still never wore any kind in his life, lit the tubes on fire before she could open them. Daizō was just happy that the man stood up for him.)

Dabi rolled his eyes before walking over to her side, shoving her out of the way. She yelped and then started to yell at him in anger, though he ignored her in favor of pulling out a simple black suit. Throwing it over to Daizō, who barely managed to catch it, he effectively cut off any of her arguments. "There," he drawled, "decision made. Now let's go."

He turned on his heel and stalked out the door, Toga following him as she grumbled. As she went to close the door behind her, she twisted back to throw a smile at Daizō.

"Remember to smile when you come out!" she reminded him. "You want to impress the crowds at the ball for your first appearance, don't you?" She winked before slamming the door behind her. He could hear her giggles through the thin door as she, presumably, skipped away.

Daizō was left in a silence. He peered down at the uncomfortable suit he was soon going to have to wear. It was plain and simple, the way he liked it.

Off to the side, a red and white full mask sat innocently on the table in the dressing room. Hints of silver and gold lined the ornate designs on the front. He swallowed thickly as he looked away from it, eyes watering slightly.

All for One picked it out specifically for him. Daizō shuddered as he remembered the man's fingertips gently swiping the skin beneath his eyes in a sign of gentleness and care. He gripped the fabric tightly in his hands as they trembled slightly while his heart thudded loudly. He knew that he should wear it, but...
He glanced over to the one that Dabi left behind before he left. It was a half-mask; the bottom curved gently into the ends, which were blunted tips. The top was heart-shaped, and along the edges of the mask were lines painted white. Around the holes for the eyes, simple carvings were delicately embedded. The color of mask itself was a dark evergreen, the same shade of his hair.

Dabi said it suited him better, that the other one made him look too angry.

Biting his lower lip, he reached out to grab onto the side of the half-mask, lifting it so the light hit the polished surface. His eyes softened as he ran the pad of his thumb along the cheekbone of it. Sighing, he placed it back onto the dresser as he started to unbutton his dress coat. He tried to ignore the scars that he could see from the corner of his eyes on his shoulders and along his arms. He peeled the cloth off and let it hit the floor as he fumbled with the pieces of clothing.

As he finished getting dressed, he looked between the two masks. Adjusting the collar so it sat flat, he pursed his lips. His brows furrowed as he gently picked up both. Both were nicely made, though the one Dabi had picked out was thinner.

You'll wear this one, won't you? You'll impress Grandpa, won't you?

Daizō frowned as he blinked tears away. The fear gnawing at him won out, and he placed the green one back where it was. He looked away, ignoring the pang of remorse that went through him as he slowly made his way to the door. He swung it open, greeted by Dabi's still form. He looked up at him with lazy movements. Daizō saw his gaze zero in on the mask in his hand.

Dabi cleared his throat as he looked away. "Come on," he said stiffly. He pushed himself off the wall as stalked down the hall, leaving Daizō behind.

He ducked his head. The red mask was heavy between his fingers.

=====*

Midoriya blinked as the words registered. A half-second of nothingness passed before the air suddenly changed in temperature. Crackling filled Midoriya's ears as he leapt upward, heart in his throat, avoiding the crystallizing ice that rapidly spread throughout the entire arena floor. His breath came out in a mist as the chill almost immediately burrowed deep down into his skin. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see several students frozen up to their knees, eyes widened in shock. Todoroki.

Midoriya hit shoulder-first into the ground, the breath getting knocked out of him painfully. He hissed as he stumbled to his feet, teeth clenched tightly. He dashed to a convenient safe zone not two feet away from him—also collapsing the minute he crossed into the light—and he heard struggled movement from behind him. (He could tell what the zone was because the circle had a bright green ring around it and emitted a soft light directly upward, almost like a spotlight.) He had less than a second to catch his breath before the sounds of what was supposedly lava filled the stadium from Present Mic's speakers. There was a loud cheer as the audience crowed. A few groans were also heard.

Breathing heavily, his heart's pounding still ringing in his ears, Midoriya stood up shakily. It seemed that over a quarter of his competition was already wiped out. A few unfamiliar figures frozen to the spot got lucky, and underneath where they stood was a safe zone. In fact, most of the safe zones closely surrounded the group of students. It was probably to start the event off and get them time to actually adjust before they threw them off to the sharks. Midoriya glanced around him as he panted to see that people like Yaoyorozu and Uraraka already had a grimace on their faces.
"Hohoho!" Present Mic yelled. "Already we've gotten off to a frosty start! Todoroki has eliminated a third of the competition with an underhanded ice-attack, freezing his opponents to the ground!"

Midoriya made sure to pay extra attention to Present Mic's words, hoping the hero would reveal any more information. "On top of that, he forced most of the remaining participants to use their quirks to escape! What a brilliant tactic!"

Ah. That explained the looks of pain on half his classmates' faces. They probably weren't expecting to have to use up their precious chances so early on in the game.

Midoriya listened as the same chicken song came up. He winced as those that had already been knocked out were dragged out of the arena. Some looked visibly upset, while others were resigned. He felt bad for them—Todoroki's attack was abrupt and not easily evaded if you didn't have split-second reactions.

Several robots that Midoriya recognized from the entrance exams started to roll out toward them, their surfaces gleaming. Brand-new and slightly upgraded from the entrance exams, they already locked onto several targets, shooting quick bursts of lasers at the remaining crowds. Midoriya felt worry start to bubble in his gut as a few rolled closer to him. Those things were difficult to take on in large numbers, and he remembered the close calls he had with several of them. Most of the other students recognized them as well, and several began to clump up as they backed away from them.

Midoriya froze as he heard the sound of a foot twisting against the ground. It ended almost as soon as it started, and he glanced back slowly to see that a small dust cloud had risen in the wind. Tense breathing appeared from somewhere on his six, or maybe seven. It was hard to tell with the way it swayed from side to side. His muscles pulled taught as he waited with baited breath for yet another movement.

He knew that most of the students would team up until later on, where the more reliant ones would be weeded out, leaving the independent and strong. When that happened, fights between the remaining would surely spark. However, that didn't mean that it was unlikely for confident and brash students to attack sooner, ganging up on others in the midst of the panic while others still tried to gain a rhythm.

Midoriya ducked into a crouch as a flying kick was sent his way, aiming for the side of his head. He stepped backward a few times, his steps slow, trying to regain his balance as he faced his opponent. She was tanned, with bright red hair. He raised his hands up to his face, bending his knees slightly, attempting to calm his racing heartbeat. The girl smirked. "Not bad, green bean."

Before he could retort, two arms snaked underneath his armpits and around his arms, pinning him to... whoever's chest this was. Midoriya felt trapped, caged; he gritted his teeth before stomping on the person's foot and snapping his head back. He felt satisfaction spread through him as a loud crunching sound resounded and the person's grip loosened considerably. Grabbing them by the arm, he flung them toward the girl. She barely blinked before her hair, stretching like a rubber band, grabbed onto the boy's waist and twisted him away from her. She remained untouched as the boy flew into the side of a robot not too far away. He yelped as the robot began to shoot lasers at him.

She smiled, unbothered that she just abandoned her ally. "Jeez, you're stronger than you look for someone so small." She copied his fighting stance, eyes glimmering with amusement. "But no matter; I'll still crush you. Let's see if you're still worthy of being in the heroics department when I'm done with you." She sprinted forward, hands outstretched, ready to pounce on him with the wrath of a thousand cats—

Midoriya roundhouse kicked her in the face. She let out a sound comparable to a dying dog as she dropped like a bag of rocks. He winced. *Oops.* "S-sorry," he stammered before twisting on his heel.
and sprinting away from her. He had no idea how to respond to her screams of "Get back here!" other than to sprint away even faster.

Midoriya ducked and rolled away from a robot that attempted to shoot him with its lasers—it was a horrific deja vu moment to his experience with the entrance exams, and he tried not to shudder. He didn't need to think about Uraraka when something more pressing was going on at the moment.

As he continued to sprint in a random direction, he stumbled across the aforementioned girl. She was hiding behind a broken-down robot, trying to avoid the others that circled around the area. He slid in beside her, panting as she whipped around to face her.

She blinked. "You look like you just died inside," she said honestly. She looked up from him as the words "GET BACK HERE YOU SON OF A BITCH, I'M NOT DONE WITH YA!" rang through the arena.

Midoriya gulped. "That may or may not be the reason for me dead-inside-ness," he replied as he sunk lower to the ground.

She gave him a nervous smile. "Haha, yeah, you're not alone..." She trailed off as she looked away, rubbing the back of her head.

Midoriya blinked. "What did you do."

Uraraka waved her hands in front of her face. "I didn't mean to!" She looked away, her smile growing strained. "See, I went to go use my quirk on a robot and release it so it would crash onto the ground, yeah? Well, I pressed onto the side of it when Bakugo tried to explode it..." She laughed nervously. "So he more or less missed when it lifted into the air and wasted one of his chances to use his quirk..."

"So now you have Bakugo on your tail?" Midoriya said incredulously. "How are you even going to survive through this game?"

Uraraka puffed up her cheeks. "Hey, I can beat him if I wanted to!" She crossed her arms. "Don't say you think I'm weaker than him, huh?"

Midoriya hummed. "Well, I think that he's a very powerful opponent to go against," he said truthfully. "He'd probably beat most." He looked away from Uraraka's disappointed expression. "However, I think you'd be able to come up with a good strategy to rival up against him." He smiled back at her. "And then you could floor him, yeah?"

Uraraka's disappointed expression morphed into one of... frightful excitement. "Oh, I'd floor him all right."

Midoriya sweatdropped as she suddenly whisked her hand upward. The redheaded girl from before leered over the piled remains of the robot, and Uraraka grabbed tightly onto her collar before pulling her head-first over. She slammed her harshly into the ground, and she groaned as she twitched in pain. Uraraka shot up and held her hand out to Midoriya, who looked (frankly) terrified.

"Come on!" she said. "We should start moving. I think this area was a safe zone last time, so it probably won't be used next time." She tugged him up, and Midoriya nodded numbly.

"Hold up," he said quietly, and Uraraka raised an eyebrow as he pulled out a panel from the robot's side. Her mouth formed an 'o' shape as she realized what he was doing.

"It's for your quirk, right?" She nodded to herself. "That makes sense."
Midoriya let out a hum of agreement before they started to jog away from the limp form of the girl. Uraraka was panting slightly as they picked up the pace, scurrying away from more hordes of robots and other obstacles. Apparently, a few mines were set up here and there that would randomly activate unless stepped on beforehand, which would set them off. They were weak but effective, though not quite enough to physically harm someone.

He felt a drop of sweat roll down his neck as Bakugo's screaming grew closer and closer. He saw Uraraka start to push herself even further, and he had to hold a hand over her shoulder awkwardly to reassure her. "You don't want to burn yourself out," he explained.

She seemed hesitant but nodded, and they slowed down slightly.

"The Floor Is Lava!"

Well, looks like they were going to have to sprint again. Midoriya quickly glanced around him for any safe zones, but there weren't any nearby. He felt his breath hitch as he panicked—were they really going to be able to squeak by this round—

Uraraka grabbed him by the neck of his jacket. "Hold your horses dude! We're already in a safe zone!"

Midoriya blinked before looking down to see the tell-tale glow from beneath his feet. "Oh," he said lamely. "We are."

Uraraka laughed. "I guess we got lucky, huh?"

Midoriya nodded as the lava sounds faded and the chicken sound came back to life. He noted that almost half of their students were gone now—between Todoroki's attack at the beginning and the seemingly endless waves of robots, many had been wiped out by surprise. Midoriya noted that the second round's safe zone number had decreased dramatically, most likely to keep up with the lack of students remaining.

Uraraka turned to him, mouth opened as she was about to ask for something. Midoriya felt fidgety—the robots were starting to close in, and Midoriya wanted to save his quirk chances in case something popped up. Hoping that whatever she had to say was quick and that they could leave soon, he leaned toward her.

In the background, a piercing shout caused warning bells to set off. He had no time to react accordingly, though he so badly wanted to.

A large explosion hit him at point-blank range.

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Daizō felt shy as he walked through the large doorway, shoulders hunched slightly. Immediately, several eyes latched onto him. If it weren't for the large mask he was wearing, Daizō was sure that he would have frozen on the spot and remain there for the rest of the night.

Dabi accompanied him toward the main attraction of the night—All for One—before immediately slipping away, leaving him to his own devices. Daizō swallowed the lump in his throat as he approached the man, who noticed him almost immediately.

"Ah, if it isn't my grandson," he said. Daizō noticed that he spoke particularly loudly—most likely to alert the others that he was important and to not ask questions. His free hand made its way toward his upper back, and he pushed him with feather-light touches until he was standing directly beside him.
"Gentlemen, ladies, I'd like you to meet Kimoto Daizō."

One of the men, wearing some kind of blue face paint, was staring down at him. "Eh, he seems a little young to me, hm?" He took a sip from his glass of wine. The cup had swirls of what was probably a stuffed snake around the handle and the tip of the glass. "You sure he's up to staying here all night?"

All for One smiled politely, though Daizō could feel the commanding aura around him as he pressed his fingers harder into Daizō's back. "Well of course. These young ones are spriteful and so full of energy. I have no doubt that he'll be lively through the ball." All for One tilted his head toward him. "Isn't that right, Daizō?"

Daizō felt small as he cleared his throat. "But of course, Grandpa." He hoped that his voice wasn't too wobbly, and he crossed his fingers that it was the right answer. It seemed to pacify the others, though All for One gained an unreadable look on his face.

"See?" he said to the others. Daizō tried to ignore the sinking feeling in his stomach as he recognized the undertone in his voice—he was hiding anger.

He had no idea what he even did.

All for One glanced at his expensive, worn watch. It was an old device that most people didn't use nowadays. Often, they'd ask their handheld electronics the size of pennies everything they needed to know. Understanding time was an inconvenience at best.

"Ah," the man said, "I suppose I should get ready for my speech." He sent the others a winning smile. "I shall be as swift as a rabbit when it's over. In the meantime, treat my grandson right, yes?" Before they could respond, he took a step back, tilting his head in their direction—his false respect for them. He was off then, his speedy walk taking him across the room quicker than what he thought was possible.

Daizō felt dread overcome him as he turned back toward the group of men and women in front of him. He knew his smile was fake and timid and weak as they collectively returned their own versions of their smiles.

"So," one of the younger men started, "what'd you have to do to get the nice suit?"

One of the women elbowed him in the gut. He hissed. "Shut up," she growled to him.

A man with blonde hair rolled his eyes. "Oh shut your trap. We all know what happened to the last one that courted Shigaraki."

_Courted...? But...?_

A woman with magenta eyes held a dark fan up to her mouth as she giggled. "He took advantage of him so many times."

Yet another voice spoke up. "Y'all are idiots. The boy's, what, six? Seven? Stop putting your feet in your mouths, it's disgusting." The man sniffed. "You're all pathetic. Shigaraki couldn't get away with that, even if he wanted to."

The woman with the magenta eyes sighed mournfully. "It's no surprise." She flicked a bit of her drink at Daizō, who flinched and moved away. "He's hideous, anyway."

The man who asked All for One if he could stay up through the party sighed as he turned away.
"Agreed," he said. "Just send him to the Breeding Program—that seems to be the only place he's useful, anyway."

Daizō felt the small, shattered remains of his self-esteem crumble. He tried to hold what was left of it close to his chest, but it slipped from his fingers and hit the floor.

He wasn't sure when all of them left—just that they did and he was left behind in the silence. Bodies dressed in frilly, ostentatious clothing moved around the room like clockwork, the music echoing throughout the room as the tune hitched and fell to a deep growl. He felt numb as he watched hundreds of men and women dance freely, laughing and happily drinking the world away.

He blinked back tears. He couldn't cry. He didn't dare cry. He didn't dare take off the mask that sat on his face, stuffy and heavy and uncomfortable and hard to breath in. He watched silently as the girls and boys his age ran around, tugging at their parents' skirts and pants. He watched as the flames on the chandeliers flickered, causing the stained-glass windows to glimmer and shine.

Daizō felt numb as All for One took to the stage.

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Midoriya wasn't quite sure when Bakugo decided to sneak up on them and revenge-blast him and Uraraka. But Bakugo did just that with the idea in mind that it'd knock them out of the competition.

And if it weren't for the fact that both he and Uraraka were insane and weren't stopping for anything, it might just have. Uraraka held an arm underneath his body as he struggled to stand up. There were scratches all over her face, and there was a red burn spot along her cheek. Otherwise, she looked pretty fine to him.

"How do I 'ook?" Midoriya slurred. Already a bad sign.

Uraraka sent him a pathetic smile. "You're bleeding from your forehead. So sexy, I suppose?" she joked.

Midoriya laughed painfully, devolving into a fit of coughs as they moved forward. Bakugo already turned his back to them, apparently not waiting to see the damage.

It was... pretty bad, if Midoriya was honest. There were burn marks all around them, and several robots that had been rolling not a few meters away were burnt to a crisp. A few's heads had melted into the wiring inside, and some sparked dangerously.

Midoriya faltered for a step, and Uraraka grunted with the exertion of holding him up. "Sorry," he murmured as he steadied himself.

"You're fine," Uraraka said breathlessly. Midoriya noted the pained look in her eyes and the scratches that were deeper than he originally thought, and a few drops of blood began to pool from the wounds. "Don't worry about it. We only have two more to go, yeah?"

Midoriya looked around at the remaining groups. She was probably right—very few students remained now. Just like he previously thought, most of the independent students were aiming against one another now. And that meant that they were easy pickings.

A mop of dark hair appeared from the corner of Midoriya's vision, and he tensed, ready to be on guard. He still held the metal panel between his arm and his side, which was miraculously unharmed. He supposed it was part of the angle Bakugo shot his explosion at. Either way, he had a weapon to protect himself, and he wasn't going to hesitate to use it if it came down to it.
And yet...

"You guys look like crap hit the fan," the person said as they approached them. Midoriya blinked as they came into view.

"Jirou?" Uraraka asked, incredulous.

The girl with the choppy bangs shot them a smile as she placed her hands on her hips. "Yeah, Yaomomo and I heard word about you guys getting exploded the hell out of. Thought we could lend you a hand."

Midoriya blinked. "This is a 'ompetitive exercise. Why would you wan' to help us?"

Jirou snorted. "It's not as if we're actually ranked." She squeezed in between the two and replaced Uraraka as she held up Midoriya. Uraraka looked grateful without the extra weight. "If we were, that would be different. But no, it's us against the other classes—they all hate us by the way. Since they're collectively aiming for us, we're grouping together so we can all make it past the next rounds."

Jirou began to walk over to a figure with dark spiked up hair. Midoriya was pretty sure that that was Yaoyorozu from what Jirou had stated, but he couldn't be sure.

"How'd you figure out our situation out so quickly?" Uraraka panted. "We were attacked, like, half a minute ago."

Jirou rolled her eyes. "More like three minutes, actually. You were on the ground for a long time."

Jirou glanced around at her surroundings. She grunted as she injected one of her jacks into the port by her leg, and she sent a loud stream of blasts toward a few robots coming their way. It destroyed at least nine within one use. "Damn," she muttered. "There goes my last one." Turning her attention back to them, she said, "Also, Koda's been helping keep watch. He asked a few birds to keep in touch with him about what was going on in the arena. They told him not too long ago about what happened."


Jirou shrugged. "I mean, yeah, I guess." She huffed as she had to reposition Midoriya's arm around her shoulders. "Damn, I can't believe Bakugo did this to you. What an ass."

Midoriya hummed. "He can be, sometimes, but he's not dumb..." He trailed off as he struggled to keep his eyes open for long. "Though he does get fed up over revenge and his anger a lot..."

Uraraka sighed. "I'd like to give that boy a piece of my mind," she grouched as they finally made their way to Yaoyorozu.

She smiled when she looked up toward them, but it soon vanished as she saw their states. "Oh heavens, just how hard did he hit you with that explosion?" She ushered the three down into a crouch. They all hid behind a wall constructed by one of the General Education students. Apparently, that was part of his quirk. He abandoned the structure soon after, leaving others to take advantage of the sloppily-made formation.

Beside her, Koda was sitting, already waving his hands around. The timid boy had to repeat himself several times before Midoriya could effectively scramble the fast-paced and hurried gestures, but once he did, he sent a small response in return that basically said he was okay. While Koda didn't seem entirely convinced, he was placated for long enough for another plan to be constructed.

"Okay," Yaoyorozu started, "I can't make any more medical items for you, so I'm sorry about that."

But I'm sure we have enough manpower to get to the safe zones in time." She bit her lip. "If Bakugo
finds out about you two still being in the exercise, he might try and attack you, so we'll have to keep
an eye on him. Most of the robots are wired so they target people that haven't used their quirks as
often as others have. However, since a majority can't see us, we should be fine." She pointed around
the area. "So far, no safe zones have really appeared around here, so I think that we're in good
shape."

Midoriya raised an eyebrow. "I thought tha' the safe zones 'ere randomized."

"That's what they said, yes," Jirou said. "But we're almost positive that, while it's mostly random,
they also won't pop up in the same areas they've already appeared in. A way to keep from people
trying to stay in one place, I guess."

Uraraka nodded. "Yeah, that makes sense. I noticed that too—"

"The Floor Is Lava!"

Jirou cursed as she shot up, bringing Midoriya with her. The nearest safe zone was a ways away.
Almost too far away.

Shit.

Jirou started to run, though Yaoyorou and Koda quickly surpassed her with ease. She wasn't going
to make it. Suddenly, she felt her weight decrease dramatically, and abruptly she was being pulled
along and into the spotlight—just in time for the countdown to end. Yaoyorozu and Koda were
beside the two, on their knees, gasping for breath.

Jirou turned to see that Uraraka was looking slightly green in the face. "Thank you," Jirou said,
breathing a sigh of relief. Uraraka nodded, though she was continuously looking more nauseous as
the seconds passed.

"Uhm," Yaoyorozu said, "you should really release your quirk now, lest you throw up."

Uraraka took in a shaky breath. "I don't think so," she said. "I only have one more use of my quirk,
and it'd be more effective to just keep them weightless."

Their group seemed nervous about the idea, but Midoriya quickly changed the topic. "There was
definitely less 'ime between rounds." He rolled around in the air so he was hanging upside down. "I
thin' there must be a lot less people."

Koda signed an affirmative.

Yaoyorozu sighed. "Hold up one second, I have to take care of these robots."

"Hol' up," Midoriya interrupted. "'ich ones?"

"The ones surrounding us?" Uraraka stated queasily.

Midoriya huffed. "Uno momento," he grumbled as he adjusted the metal panel in his arms. He laid
his hands flat on the surface.

Yaoyorozu twirled the baton she had created beforehand in her hand. "Midoriya, what are you—"

Chains erupted from the sides of the panel, shooting out in a sudden star shape as the ends ripped
through their metal heads and out the other end cleanly. Several dropped to the ground, ineffective
and red eyes dulled.

"That... works too," Jirou said.

Midoriya was about to say something when a sudden pain erupted in his ears. High pitched noise stung his inner ear canal, ringing noisily and loudly. He could faintly hear Uraraka ask him what was wrong, but it was weak at best. He could taste iron in his mouth, and he felt something dribble from his nose.

He opened his eyes slightly, only getting them into small slits as he looked around. Jirou was suffering from the same thing he was, and there were tears in her eyes as she gasped for breath.

Koda was pointing to something, or someone, rather. Midoriya could make out an unfamiliar figure—perhaps she was from Gen. Ed? Or the support course?

Whomever she was, her dark blue hair was writhing like snakes as her hands, raised toward them, emitted a soft red light. Midoriya felt a huge, high-pitched screech that could be compared to the feedback in a microphone hit him, and he let out a small whimper as something wet trickled from his ears and to his hands.

Yaoyorozu had to have said the most polite curse he'd ever heard from her when a blinding pain hit him in the stomach. All the breath was knocked out of him as he was thrown out of the way, Jirou still gripping his arm. He heard Koda gasp and Uraraka scream—and when he opened his eyes, he knew why.

Jirou and him were still weightless. In the air.

And the were very high up. And they were continuously going higher.

Oh no.

Midoriya tried to ignore the ringing sound as his stomach twirled in his gut. He was starting to see why Uraraka got nauseous all the time, and this height was terrifying.

The sound in their ears cut short as Yaoyorozu pounced on the girl with the slithering hair. As for the one that hit the two in the gut...

The redheaded girl from before with the hair quirk was smirking as she twirled her locks around like battering rams. Of course she got back up after Uraraka slammed her into the ground. That was just his luck.

Midoriya winced as he looked around at the arena. He was still upside down, which partly sucked but was also helpful, even if it made his stomach twist into several uncomfortable knots. He cleared his throat and craned his neck to look at Jirou, who looked like she was ready to stab a man. Or girl. Or girl with red hair and glimmering eyes. Or girl with red hair and glimmering eyes and hair that shouldn't move like that.

Midoriya grunted as he readjusted his hold on the metal panel in his arms, which he still managed to keep a hold on. It was surprising, really.

Of course, then his butterfingers thought it would be nice to come back and bite his ass, and so as he tried to turn it around in his arms, it slipped through and out of reach.

Midoriya cussed foully. Jirou turned to him, eyes wide and pale. "Where's the apocalypse?"
"I dropped the metal panel."

"... Shit."

Midoriya hissed. "Yeah, I know." He watched as it finally reached the arena floor. He could hear the clanging up from where he was. Midoriya turned to Jirou, who was obviously trying to hide disappointment. "Well, there goes our only chance of safely getting to the next—" He froze, his eyes gaining a curious light.

Jirou blinked. "What's the matter? Did you think of something?"

Midoriya tilted his head. "Kind of."

"Kind of?" Jirou raised an eyebrow. "What do you mean, 'kind of'?"

Midoriya furrowed his brows in thought.

"What metal are your earrings made out of?"

Daizō wasn't really hearing anything as All for One made his speech. He knew he should be paying attention, but he couldn't—there was so much white noise in his ears that any concentration he usually had flew out the window.

He looked around the room, seeing nothing but wonder-filled gazes and hawk-like concentration. They were all mesmerized by seeing him, his every movement, every sound that fell from his lips, every motion he made with his hands. Hypnotized by every part of him, they were all practically bent over backward to make it seem like they were paying the most attention to him. To put them higher on his list, he supposed, and yet Daizō couldn't bear to look at the man's smile. It still reminded him of all the times the man found enjoyment in his suffering.

Daizō held his breath as he tuned back into his speech. All for One said a few words about thankfulness, and he was sure it was about to end any time now. Dabi said that All for One used the same speech over and over again and often cut out more lines every time until there was no speech left. Then he would create a whole new one before repeating the process. It was apparent that All for One had already spoken this one multiple nights before.

Daizō was betting that All for One was on his last line. The audience clapped and cheered, and All for One bowed. Simple, simple, simple—

"I would now like to introduce my grandson onto the stage."

Daizō felt his stomach drop to his feet as a million eyes centered on him. He tried to ignore the lump in his throat as he shuffled forward quickly, slipping through the crowd and apologizing every time he accidentally brushed against them. He fumbled slightly when he got to the stage, but no one noticed too much—they were still so focused on All for One, it was almost like he wasn't even there.

He stood next to the man, who sent him a smile. Daizō did his best to stop the tingling feeling in his stomach.

"All of my guests," he said, "I'd like to introduce you to my successo—"

A faint rumbling sound cut him off. He fell eerily silent as the rumbling ceased. All for One glanced around the room. Daizō swallowed thickly. Another faint rumble, louder this time, gently shook the
building and through the floor. Daizō felt the trembling underneath his feet halt.

There were a few whispers exchanged through the crowd. The murmuring grew louder until yet another boom echoed through the room.

Silence.

All for One turned to the guards that had stepped closer to him in fear of his safety. "Find out what's going on, would you?" he said quietly to the woman nearest him.

She nodded. "Of course, sir," she said before tapping at the comm in her ear. "Squad Beta, please make your way to corridor eight, I repeat, please make your way to corridor eight as soon as possible —"

A rumble, loud and suffocating and too close centered from nearest the room they were in. Daizō felt his throat clench as he tried to ease the panic creeping up his spine. He shivered despite himself, and his eyes darted around the room. He looked toward the stained glass windows, peering outside. Rain pummeled the outside of the surface, the dark clouds flashing with lightning strikes as the hard rain crashed against any opening it could find.

A hand rested on his shoulder, and Daizō flinched. "Come on," All for One said. "We should get going. You're looking a little tired, are you not?"

Daizō nodded his head mindlessly. Anything to get away from the sounds. All for One's grip tightened for a second before he cleared his throat, regaining the attention of the crowds. "It seems as if we're having a few difficulties. No worries though, it is merely a part of the storm. We'll get it all fixed in the meantime." His tone remained light, though Daizō could hear the hurriedness in his voice. "Now then, before my successor heads off to bed, I would like to introduce him to—"

Without warning, a loud squeaking sound reverberated through the room. Daizō's head whipped upward to see the bolts keeping one of the chandeliers up was coming undone. There was a moment of silence as everyone held their breath before the chains keeping it up came undone, and then the candles flickered out. It tilted to the side before losing all of its support, and it crashed toward the ground.

Panicked screams shot through the air, and the crowd swarmed the sides of the room like a school of fish. Chaos wrecked the audience, throwing them into a frenzy. All for One tried to speak over their screams, but the sounds of even more chandeliers crumbling to the ground ensued more noise. All for One gripped Daizō's arm tightly, dragging him off the stage when the windows suddenly cracked and caved in. Hundreds of people flew through the openings, one landing their motorcycle with ease, even with the screeching of the wheels. They paused, motorcycle tilted to one side with their foot on the ground as they searched the room. It was hard to tell what they were looking for with the helmet on their head, effectively blocking their eyes. But, presumably, when they landed on Daizō, they revved up the engine.

All for One growled under his breath as three random attackers sent out a huge wave of smokebombs, and Daizō heard him cough into the sleeve of his suit. The sound of the engine came closer until a sudden force pulled him out of his grandfather's grip. He felt weightless as he was pulled through the air until the same person who grabbed him plopped him on the seat behind them.

"Hold on tight to me!" the familiar voice called, and then the wheels were screeching again as the motorcycle powered through the broken-down doorway leading outside. The cold air whipped past Daizō as they flew through the empty streets, zipping through and between different alleyways as several airborne vehicles flew over them. The rain started to drench Daizō's form, making him
shiver in the cold. The only reason he was able to see at all with the thick rain was because of the mask, which provided enough protection for his eyes that the pellets of water couldn't fall into them. The engine was emitting a little bit of heat, though it was loud and noisy and it hurt Daizō's ears.

"What the heck is going on!?!?" he yelled at them, struggling to be heard over the pounding rain and engine. "Who are you!?!"

The person driving took a sharp turn, and Daizō had to hold especially tight around the person's middle as he felt like he was about to fall over. They laughed.

"Don't you recognize me?" The person took one hand off the handlebars, grabbing onto the bottom of their helmet before pulling it straight off. The wind carried it out of their hand, and Daizō heard it clunk behind them as it hit the ground. The person's hair whipped outward in the wind as they turned toward him.

"I came to save you, my little echo." Maiko smiled. "You really didn't think I'd leave you behind, did you?"

========

"Are you sure that this is going to work?" Jirou said.

Midoriya shrugged. "Not particularly, but I'm going to try anyway." He had an earring in each ear, ones that Jirou had been wearing during the exercise. He was desperate to win this, and he was going to try everything he could.

"Okay, but where are we even supposed to be headed?" Her lips were pursed as she twisted around in the air. "In order for this to work, we need time. But we only have five seconds after "the floor is lava" is called. How are we supposed to make it in time?"

Midoriya released a shaky breath. "Okay, so you know how you said that the safe zones weren't as randomized as we thought it to be?"

Jirou raised an eyebrow. "Yeah, of course. They don't appear in the same places because otherwise, it might be too condensed and boring. Why?"

Midoriya sighed. "Well, that got me thinking... If they're already altering the safe zones, then what if they're not randomized at all?"

Jirou blinked. "What? Why would they lie to us?"

"To make it more confusing." Midoriya held his hand up to his chin. "By realizing the fact that it's not randomized, there must be some kind of pattern. For example, Present Mic might make it so that safe zones are spread far apart, and that none of them overlap."

Jirou crossed her arms. "Cool, but how can you prove that?"

Midoriya wracked his brain. It hit him like a shot of lightning. "Wait, do you remember at the beginning? When Todoroki iced everyone? Remember where the safe zones were?"

Jirou twirled one of her jacks around her ear. "They were—" Her eyes brightened as she realized it. She face palmed. "They were directly around us. All of them were close enough to get in because we were all scrunched together. I'm such an idiot."

"Right," Midoriya said. "And don't you find it weird that the safe zones usually appear nearby large
groups of people, but not around those who are by themselves?"

"So they're picking us off, a couple at a time," Jirou added. "I guess that makes sense—it makes the entire event more exciting, rather than wiping out large groups at a time by the whole "safe zone thing." It's much more interesting when people are knocked out of the competition by fighting rather than getting to the zones in time."

"But pure fighting would take too long," Midoriya concluded. "So they had to add a way to eliminate some of the competition each time."

Jirou nodded. "Okay, I get that. But how does that help us?"

Midoriya smiled at her. It was an odd sight to see, seeing how he was upside down while she was right-side up. "Well, let's think about it this way: Present Mic and Aizawa are manipulating where the safe zones appear. So they have control over what goes where—but this is Aizawa we're talking about. He has input. So what would he do?"

"Troll us," Jirou said, deadpan.

"Exactly!" Midoriya replied brightly.

Jirou blinked. "Wait, what? I was kidding."

"And I wasn't," Midoriya said. He twisted himself so he was facing the area where Midnight was standing, her hip cocked and grin still present on her face. "By now, everyone should have come to the same conclusion we did—the safe zones won't appear in the same place they have before. And it was a good answer, but we're partially wrong." He pointed to Midnight, and Jirou followed it until they were both looking at the older heroine. "Kayama-sensei stated one thing that has bugged me for a while. She said that, if we used our quirk more than three times, it would be impossible to move—but she didn't say it was impossible to pass the next rounds without moving. Unlikely, but not impossible."

Jirou paled. "Don't tell me..." She trailed off.

Midoriya smiled. "Aizawa is always telling us to look at the entire picture. And almost every time I've looked around for nearby safe zones, one is always nearby Kayama-sensei's perch. I brushed it off, but if what she said was true about not being able to move and yet it still being able to pass, then there must be a loophole that Aizawa and Present Mic created."

Jirou frowned. "So there's always a safe zone in the exact same spot..." She readjusted herself so she was parallel with him. "But where exactly is it? Nearby Midnight-sensei?"

Midoriya grinned as he grabbed onto Jirou's shoulders. Pushing himself upward so he was in a split, he tucked the earrings into the top of his socks. The metal was cool against his skin.

"Not nearby," he said. "On."

Jirou blinked. "What the—"

Midoriya felt the skin around his ankles burst with feeling until a group of small chains appeared on either side of his legs. From those small chains sprouted partners, until there was a thick branch shooting out on either side of the open ceiling arena. Hitting each side with a thunk, Midoriya leaned down to grab onto Jirou's hands.

"Holy shit, we must look like crazy people," Jirou said as their supports grew thicker with each
Midoriya’s hands clasped around hers tightly.

"Probably," Midoriya said. Jirou wondered how it felt to be strung into a perpendicular line.

Jirou laughed. "At least we're weightless-oh HOLY FUCKING LORD SHIT SHIT!" Both of their weightlessness disappeared, and Jirou screeched as Midoriya’s grip tightened considerably. She swung her legs back and forth, trying to ignore the way both of their hands were already sweaty.

"Hey, hey, hey," Midoriya said, trying to gain her attention. "Don't worry; calm down, I've got you!" Jirou heard the slight panic and pain in his voice as his supports strained under their sudden combined weight. Uraraka must’ve seen them and released her quirk, or maybe she accidentally released it. "Look, don't worry, I can catch you with my chains if you fall, okay? Just don't look down."

Jirou was trembling, though she nodded. "Yeah," she said breathlessly. "Yeah, got that." She took in a few deep breaths as she tried to calm herself. "At least you're doing better, yeah? You're not slurring anymore, and the bleeding's stopped."

Midoriya could tell that she was trying to distract herself. He played along. "Yeah, it doesn't hurt as much as before," he said. "I'm doing so much better." He breathed deeply as he looked around at where Kayama was. "Okay, so, we're going to have to do a bit of maneuvering to get over to Kayama-sensei, alright? So I'm going to pull you up. Sound good?"

Jirou nodded. "Yeah, yeah..." She blinked lethargically. "I'm gonna wrap myself around our support, hope you don't mind."

"That’s fine," Midoriya said. "Whatever you’re comfortable with." He squeezed her hands. "Okay, so we’re gonna go in three, two, one—" Midoriya hefted her up, grunting at her weight as she pulled herself around so she was wrapping her arms and legs around the trunk of the chains. She was gripping onto it for dear life.

Midoriya reached over to the earring on his left leg, pulling it out of its spot. He wrapped his free leg around the chain to balance himself as he brought the earring—and the chain with it—over to his right side. He did the same with the other side before clamping the two earrings down with a few chains; they wrapped around them perpendicular to the long line that he and Jirou were clinging to.

"Will those stay?" Jirou asked as she watched Midoriya crawl up behind her.

He was pale. "I hope so," he said truthfully. "Otherwise, we might be in a bit of trouble." If the earrings came loose from their bindings, then they would shoot outward, back toward the side of the arena they were linked to. With their support sufficiently snapped, they would fall unceremoniously. He sent her a weak, trembling smile that moved with his body. He was just as terrified as she was, if even more so. He couldn't believe she calmed down as quickly as she did when she was a grip away from falling to her death. "I'll pay you back for them, by the way."

"D-don't worry about it," she stuttered. She cleared her throat and put on a brave face, hiding the panic that was previously obvious in her expression. "Okay, so our little chain bridge goes right over Kayama's head, which you probably aimed for. So we should really start moving, and quickly. We don't want to have gone through all of this only to lose the round, ya?"

Midoriya laughed painfully. "Oh, that'd be so bad."

======

Todoroki had easily passed the first game.
He knew he would—the minute Midnight had explained the game, he understood just what it entailed. He also knew that there would probably be loopholes for people to follow—and for people to fall into.

He had foreseen many things. Bakugo would be at his tail, trying to trip him all the way, while others would try to gang up and attack him. It was why he started off the event with the long-ranged ice attack—he wanted as little inconveniences as possible. As expected, Bakugo breathed down his neck the entire time, except for the moment when the two were passing by Midoriya and Uraraka. The boy took a detour and sent a huge explosion at them when they weren't looking.

It was kind of cruel, to be honest. But he could see why Bakugo would want revenge, even if it was mostly unwarranted. Uraraka was just at the wrong place at the wrong time.

There was another reason Bakugo attacked the two, however.

Uraraka and Midoriya were strong opponents. By eliminating them in the first round, Bakugo could potentially gain an advantage later on in the upcoming events. And while Bakugo often liked to fight people he deemed capable of facing him head-on, this was also a tournament where anything could happen—and if Bakugo didn't make it to the third event, then he wasn't even coming close to his promise from his opening speech.

So he understood it. Would he do it himself? Perhaps, though probably not. He was careful in how and where he used his quirk. The first time was logical, and it cut his competition majorly. Though all his classmates managed to evade it, the ones who merely cluttered up the arena were taken out. His second time included when he was surrounded by thirteen or fourteen robots—once again, he made sure to make his attack as broad as possible to make is effective. He took out around eight more people then.

The third time ended up being in the final round, when Midnight called the last "The Floor Is Lava!" Todoroki was alone, too far away from a safe zone, and desperate. He used his ice to propel himself across the grounds and get to one in the nick of time, though it was close and he could practically feel his father's eyes burning into him in disappointment.

"A real hero would have prepared himself to get into the zone immediately."

Todoroki scoffed. "Yeah, and a real hero would have "used his fire," old man. I practically know you like the back of my hand."

Just as Midnight promised, the remaining forty-two students passed.

Present Mic called out all the names of those that would move on to the next event. However, he paused after calling out the name "Shinsou Hitoshi."

"Uhm... we're missing two people? Midnight, where are they?"

Todoroki looked over to Midnight, who was grinning. She pointed upward. Todoroki followed to where she was aiming, and—

"What."

"What's this!? Jirou Kyoka and Midoriya Izuku squeaked by the last round in the air!"

And once again, Midoriya managed to floor him. How the heck did the two even get up there?

=====
Cementoss managed to get the two down to the ground. Midoriya fell face-first into the floor, trembling from head-to-toe. Jirou was practically crying from joy.

"I've seen God," she said hysterically.

Midoriya let out a muffled groan.

"I'm so sorry!" Uraraka cried. "I thought you guys were safe, and I really couldn't keep it up any longer... I had no idea you guys were up there!"

"It's fine, really," Jirou reassured, though her voice was wobbly. "You couldn't have known."

Midnight cleared her throat, gaining the attention of the rest of them. The crowd fell silent again, much quicker this time than previously since their number had been cut incredibly short. She went on to say that the next event was going to start soon. They had already decided on the second event before the festival started, so there weren't going to be any surprises.

As ranking was taking place, Recovery went around and handed out gummies while healing those that had injuries. Midoriya, Jirou, and Uraraka were included in the minority. Before long, Midnight took the stage again, explaining how it was a cavalry battle. A team was set up of three to four people, while each person was assigned the amount of points depending on the rank they got. Their rankings were determined by creativity, the amount of times they relied on their quirks, and how many obstacles and students they took out.

The person in last place was granted five points, the second to last ten, and the next fifteen, until second place.

And first place was the odd one out—one million points.

So of course Todoroki got first place. *Of course he did.*

Jirou got in second, while Bakugo got in third. Midoriya got forth, probably for his little stunt. Yaoyorozu got fifth, apparently since she only used her quirk once, and then Todoroki stopped caring and didn't look at the remaining people. He heard from Midoriya not too far away that everyone from their class passed, which was a relief. That meant that he knew a majority of everyone's quirks beforehand.

It turned out that not many people wanted to join him. It was no surprise. There was a girl named Hatsume Mei who approached him, asking to join his group. He might have turned her away any other time, but he didn't have much support and she was strong in her own way. And her mechanics would come in handy against the others.

"May I join you?" a voice said from behind him. Todoroki turned to see Yaoyorozu.

"You're not joining up with Midoriya?" he asked, raising an eyebrow.

She smiled nervously at him. "I wanted to gain a different experience," she said honestly. "And I thought I'd be a good help."

Todoroki didn't even have to think about it as he nodded. Yaoyorozu was brilliant, and her quirk was just as useful. "Of course. We should probably get one more person now."

"I think I could fill that role."

Todoroki glanced back at the person. "And why would I pick you?"
They smiled. "I think you'd be a little surprised, son of Endeavor." Todoroki gritted his teeth as they smirked at him. "You won't be able to pass without me."

Todoroki narrowed his eyes. "Start talking."

=====

Midoriya watched as Bakugo, Kirishima, Kaminari, and Ashido team up. Aoyama, Tokoyami, and Shouji were talking not too far away from them. Asui was standing beside the three quietly.

Midoriya turned back to see that Jirou was still standing by his side. She smiled back at him when seeing his questioning expression.

"I was hoping that we could team up," she said nervously as she rubbed the back of her head. "I hope you don't mind being paired with number two."

Midoriya smiled up at her. "I should be the one asking you," he said. "But of course we can team up." He looked around at the different stray students. "You might want to find any others you want to team up with before we get surrounded—as number two, they'll be attracted to you."

Jirou nodded as she tapped her lower lip with the end of her jack. She was surprised she even got so high on the charts, though that could have been due to all the robots she destroyed with her amplifiers and Midoriya's creative stunt.

Before she could say something, a someone tapped on her shoulder. Jirou turned to her, blinking her eyes as she took in the girl's appearance. She had vines sprouting from her head as her hair and dark eyes. She held herself with elegant poise, as she smiled at the two of them.

"If I may ask, would you be so kind to allow me to accompany you?"

Midoriya peered around Jirou. "I don't mean to sound rude, but may I ask what your quirk is first?"

The girl nodded as she held her hand over her chest. "My quirk is called Vines—I can grow, control, and detach the vines from my head at will. My name is Shiozaki Ibara."

Jirou smiled at her as she reached her hand out. "My name's Jirou Kyoka. My quirk is called Earphone Jack. I can hear things better by embedding my jacks into objects, but I can also release sound from my amplifiers." She pointed to her ankles, where they sat innocently.

"I'm Midoriya Izuku," the boy beside her said. "My quirk is called Chain Conjuring—I can create chains from metal if I have contact with them. As long as it's still touching me, I can control their movements and from where the chains grow."

Shiozaki gave them both a smile as she took Jirou's outstretched hand. She shook it. "It's nice to meet both of you."

Jirou grinned back at her. "Welcome to the team."

"Hey, hey, hey, can I join too?" Midoriya turned to see Sero running toward their group.

Shiozaki blinked in surprise. "Oh, and who might you be?"

Sero laughed as he placed his hands on his hips. "I'm Sero Hanta! My quirk's called Tape. I can shoot, well, tape out of my elbows. It's super sticky!"

Jirou nodded. "He'd be a useful addition."
"True," Midoriya said. "You okay with that, Shiozaki?"

The girl seemed caught off-guard, but she nodded and smiled. "But of course."

"Heck yeah!" Sero said, pumping his fist up in the air. "That's awesome!"

"But now we're mostly long-ranged attacks," Midoriya said. "So it might be difficult to make our formation."

Jirou twirled her jack around her finger. "Well, I think that I should be the main horse." At the others' gazes on her, she continued. "My jacks can be used to attack people, and they're super durable. They'd be helpful for short-ranged attacks. However, I don't want to be the rider, because then I'd hurt you guys when using my sound attacks, which are most effective against large groups of people."

Sero clapped his hands together. "Well, then I guess you're being the rider then, Midoriya!"

Midoriya blinked. "Huh."

Shiozaki laughed lightly behind her hand. "Well, you seem to be the lightest out of the rest of us, yes? That would make it easier on Jirou, who will be protecting you from people attempting to steal our bands."

"Plus, me and Shiozaki's quirks are great for long range, and they're not as finicky as yours is," Sero added. "If someone knocked your piece of metal out of your hands, you're done for, and we're weaker as a whole."

"And Sero and Shiozaki's quirks are great to keep others as far away from us as possible, yeah?" Jirou said.

Midoriya scratched the side of his cheek but nodded. "I-I mean, I guess so. Are you guys okay with that?"

"But of course," Shiozaki said.

Midoriya smiled at all of them brightly.

Sero tried to ignore the way it made him feel warm.

=====

Five hundred and twenty-five points.

That was Jirou's team's point worth. Technically, if they wanted to, they could probably skip out on the entire event and play defense. However, they decided that they'd go on the offensive for a little while and steal more bands, if only to get more points in case something happened.

And that was how they came across the infamous Monoma Neito.

"Eh, Shiozaki? What are you even doing with these Class 1-A idiots?" He smiled. "Don't tell me you were converted into their idiocy?" He began to laugh like a madman. "Oh my god, now you're turning us too—"

Shiozaki slammed a wave of vines into his face before they sprinted away. "Sinful buffoon," she muttered under her breath.
Midoriya really had no idea how to react. To think that the male, who used to be in Class 1-A until he took his place, hated their class so much...

Midoriya shook his head as his group entered the middle of the boxed-in area. They had only thirteen minutes left. As they passed another group full of Class 1-B kids, Sero swung a wad of tape around one of the horses. Their entire group was yanked backward, and Midoriya slipped his hand beneath the rider's band and pulled lightly. It came off with ease, and Midoriya pulled it around his own neck.

One hundred and seventy more points. They were in second place.

"Think we can keep this up?" Jirou called up to them.

Midoriya smiled. "I think we should turn up the heat."

=====

Aoyama wasn't responding.

No matter how many times they yelled down to him, he wouldn't move. They had to stay still while Tsuyu and Tokoyami used their quirks to get their bands.

Shouji covered him with one of his many arms to try and hide their obvious weakness in their third horse.

Aoyama's eyes remained misty. He was glassy-eyed.

And they had no idea how it happened.

=====

Kirishima was Bakugo's main horse, while Mina and Kaminari were their side ones. The three of them were standing across from Todoroki's team.

Bakugo screamed as he launched himself up and toward Todoroki, hands reaching out to grab his band. Yaoyorozu launched a net at him, and he had to blast himself back in order to not get captured. He groveled under his breath as he landed back on his horses.

The Hatsume girl was obviously their defense. Yaoyorozu was their backup, though she also served as a great attacker. She was their main horse, which impressed Bakugo. She didn't even seem fazed by Todoroki's weight.

But that left the last member. Bakugo narrowed his eyes as he peered the boy down. He was unfamiliar, and he hadn't seen him before.

He tsked as he couldn't find out what his quirk was from looks alone. "Oi, Todoroki!?" he spat. "How long are you going to play hard to get? Quit being a scardy-cat!"

Todoroki sniffed. "At least it's better than being an angry Pomeranian."

A tick mark appeared by Bakugo's head. "The fuck did you say!?"

Todoroki glowered at Bakugo. "I said," he said, speaking slowly as if talking to a kindergartner, "you're acting like a little dog."

Bakugo was seething. Before he could respond however, Todoroki nudged the pink-haired girl. She
smiled and mentioned something about "babies" before she pressed a button on her controller. Suddenly, the four shot upward and were flying through the air.

Bakugo cursed before he shot himself back upward, explosions rocketing himself as he chased after them. Todoroki didn't even seem surprised as he lifted his right hand, sending a burst of cold air. Bakugo dodged it, though he lost some of the ground he made as Todoroki started to head back toward ground.

"Nice shot," Yaoyorozu complimented.

Todoroki exhaled sharply through his nose. "Thanks—" He froze as he felt something whiz directly beside his ear. His eyes widened as something started to move around his head, slipping underneath his headband—

Instinctively, Todoroki raised his left hand and sent out a huge burst of fire. The thing receded immediately.

It was a vine.

Todoroki whipped around as his team touched the ground. Standing there was Midoriya, sitting on his horses of Jirou, Sero, and a girl he didn't recognize. She was the ones with the vines, and she had a grimace on her face as the burnt plant curled itself into the area around her neck, where it would be protected from any further attacks. Midoriya and him made eye contact.

"Are you all right, Shiozaki?" the boy inquired, though he was still staring at Todoroki.

The girl nodded. "I'm fine. It's nothing more than a small burn."

Todoroki might've been offended if he wasn't too concentrated on the tingling in his left hand and the look on Midoriya's face. It was one he'd only seen once, and that was when he and Shigaraki faced off. Even then, he'd only gotten a glimpse.

"Todoroki," Midoriya started slowly. His voice was frosty. "How on earth do you think you're going to keep up with us?"

Okay, now Todoroki was offended. "Excuse me?" he snapped back. "What does—"

It was quick, sharp, and Todoroki had no time to react as two of the four bands around his neck was snapped away from him. They landed in Midoriya's waiting hands.

Had Midoriya aimed for his right side, Todoroki might have frozen those chains in place. But he didn't. He aimed for his left side.

Midoriya's frown deepened. "That's what I mean."

Todoroki gritted his teeth. Midoriya hadn't even bothered aiming for the one million. He could have taken it right then and there, or tried to, at least. But he didn't.

He was using him as a message.

Todoroki balled his hands into fists. Behind him, more footsteps were heard. There was Kirishima, Ashido, and Kaminari, all ready for an attack. A look around told him that Bakugo was still in the air.

They were surrounded from all angles.
"Come on," Kirishima taunted. "Aren't you gonna fight back? Because that one million is looking like an easy catch at the moment."

The unfamiliar boy twisted to face him fully. "Oh really?" he asked. "And, pray tell, how are you going to do that?"

Kirishima grinned. "Well, I can't reveal my—"

Static. Kirishima felt his body grow lax.

The boy with the purple hair and deep bags smiled.

*Stay put.*

Kirishima felt like cotton filled his ears and mouth and nose. Someone said something to him, though he couldn't hear it. He tried to fight against it, really.

He heard Bakugo's screams. There was arguing.

And more arguing.

And more arguing.

And silence.

Todoroki smiled despite himself. "There goes one team's main horse," he said. While Bakugo would still be troubling, he was in the air—

Yaoyorozu sent another net at the boy who was trying to dive straight toward them. He cussed loudly before evading it. And then again, he tried, and again, and again. Todoroki did his best to ward off the multiple vines, strings of tape, and chains that tried to go for his million-point headband. For several minutes, it stayed in that standstill—never making any progress, never finding an opening.

"Six minutes left!"

Yaoyorozu frowned before creating something in her hand. Immediately, Midoriya screeched "CLOSE YOUR EYES!"

She threw the weapon down, and Jirou could see the bright light through her closed lids as a wave of heat came over them. Cracking her eyes open a second later, she growled at the sight of Todoroki's team back in the middle of the arena. Todoroki looked back to Midoriya before creating a wave of ice, building a huge wall that separated the first half of the area from the second.

"Dammitt!" Bakugo cursed from above. "Shitty Hair, get through to the other side!" he ordered before disappearing over the wall. Ashido winced. "How are we supposed to get him to when he's not responding to us?" she asked Kaminari.

The electric boy was biting his lip in worry as he gripped Kirishima's arm. He could shock him, maybe, but would that really break him out of it? Kaminari shook his head. "I don't know."

Midoriya felt guilt overcome him as he looked at the two. He had no idea how to help them, though,
and turned away as Jirou ran toward the wall.

"Shiozaki, I need you to help break through the wall," Jirou ordered as she stepped one foot forward. Almost immediately, a high pitched sound shot through the air, hitting the ice formation repeatedly. The vine girl nodded, and her hair extended as they pounded against it in fierce strikes. Midoriya gripped the two pieces of metal in his hands—Shiozaki found them for him from the last event before the battle started—and watched as several more chains burst from the pieces. He shot them toward the wall, and he helped the best he could.

He ignored the pounding headache that he had. It had steadily grown worse over the events, now a pressed clamp around his head that made him woozy. He wanted nothing more than to sleep his obvious illness away, but he had more important things to focus on.

Like taking down this damn wall.

"Sero," he called down toward the boy, who was fidgeting slightly from not doing anything, "could you stay on guard? Who knows what attack they'll have prepared for us." He was breathless from exhaustion, but he didn't dare let it show.

The boy nodded, a look of determination crossing his features. "Of course."

Midoriya froze as a whisper invaded his sense of hearing.

todoroki, toodoroki, flame, flame, flame
unstable,
unable,
he'll blame, blame, blame,
don't get caught in this fable
or you'll be strung like cable
and cooked over the fire for dinner

The wall cracked and collapsed.

fire, fire,

fire

fire

fire

fi

i

iiiiii

rreererrree

f
endavor?

"—riya? Midoriya!"

Midoriya blinked frantically. His hands were clamped tightly over his ears, and he felt something trailing down from his nose. The chains he created were dragging along the floor.

A... nose bleed?

"I'm fine," he said. "I'm sorry, I didn't- how much time do we have left?"

Jirou exchanged a glanced with the other two. "We have two minutes."

"We just finished taking down the wall," Sero jumped in, placing a reassuring arm on Midoriya's arm. "Look dude, if you're not feeling well, we can call it quits. We've got enough points anyway."
Shiozaki nodded. "We're in third, if I remember correctly."

"And anyway," Jirou interjected, "Bakugo and his team finally managed to get Kirishima to snap out of it. They're also going for the one million. It'd be difficult to even try getting the points."

Midoriya rubbed his head with one hand. "I'll do whatever you want to do. If you want to continue, that's up to you."

Shiozaki smiled up at him. "I feel as if it would be best for you to merely wait out these next few minutes."

Jirou nodded. "Yeah, that sounds fair. I don't think we'd make much more of an impact, anyway."

Sero hummed in agreement.

Midoriya sighed. "All right," he conceded.

Suddenly, Shiozaki sent out a wave of vines at something behind them. Midoriya turned to see that Monoma had attempted to sneak up on them.

"Now is all right," Shiozaki said as she smiled.

=====

Todoroki's team remained in first place.

Bakugo's came into second.

Midoriya's came into third.

Asui's came into fourth.

Uraraka's team, which consisted of Iida, her, and Kouda, was close behind.

Midoriya was proud of his team. Even though they moved down a place, they still managed to gain more points than they had originally. Those moving onto the third event included Todoroki, Yaoyorozu, Hatsume, Shinsou, Bakugo, Kirishima, Kaminari, Ashido, Midoriya, Shiozaki, Sero, Jirou, Shouji, Tokoyami, Asui, and Aoyama.

They were the remaining sixteen, and they'd be participating in the one on one battles.

Midnight snapped her whip. "Any questions before we move onto a one-hour break?"

There was a moment of silence. And then—

"I'm sorry," a voice called out. It was small, almost ashamed. Midoriya turned, surprised, to see Aoyama with his head bowed. He looked up, and Midoriya was shocked to see it without a smile. He looked... sad.

"I'm dropping out of the next event," he said clearly. Midoriya's stomach turned to ice as he bowed. "I did not do anything for the entire cavalry battle. I was under a person's spell, and..." His voice cracked. "I believe someone who worked hard to pass, and yet couldn't, should take my place. That is why I'm asking you now to let Uraraka replace me in the upcoming event." He came up from his bow, and Midoriya saw the tears in his eyes. "Mademoiselle helped me out in the first event, and I feel like this is my only way to repay her." He shot Midnight a shaky smile. "After all, how can I shine in the spotlight when I did nothing on the stage?"
Silence overcame the entire group. Midoriya felt his eyes water slightly. And then—

"Me too." Midoriya whipped his head around to see Kirishima, whose usual smile was pulled into a frown. "I would like to give my place up to Iida." Kirishima's voice wavered as he continued to speak. "As someone who passed, I should be proud of how I got here. I should have won it fairly." He swallowed. "But, instead—" He stopped himself and took a shuddering breath in. He clasped his hands together. "I did nothing. My teammates carried me throughout the whole round. And it's not manly to claim something for myself when I don't deserve it."

Kirishima bowed, a shadow falling over his eyes. Aoyama stared at him before bowing beside him.

"Please consider my request, Midnight-sensei," Kirishima croaked.

Midoriya felt his stomach churn uncomfortably. He was about to step toward them when a hand wrapped around his own. He looked back to see Sero smiling sadly. "Please don't," he whispered to him. Midoriya glanced away.

Midnight was quiet for a moment. She stared at the two of them before looking to Uraraka and Iida, who looked just as shocked as everyone else. "Would you two be willing to take up the challenge?"

Iida was the first to react. He cleared his throat and adjusted his glasses. "If that is what they so wish, I would be honored to take Kirishima's place."

Uraraka nodded. "But only if you're sure!" she said, waving her hands back and forth.

Midnight hummed to herself before smiling. "Well then, of course! What beautiful and respectful youth!" She snapped her whip once more. "Kirishima Eijiro, Aoyama Yuuga, you are dismissed from the upcoming tournament. Uraraka Ochako, Iida Tenya, please take their places!"

Kirishima and Aoyama stood before turning, shaking the hands of their replacements. They both had relieved looks on their faces, but Kirishima's smile was trembling so hard that it looked like it'd snap any second. Midoriya turned away, unable to look any further. A deep disappointment struck in his gut, because they'd done so well—

Midoriya wiped his tears away, trying to hold back any more that'd fall. They deserved that win. They deserved to move on.

*They deserved it.*

=====

Midoriya didn't participate in the games during intermission. Instead, he excused himself, got a little something to eat to carry him though the next hour or so, and then scurried to Recovery Girl's office. He told her that he wanted to sleep because he didn't get much last night. She didn't question him too much. He slept for about half an hour before he gave up on the endeavor.

The first match was between Kaminari and Shinsou. The second was Shiozaki and Hatsume. Iida and Ashido were after. Then it was him and Todoroki. Asui and Tokoyami were after. Shouji and Jirou were next. That left Sero and Yaoyorozu, and then—

"I'm actually against Bakugo," Uraraka whispered. She frowned. "That's gonna be tough."

Midoriya winced. "Yeah, I'm against Todoroki..."

"Indeed you are."
Midoriya turned to see the same boy was behind him. "Oh, hi," he said. "I wasn't expecting you here."

Todoroki stared at him unnervingly. "Can we talk?"

Talk? He glanced toward Uraraka. He probably means privately. Looking back toward the taller male, Midoriya hesitated. Did he really want to speak with the boy now? They only had around twenty-five minutes left before the first match. He bit his lip but nodded. "Right. Of course."

Midoriya wanted to believe that Todoroki seemed a little relieved, but his mask was still firmly in place. "Come on, then," he said. He twisted and stalked down a corridor. Midoriya hesitated again, but he followed after the boy. He waved toward Uraraka, who awkwardly returned it.

Midoriya bit his lip as they continued to go farther and farther away from the rest of the crowds. Silence prevailed.

Midoriya didn't want to break it, too afraid that it would shatter their already-strained relationship.

Todoroki paused when they reached a secluded wing.

"Todoroki?" Midoriya asked to the boy's back. "... Todoroki, what did you want from me?"

The boy tensed before he sighed. He glanced back toward the smaller male. "Can I ask you a question?"

Midoriya blinked. "Sure, I guess..."

Todoroki was silent for a moment as he shoved his hands deep into his pockets.

"Where, exactly... did you get your burn scar?"

=====

Midoriya was told not to get attached to the people he was saving.

But he couldn't help it.

And now, he was on the floor, curled up in a small ball. Todoroki's words about an abusive father and a broken mother rang through his head. He felt his chest ache for Todoroki. He felt his chest ache for Aoyama and Kirishima.

He felt his chest ache for everyone.

And he cried.

(And he cried some more.)

=====

Uraraka almost asked why Midoriya's eyes were red and puffy when he came back to the stands. Sero placed a hand on her shoulder and shook his head.

So she didn't.

=====
endeavor, endeavor,
a lover, a lover,
a lover of hate
hate
hate
hate

welcome to our flames,
endeavor,
we hope
you
burn
=====

Kaminari listened to the cheers of the audience that filled the stands. He remained as still as he could until Present Mic finally called him up to the battle arena.

Kaminari tried not to spark when he saw Shinsou.

"Why?" Kaminari asked as he grabbed Kirishima's wrists. "Why did you- Kirishima, it wasn't your fault—" He felt tears start to well up in his eyes again. "You- you promised me, Kirishima. You promised me that we'd make it to the very end, and that, when the time came, when one of us had to face Bakugo, the other would be cheering our hearts out." He felt his chest shudder as he struggled not to cry. "Why, Kirishima? Why'd you give that up?" He felt a sob wrack through him.

Kirishima grabbed onto Kaminari's arms. "I couldn't live with myself if I moved on, Kaminari," he said, though he could hear the wobble in his voice. "I wouldn't—"

"I swear to god, if you say that y-you wouldn't be manly, I-I will punch you in the face. It's not all about being manly, Kirishima—"

"I wasn't about to say manly," Kirishima interjected. Kaminari clamped his mouth shut. Kirishima had tears escaping his eyes now. "I was going to say that I wouldn't be able to be your equal." Kaminari didn't reply, though he hiccuped as he wiped his face. "Kaminari, I wanted to face you as
your opponent. As a friend." Kirishima's voice trembled. "I was su-supposed to go all out against you, you know? Just us two, gi-giving it our all, trying our hardest..." He sniffled. "How was I supposed to do that if I hadn't even participated for most of the second event?"

Kaminari ducked his head. "That's not fair to you, Kirishima. That's not fair."

Kirishima laughed hoarsely. "I know, Kaminari, I know." He placed his hands on Kaminari's shoulders. "But it's okay. Because you're going to do great out there, right?" He gave him a weak grin. "You're going to beat him! P-plus Ultra!"

Kaminari gave him a wobbling smile in return. He punched the air weakly. "Plus Ultra."

As Kaminari made his way to his side of the arena, he could see Shinsou smirking up at him. It got under Kaminari's skin, made his blood boil and his broken heart ache.

The two stared one another down as the clock counted down. "START!" came from Present Mic's speakers, and Kaminari instantly started talking.

"Don't you care what you did? That you forced them out of the tournament?"

The boy with the purple hair rolled his eyes. "Am I supposed to?" He sighed as he ran a hand through his hair. "And anyway, I didn't force them out of anything. They were idiots and backed out themselves. They could have stayed if they really wanted to."

Kaminari gritted his teeth as he stepped forward. His hands were balled into fists. "You're the reason why I want to be a hero," he muttered harshly under his breath.

Shinsou raised an eyebrow. "Excuse me? I couldn't hear that."

Kaminari felt his composure snap as he sent a wave of sparks at the boy. "I said, you're the kind of person that made me want to be a hero, you asshole—!"

Kaminari watched as something unreadable flashed in his eyes when everything turned to static. Kaminari felt his muscles slump. It reminded him of how he felt when he overused his quirk and went into his "idiot phase." It was cold, blinding, and uncomfortable. He felt trapped in his own mind as disconnected thoughts ran through his head.

"Turn around and walk off the field."

The order rang clear in his head. He felt his body twist and his legs move.

The sounds of the audience gasping or booing didn't reach his ears. It was silent, silent, silent.

He could practically feel Kirishima's eyes on him as he crossed the line.

He heard a whistle, and then everything cleared.

You're going to do great out there, right? You'll beat him! Plus Ultra!

He felt something wet rolling down his cheeks.

=====

Hatsume and Shiozaki's round was a joke.

Todoroki couldn't even bear to watch it as Shiozaki struggled to win the round with all of Hatsume's
devices moving her around. The latter even commentated the entire round, explaining all of her creations in full details.

Shiozaki was clearly upset.

Iida and Ashido were after. Iida eventually won. He was slightly faster than Ashido with his Recipro Burst, which he used for the first time. Ashido put up a fight though, tooth-and-nail, and she actually ruined most of Iida's clothes with her acid. The ground too suffered from deep gashes, and they had to take a ten minute break for Cementoss to fill in the gaps.

Todoroki was heading toward his first battle—which was up against Midoriya. He would arrive around five minutes early, but that was okay. At least it could be better than arriving late. That, and he'd hopefully evade his father from attempting to interrogate him. While speaking with Midoriya helped some, he was still seething at the fact that his father continued to breathe down his neck about every little thing he did.

Unfortunately, as he turned a sharp corner, his luck was proven to be nonexistent. Standing rigid and frowning in the middle of the hallway was Endeavor himself, his flames licking at his face.

"Shouto."

"Endeavor," Todoroki replied. "My match is coming up. Please move aside. I don't want to be late."

Endeavor exhaled sharply through his nose, clearly not taking his easy lie. "You can wait a moment. You still have time."

Todoroki narrowed his eyes. "What is it?"

Endeavor crossed his arms as he looked down at Todoroki. "You know as well as I do that you won't win this tournament if you don't use your left side."

"I don't need your fire," came Todoroki's automatic response. "I can do it with just Mom's power."

He attempted to shove his way past Endeavor, who let him pass.

However, he didn't leave without the last laugh. "You say that, Shouto, but let's remember where she is right now." Todoroki froze. "I'd recommend you fix that attitude and teenage rebellion. Open your eyes—using just your left side will leave you like her: broken and useless."

Todoroki felt his anger spike as he remained glued to the spot. However, he didn't dare attack his father. Instead, he continued making his way down the hall and toward the wing where he would remain until his match started. He felt frost start to crackle and harden against his skin. He did his best to suppress it.

He didn't do very well.

=====

When Todoroki was called to the stage, Midoriya was already there. He wasn't wearing any shoes or socks, and a panel of metal was placed beneath his feet.

Of course. It was probably to help his quirk. Todoroki barely managed to keep himself from lashing out then and there, waiting impatiently as Present Mic called out their names and introductions. His own was long, mostly because he came in first in both of the events.

As he focused on Midoriya, whose eyes were red and puffy, he couldn't help but feel bad.
He wouldn't have any idea what hit him.

Once again, Present Mic called for the fight to start. Almost immediately, the panel beneath Midoriya's feet burst to life—chains shot toward Todoroki, wrapping around his waist and pulling him outward. Others burrowed into the ground around the panel, effectively grounding it and Midoriya as a result.

"What a brilliant tactic!" Present Mic screamed. "Who knows, maybe this might even be the thing that ends the streak of Todoroki Shouto!"

Todoroki huffed as he neared the line. "Sorry," he murmured under his breath as the air around him suddenly grew cold. From beneath his foot, ice began to form, slowing his movement to a stop before it tore through the air. Ice began to pile on one another, growing stronger as it hurtled toward Midoriya.

Todoroki watched as Midoriya's eyes widened before a tidal wave hit him, encasing him in the ice completely. And yet it kept going, up, up, up, until the tip of the ice attack he sent swept high above the top of the arena. The ground shook, almost causing him to tumble to the ground. He felt frost and ice form over himself as the ice permeated a terribly chill in the air. He did his best to hide his shivering as he waited for Midnight to speak. She herself was covered half in ice.

She cleared her throat as she spoke into her microphone. "M-Midoriya, we cannot t-tell if you're able to move. If n-no changes take place in the next twenty seconds, we will end this round with Todoroki as the winner."

Present Mic's voice was shaky over the speakers. "T-Todoroki shoots a massive glacier attack... leaving us all shocked and rooted to the spot." He sounded dumbfounded. "Does Midoriya even stand a chance?"

Todoroki closed his eyes as he sighed. Ten seconds already passed without action, and there was still no sign of him moving. He counted down in his head as the audience waited with bated breath.

Ten.
Nine.
Eight.
Seven.
Six.
Five.
Four.
Three.
Two.
One.

Nothing.

Todoroki sighed and began to walk toward the ice formation. He would most likely have to find and break Midoriya out before he got frostbite.
Midnight swallowed thickly. "There is no reaction from the other side. This round is over—"

A loud snapping sound echoed through the arena. Todoroki froze as a crack appeared in the large structure. It was large, expanding across half of the surface. And then another crack appeared, branching off the first, and then another, and then another.

"Wh-what's this? Has Midoriya found a way to get out?" Present Mic rambled.

And then the side of the structure exploded. A thick cylinder of hundreds of chains wrapped around one another burst through the side, red hot as steam poured from the opening. A second group burst from the other side, and then two more—one directly from the top, and the other straight forward. The base of the ice structure caved in, sending ice fragments flying through the air. Huge chunks of ice rolled off the surface and collapsed against the ground, sending huge gusts of winds at Todoroki.

His bangs flew upward, and his hair whipped backward as a huge cloud of steam poured in from the empty cavity. The four thick columns of chains rose up and melded together, forming a writhing body that could be compared to that of a snake. They were red hot, and Todoroki could feel the amount of heat emanating from them from where he stood. The chains made soft clinking sounds as they rubbed against one another.

As the snake-like formation twisted in the air, its eerie melody of clinks following it, the steam cleared somewhat enough for a small shadow to become visible. Standing in the mouth of the giant crater was Midoriya, his expression like that of stone.

Todoroki's eyes widened as he saw that Midoriya was practically untouched. He heard Present Mic stutter as he spoke.

"Wh-what the-!? Since when was Midoriya able to do that!? He just broke through Todoroki's ice attack like it was butter!"

After him, a deeper, more gravely voice spoke into the mic. "Heroes often hide tricks up their sleeves until it becomes inevitable to hide them any longer. For them to both use an all-out attack like this..." On the screen above Present Mic's box, it displayed Todoroki and Midoriya's current states. "It's not just terrifying, it's also a huge warning to the other contestants. "This is who you will soon face.” It's an intimidation factor."

There was a pause as Midoriya stepped forward, leaving the orifice in the giant ice structure behind. The ice chinked as Midoriya stepped on them, leaving shattered remains behind.

"And it's definitely working."

=====

**Quirk — Recipience: The ability to receive quirks with the original owner's full consent; can**

**GIVE quirks received, but only back to their original owner.**

**Warning: Consent can still be achieved forcefully through torture, as seen by example three.**

**Quirks Received:**

#1: (XXX, Seiya): Time Manipulation—can manipulate time at will on both objects and self; stress can cause it to activate; will sometimes replace dreams with visions

#2: (XXX, Maiko): Chain Conjuring—with skin contact, can summon chains; also controls their movements until contact is relinquished
#3: (Disaya, XXX): Heat Conductor—can release heat from the bottom of feet and palms up to 2,400 degrees Celsius; can distribute how hot it gets on objects freely

#4: (XXX, XXX): Pain Concentration—naturally lowers the amount of pain the user goes through

#5: (XXX, XXX): Faerie Whisperer—will hear messages in inner ear canal, often warnings; the more wind and shadows present, the more frequent and clear the messages are; user can sometimes control what they wish to hear

*Note: One quirk that had been received was a vaulting-type quirk from the user's cat. This quirk was given back to its owner after an incident with the family.

=====

Midoriya had the panel slipped into his jacket so it touched his skin directly. It was strapped to his back, held in place by more chains wrapped around his middle and shoulders. Even as he walked, it barely seemed to bother or hinder him in any way.

"You said you'd only use your right side," Midoriya commented, loud enough to be heard by Todoroki. "But you're not the only one holding yourself back."

As Midoriya took a step forward, Todoroki took one back.

"So I made myself a deal." He held his arms out, letting the huge moving beast slither closer. "If I won't do it anymore, then maybe I can convince you to stop too." He narrowed his eyes. "So, Todoroki—just how long are we going to do this for?" He tilted his head upward.

"How long will it take to get you to use your left side?"

Chapter End Notes

if any of you complain that this wasn't directly related to canon, i will hunt you down because i did not write six-eight thousand words of the floor is lava for you people to whine about it, sorry

Hey guys, so it's come to my attention that a lot of BNHA authors have discord servers or some kind of social media where they can speak with their readers directly or at least have up-to-date posts. Uhm, I'm dense as a fricking rock, so... help? If I made some kind of account, would you guys actually join it or follow it or whatever? I hope so.
Anyway, just tell me your thoughts, please?

Also, I cannot get this au out of my head: Midoriya has a quirk called Wonderland, and it causes him to develop multiple personalities that each have unique powers of their own. The only problem is that they each take up the persona of a character from Alice in Wonderland, and Class 1-A has no idea to react when one of them ends up being the Cheshire cat. (It's really flipping creepy.)
Chapter Notes

Traitor Theory Count: (I'm doing this only for my own amusement)
Shinsou: III
Kaminari: I

Also, I am so sorry for this chapter. I'm terrible at writing action scenes, though I tried my best. I'm sorry if it isn't up to quality as the rest of the story. >--<

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sero stared, wide-eyed and mouth open in shock. Their entire class's eyes were bulged out of their skulls, excluding Bakugo—but he didn't count.

"H-holy shit," Kirishima cursed from beside him.

"Lesson learned," Hagakure said faintly. "Don't piss Midoriya off."

How... since when could he even do that?

Sero gulped as his throat went dry. "Bloody hell," he muttered to himself. He watched in awe as the large serpent-chained-creature-thing slithered upward into the air, the faint sounds of the chains knocking against one another echoing throughout the arena. Sero felt his breath get taken away at the amount of control Midoriya had over its every movement.

Sero knew from the first time he saw Midoriya that he was something different. His peering eyes and ever-knowing gaze never failed to send a shiver up his spine. Midoriya was something, something that held so much more raw power than what could be seen in the naked eye.

And for the first time, Sero felt like he finally understood why.

As he leaned over the railing, breath showing in short bursts of mist from the palpitating temperatures in the air, he watched as Midoriya spoke to Todoroki. The dual-haired boy said something back, and Midoriya sighed. The boy seemed disappointed as he raised his arm, and Sero choked on his own spit as the chained creature unraveled, swirling upward into a huge wave of heat and metal. Climbing higher than where the student body was seated, the moving surface of the huge wall shuddered and swayed as it grew even taller. Sero felt like he couldn't breathe if he wanted to.

Silence fell over the entire audience as everyone held their breath. And Sero, straining his ears, caught the last words that Midoriya spoke before hell broke loose.

"Fine. The hard way it is, then."

=====

Todoroki peered up at the giant tidal wave. He felt a drop of sweat roll down the back of his neck, sticking a few strands of hair to his skin uncomfortably. In front of him, Midoriya was frowning.
He didn't know why. Midoriya had randomly told him to use his fire side—and why? Why would he ever break his vow? He made it clear that he'd never use it again, and it'd been years since he purposely tried to...

So why now? Why was Midoriya so damn focused on it?

If Todoroki's eyes could grow any wider, he was sure they would at that moment. Even with his head craned all the way up, he still couldn't see the top of the wave. Perhaps, maybe, that was for the best. Maybe he'd freak out more if he could. It blocked out part of the sun's rays, enough to cast a sharp black shadow on the ground. Even so, the light that bounced off of the metal burned into his eyes, and he winced as they watered.

Yet he couldn't bring himself to blink. There was this terrifying thought that the moment he did, those same chains would be wrapping around his throat, throttling him as he struggled to fight back.

(A small voice in the back of his head whispered that that would never happen. Midoriya was kind, and he wouldn't even dream of hurting any of his classmates. He looked at them with so much care, like they meant the world to him, and beating them up for his amusement wasn't anywhere in his character.

Todoroki broke that voice in his head. His mother was kind too, and she cared about him. Did that necessarily stop her from burning him? No.

And then another small voice in his head cried that it was his father that drove her to do that. His mother still cared about him, Fuyumi said so herself.

He broke that voice, too.)

"Shame," Midoriya said as he sighed. "Fine. The hard way it is, then."

And then he snapped his arm down, and the tip of the tidal wave curved before it began to make its descent toward Todoroki. He cursed as he moved his right foot forward, summoning all his willpower to freeze the area around himself faster. The creaking and clanking of the chains as they came crashing forward at a speed inhumane was deafening, only barely muffled as a dome made of thick ice surrounded him. He watched through the translucent layer as everything around him grew considerably darker. Todoroki breathed out for a second, seeing his breath as it rose from his mouth.

Silence.

And then the dome was hit by an onslaught of the metal links, and the ceiling crashed to the ground in an instant. Todoroki hissed as ice fragments flew toward him and embedded themselves deeply into his arms, which were covering his face protectively. He ignored the pain that followed and created a layer of ice that rose up from the ground, almost like a bridge. Chains flew across the ground, the layer so thick that little to no openings to the floor revealed themselves. When they did, they lasted but a few seconds before they were swallowed up by more metal.

Sliding swiftly through the air as he began to get some altitude, he winced as the ringing in his ears grew louder. His feet started to burn through his shoes as he slid across his own ice—while he did his best to make the surface of his bridge smooth, the speed he was crossing it allowed little imperfections and bumps to add up. He went in a zig-zag pace, doing his best to mislead the boy beneath him while he evaded the chains that swirled back around like a boomerang.

Simultaneously using his ice to freeze small pairs of chains to his bridge and to give him another burst of speed, he skidded quickly around the arena, careful not to step out of bounds. Even as he did
his best to take the chains out little by little, he heard the tell-tale signs of hissing, alerting him that they easily melted out of their binds. Out of breath as Midoriya continued to push him upward, higher into the air, he shivered. He was slowing down from the constant use of his ice, and he knew he was—the best he could do was to take random turns and hope that he could throw off Midoriya.

"Even now, when you're being backed into a corner, you refuse to use it!" Midoriya called up to him. His voice was strained as it struggled to carry over the distance between the two.

He felt a wave of defensiveness surge through him. "Shut up!" Todoroki snarled. He sent a wave of ice down at the boy with a swing of his hand. It was a futile attempt, and a wave of chains took the brunt of the attack. "What, did Endeavor set you up to this!? Is that it!?"

If Midoriya wasn't pissed before, he definitely was now. Todoroki almost froze on the spot as a cold expression passed over his face; his eyes were chilly, without a single shred of warmth they usually held.

Or maybe that was the fact that frost was almost covering his entire right side.

"I couldn't give two shits about what your father wants!" Midoriya snapped back. His voice was definitely filled with more ire than before.

Todoroki was about to reply, but the chains trailing him were starting to gain on him with his lack of attention toward them. He felt something graze his back, sending chills up his spine as the heat caused him to flinch. Cursing as he frantically moved abruptly to the side, his bridge curved with him as he almost (almost) made himself sick. The loop caused some gasps to erupt in the spectators, but they barely penetrated the white noise in his ears.

And yet, the chains still continued to remain on his trail.

Todoroki gritted his teeth as he arched his bridge upward. The chains had to have a limit to how long they could go, right? Or maybe it'd tire Midoriya out more. He was already at a ridiculous altitude, but maybe he could gain enough height that Midoriya would waste too much of his energy. If he went too high, it would be difficult to send his own attack back down, but it wasn't impossible. All he had to do was go higher—

Without warning, a streak of blue and green whizzed past him, and Todoroki stumbled and froze in his tracks as the person came to a stop in front of him. Crouched low to the ground, they dug their fingers into the bridge beneath them. They stabilized themselves before they stood up on the thin layer of ice, turning to face Todoroki.

He grimaced as he came face-to-face with Midoriya. Chains wrapped around his shoulders and chest, presumably what carried him off the ground. "Would you just leave me alone about it!" Todoroki hissed. He slid his right foot backward, sending a huge blast that froze the chains sneaking up behind him. He didn't dare take his eyes off Midoriya, though. Not when he was in such a close range. Todoroki knew that that was the first mistake to make in a situation like this, one that would end him ungraciously defeated.

"Leave you alone!?" Midoriya echoed. Todoroki couldn't help but notice the slight red that flushed his cheeks and the tip of his nose. His freckles were almost buried under the crimson, and his eyes were rimmed with pink, like he had been crying. He laughed hoarsely. "Right, that sounds like a grand idea! Let's just leave you to roil at your own mistakes," he said harshly.

And Todoroki could see it—the pain swimming in those eyes, muffled by the extra layer his contacts
provided. He didn't understand why he wore those green-tinted contacts, why his father had been so adamant that he wore them. His coppery-orange irises, pale and gentle, weren't filled with bright, glowing fire. Even now, with the red hot links surrounding him, curling around his arms and neck, they seemed almost dulled in comparison.

And yet they still held that ache, as if he was staring at something he understood. As if he was staring at a mirror of himself.

"I'm not making a mistake," Todoroki snapped. He was angry, pissed, even, but his words were bitter in his mouth. He didn't want to hurt the person in front of him. He didn't even understand why the boy was so pushy about this. He seemed so respectful of his boundaries, and yet here he was, trying to bash his way through them. "And you need to get that out of your head!"

Attacking Midoriya straightforward was not a good idea, not at this height. But he couldn't very well escape backward, not with his only exit being blocked by the wave of chains behind him. And so, without waiting for Midoriya's response, Todoroki prayed that he wasn't making a stupid decision from his own lightheadedness and jumped off the side of the bridge.

He heard the chains break free from his ice again as his stomach flew up to his throat. His heart beat loudly in his ears, drowning out any other sound other than the whistling of the wind. Hair whipping around his face, Todoroki felt his left side grow even colder as ice formed beneath his feet again. He heard Midoriya curse loudly from his perch as he slid back down to the ground safely. Adrenaline pounding through him, he brushed away the spiked surge of panic that had run through him, calming his nerves the best he possibly could.

There was a small seed that remained though, no matter how hard he scraped and pulled away at it. It seemed to bloom and whither in time with his racing heart, mocking him with the voice of his own father.

"You're weak,
You're weak and pathetic and you're being cornered so easily, get up, get up, GET UP—"

"So what!?!" Midoriya shouted after him. The same chains that had been wrapped around his body slowly dropped him to the ground like a marionette. That's all his chains seemed to do, really—it controlled him, strung him around, made him out to be nothing more than a puppet while its puppeteer laughed and giggled. It made Todoroki wonder how much is he like me? How many times have I looked at him and seen someone with a bright smile, only for it to be all a lie? His landing was much more graceful than Todoroki's was. "That's it!? You're just going to throw it all away!?"

Throw it all away.

It's a part of you you'll never be able to escape, Shouto. You'll never be able to escape me.

"What am I throwing away if I don't even need it in the first place!?" Todoroki replied as he raised his right arm. He winced as it struggled to make it all the way up—his muscles were so cold, he could barely bear through the pain as he moved them. Sharp aches wrought through his tendons, and he wanted desperately to thaw the pain that was building in them.

Midoriya beat him to the punch, and with a swipe of his own arm, his chains swirled into formation. Clink, clink, clink repeated endlessly in Todoroki's brain. Shadowing a giant's hand, it grabbed a hold onto one of Todoroki's own bridges, its fingers wrapping tightly around the frozen surface. Thin cracks appeared along the impact, and Todoroki winced as a wave of glittering fragments poured down on him. With a pull that sent a loud groaning sound reverberating through the arena, a huge chunk of ice broke away and was slammed into the ground where Todoroki stood.

Dust exploded up and outward from the attack, billowing close to the ground, and Midoriya held a
hand over his mouth as he coughed. His eyes watered from the dust particles, and his throat itched terribly. His nose burned. More parts of the never-ending bridge shuddered before collapsing as well, no other support there to hold it up. A huge branch of them fell onto other parts of the structure, breaking it further, until the entire thing dropped to the floor, sending pieces of ice along the ground as the crack! made Midoriya's ears ring from the intense volume.

"Ehhhh!?" Present Mic's voice was loud over the cheering of the spectators. Midoriya winced as it burned his ears further. He hadn't been paying attention to him this entire time, too focused on what was going on at hand. Maybe he could ask Uraraka what he had been saying throughout the battle. "Was that the last attack to make Todoroki—"

"You might want to take a better look." Todoroki's voice was loud and clear as he spoke. He didn't even sound intimidated, instead as calm as he always was. It almost made Midoriya jealous. He might have been good at hiding his pain, but fear was always an emotion he struggled to mask. And he knew that hiding fear was practically the number one common rule amongst heroes. So why was he so bad at—

You're not here to be a hero, dumbass. Get that out of your head. You're here to protect the class, nothing else. Stop daydreaming.

Midoriya flinched as the dust cleared. The bridge was centimeters from the boy's head, but a thick layer of ice was starting to cover the twitching chained hand. He hadn't kept the heat up during his attack since he didn't want to melt the bridge, but of course Todoroki noticed that and would use it to his advantage. Midoriya licked his lips as his muscles trembled. It was getting hard to keep up the formation with the hand, and his stomach felt like it was being compressed, almost as if someone was putting a light pressure on it with their hand.

A sudden spell of dizziness hit him, and he did his best to retain his balance without creating too much of a scene. The heat in his cheeks and head was starting to get unbearably hot, and he felt like any second would pass before he fainted. Of all the times he had to get sick, of course it had to be right before the Sports Festival.

Todoroki huffed, his breath clear in front of him as he bent his knees. "You're looking a little feverish there, Midoriya." He tilted his head. "If I remember correctly, you weren't feeling well, were you?"

Before Midoriya could respond, Todoroki shot toward him, arm pulled back and ready to deliver a punch. Midoriya froze at the familiar posture, and dark black skin and empty eyes and a deafening cry filled his ears as a memory flashed through his mind. His side suddenly flared up with unbearable phantom pain, like claws digging into his skin, and he barely snapped himself out of it in time to lean to the side. However, Todoroki's fist was covered in sharp spikes of ice, and Midoriya let out a noise of shock when they scraped into his cheek.

It was a movement burned into him, repeated hundreds of times when he was a child and still learning how to fight. His opponents always aimed for the face, always, and it took too many black eyes and bruises and broken noses before he found his way out of a pummeling masked as a fair fight. And so, with a fierce retaliation, Midoriya opened his hand until the bottom of his palm jutted out, and he slammed it into the other boy's throat. As he choked on his own breath, he kneeled him, hard, into his gut, until he was left wheezing and struggling to regain his breaths.

So many times had Midoriya used that underhanded tactic, if you could call it that. But he more than appreciated it, because it took at least five seconds to get themselves back into control. Five precious seconds that could end a fight in an instant.

But he wasn't aiming to end this fight. He wasn't even aiming to win it.
Well... not everyone else's version of win, anyway.

Midoriya skidded away to put some room between them. Panting heavily, Midoriya wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. His illness was starting to finally catch up with him, and he struggled not to cough as the dust in his throat continued to burn. He felt hot, from head-to-toe, and it clashed angrily with the chill that covered the entire area, clashed even more fiercely with the hot pockets of air left over from his first attacks. Todoroki turned back toward him, massaging his throat, eyes still faintly watering.

"If you think a little sickness is going to stop me, then you have another thing coming," Midoriya replied, ignoring the pounding in his head and the heat in his cheeks. It was a lie, an obvious one, a cracking mask that wouldn't hold up much longer. How much longer was this going to go on for? *Forever, and ever, and ever and ever and ever and ever until we can convince him, and ever some more.*

The boy tsked. "You just won't give up, will you?" Another wave of ice formed underneath his foot, shooting toward him. If possible, the cold surrounding them got even worse, and Midoriya shivered, even as his body felt hot, hot, hot.

Midoriya's eyes widened fractionally, but he brought his arms in front of his face as it flew toward him. He felt his stomach clench uncomfortably as another wave of chains rose up in front of him, swirling as it formed a protective barrier around his front half. The clinking was gentle and faint in the roaring of the incoming ice. Midoriya grunted as it slammed into his makeshift shield, putting an unbearable pressure on his muscles as they felt the backlash of the attack. Immediately, the movement of his chains paused as they were frozen solid. Even so, they refused to let any get through to the person behind their barrier.

"You keep on saying that you want me to use my fire side," Todoroki growled, "and yet you can't even handle my right!"

Midoriya clenched his jaw as the ice began to push him back. He did his best to dig his heels in, and the bottom of his feet stung as the rough ground blistered the skin. Todoroki's ice pushed him closer and closer to the line, and Midoriya instinctively formed a barrier of chains behind him. As he did, he noticed that the panel strapped to his back was hanging on precariously. There was no doubt that, if Todoroki aimed for it, he would be in severe trouble.

He needed to get out of this trap. *Now.*

He pressed his palms against the wall in front of him, and, against his better judgement, he let the heat of his palms transfer into the chains. Immediately, his vision swam, and he struggled not to puke as the progress the ice made slowed considerably. Steam rose from the other side, a hissing sound reaching his ears. The chains' texture were rough against his hands.

(Heat Conductor was an interesting quirk. With it, his palms and the bottoms of his feet were practically immune to being burned, though the same couldn't be said for the top of his hands and feet. It was almost annoying, except Midoriya rarely ever turned up the heat on those parts of his skin.

But what made the quirk really unique was its ability to control the heat's distribution. As long as heat was already in the object at hand, Midoriya was able to distribute and concentrate where and how hot the heat of an object would get. If he wanted to melt a circle into the wall, for example, like all the cliches in the universe, he could press his palm to the wall and concentrate the heat into his little circle. By creating enough heat until it went past the wall's melting point, the part of the wall in his circle would melt and create an opening.)
Ta da! It was honestly no surprise that Disaya had been one of Hisashi's favorites and stood by him, even if it was only a year before he messed up and was forced to give it up. Midoriya was sure that Disaya was an excellent addition to get them out of hairy situations.

Too bad he was a creepy pedophile.)

But the ice had not slowed enough, apparently, because Midoriya felt his back hit the chains behind him. His arms trembled as he struggled to keep the wall from crushing him, his muscles still sore and aching from a lack of rest. Midoriya felt bile rise up in his throat as he forced the other end of his barrier into the shape of a drill, just as he did before—back when Todoroki first froze him in that dang glacier. Feeling the metal heat up even more, he heard the ice begin to crack before it shattered again.

Midoriya fell forward, gasping for breath. His lungs felt weak and shriveled up in his chest, too pathetic to correctly inhale and exhale properly. Ahead of him, his shield unraveled like a piece of cloth whose stray strings had been pulled. The strands shot back toward Todoroki, who dodged them clumsily. He was getting slower, though it wasn't really any improvement—they both were, and so they continued to remain evenly matched.

Midoriya felt his throat burn again, and he turned before hacking into his elbow. Something stained the sleeve of his jacket, though he ignored it as he sprinted forward. Todoroki wasn't expecting him to recover from his attack so soon, something that had Midoriya both wincing and internally cheering. As he jumped in the air to avoid another attack from Midoriya's chains, he grabbed Todoroki by the meat of his forearm, slamming him into the ground. Todoroki coughed as the air was knocked out of his lungs. But it must have been a normal thing for him, to be out of breath, to be forced into the ground. And so he growled as he kicked upward with his right foot, and Midoriya's head snapped back as frost spread over his jaw.

It hurt. Midoriya would have liked to say that it helped numb the pain from the cuts in his cheek, but all it seemed to do was aggravate it even more. And, if anything, it just brought his unwanted attention to it, the biting cold biting into his skin.

Todoroki rolled back to his feet as Midoriya opened his mouth to speak. "You want to ignore using your fire," Midoriya said, "but what happens when you're a hero, huh?" Midoriya pressed the back of his hand to the side of his face, and he smelled iron in the air. If his hand came back tainted red, he didn't mention it. "What happens when there's a little boy who's crying for help, hoping to be saved!? What happens when your ice isn't enough!!?"

He saw it strike a cord with the other male. Perhaps it struck too close to home. It did for Midoriya.

"Shut up," Todoroki muttered as another, thicker layer of ice began to coat his right side. A shadow fell over his eyes.

The chains surrounding Midoriya flickered. He felt his frustration spike. He thought about himself, hiding in the small closet in Seiya's room. He thought about the pounding in his ears, the pain in his skull when Shigaraki grabbed a hold of him. He thought about the sadness welling up in his only friend's eyes when they reunited, his frown permanently etched into his face and over thirty different versions of the same event cycling through his head.

He thought about the smaller version of himself, curled into a ball, delirious from lack of food and water as he was strapped to a chair, throat burning and dry and too, too tight. He thought about himself, curled into a ball, bawling his eyes out as blood coated his chest and hands and stomach and legs as he desperately held the stump of his left wrist to his chest, and there was so much blood, so much blood, and he wished so much that there was someone who could save him, someone who
could save him, someone with enough power who could save him—

He didn't realize that his eyes were burning, that his scar was burning, that his hand was aching, aching, aching, aching. "When will you realize that people out there need you with your fire!?" People like me?

"How exactly... did you get your burn scar?"

"My... burn scar? The one on my neck?"

"..."

"... It was just... an accident."

"Shut up!" Todoroki repeated, though it was louder, and in pain, in so much pain.

Another huge wave of ice leapt forward, fangs bared, ready to pounce on its next victim. Midoriya raised his arms to create another shield, but the wave crashed into it when it was only barely formed. He almost went flying into the air as he fought to keep his feet on the ground. He pressed his hands against his shield, his feet dragging back through the ground as he did everything he could to keep the ice back.

"How many, Todoroki!?" he rasped behind his shield. His arms trembled something fierce. "How many pleas for help will you be unable to answer!? How many people have to die before you realize it!?"

Without warning, his shield cracked, and he let out a choked gasp as he was slammed back into the wall he left behind him. He felt his body freeze against his chains, the metal cool against his back. He was inches away from being out of bounds, a distance too small for comfort. Midoriya tried to heat up his hands and feet at risk of being discovered, in too deep to care any longer. Freezing spikes circled his neck, and he struggled to breathe as he twitched. Todoroki began to make his way up the ice that he formed.

Todoroki seemed to falter at the thought, though he soon continued his way toward his frozen form. "No one is going to die on my hands. And I don't know how many times I have to freeze you to get that through to you."

Midoriya let out a short, weak laugh. "We'd be doing this forever, Todoroki." He hissed as spikes around his neck dug into his skin. His voice was raspy as he spoke, filled with quiet determination. "I'd do it again, and again, and again, and again, and on and on for eternity, and you wouldn't be able to do anything to stop me."

"You're a fool." Todoroki raised his right hand up to Midoriya's face.

In a whip of action, the ice around one of Midoriya's arms cracked from the pathetic heat he was emitting, and he snapped his hand up to grab onto Todoroki's. It hurt, and he was shivering from the cold. His fingers felt too numb to move, and they ached in hunger for warmth. "A fool?" Midoriya echoed, his voice a low hiss. "The only fool here I see is you. What happens when the deaths of those you could have saved are hanging over your shoulders, all because you refused to use everything you had? Even now, when everyone else is trying their hardest, using one hundred percent to become a true hero, you're only half-assing it."

It burned his tongue to say it. He didn't want to say anymore, because it hurt, it hurt, and he was no better than Todoroki was. How was he to berate Todoroki when he was no better?
He was no better.

Absolutely no better.

Did that make him the bad guy?

...

Was he the bad guy?

He narrowed his eyes as the chains behind him began to shudder. His grip on Todoroki's forearm tightened. And his tongue, it stung, and his words were like poison on his taste buds, and he hated it, hated it. "For someone who claims to want to be nothing like your father, you seem to radiate him perfectly." Todoroki froze, his eyes widening. Midoriya could see it, the pain, the horror, the utter agony of being compared to the man he hated the most. Being compared to the man who drove his wife into hurting him, who burned him, who hurt him. "Both of you—arrogant, looking down on others... pushing parts of yourselves away for what you believe is the better good." His fingers gripped Todoroki's muscle tightly, his nails digging into the skin uncomfortably. "How many lives will be cost because of your pettiness, huh?"

Behind him, his chains vibrated as they heated up. Todoroki's hand started to form ice as he realized that Midoriya wasn't done, but he didn't have time to react before the ends of the metal links slammed into his stomach.

Midoriya winced as he used his distraction to melt his way out of the glacier he was stuck in. He wasn't sure how much more his knees could take when he glanced over the edge, seeing the immense height that separated him from the ground.

But he wasn't done. He still had more to say. He still had more to do. So, he sucked in a sharp breath before letting himself fall to the floor, his knees shooting sharp pains up and down his legs as he landed it.

Ouch. That hurts like a truck.

Midoriya winced as his freezing feet struggled to keep him up. He really shouldn't have gone barefoot, and yet he did, and he was seriously starting to regret it. He regretted a lot of things, now. He wished he noticed it sooner. Why didn't he notice any of these things sooner? How many years had he been studying these nineteen kids, wondering, pondering, hoping, never realizing?

By the time Midoriya focused back into the fight, Todoroki had already recovered, and he was staring him down. But the latter saw it in his eyes—the slight conflicting emotions that battled their way through. Midoriya took a deep breath as he forced his voice over normal volume. It hurt, it hurt so much, and he hadn't hurt like this in a long, long time. But he supposed that it could be worse, and that this hurting was worth it in the end, and so he ignored the pain and the ache and the tears and he screamed:

"You fool!" He was starting to get incredibly light headed as his chains circled around his feet. "You don't want to be like your father? Well here's my response!" He bent his knees as he made sure he was as loud as he could possibly be. And it hurt, but that was okay, because heroes were born to hurt, and villains were bound to pain. "It's not his power! It's yours!" He swallowed thickly before the next words tore from his throat. "So what about that is so hard to understand?

"It's your power, isn't it!?”

====
It was so hypocritical, it almost made Midoriya want to cry.

Almost.

(Instead, his chest grew lighter as his own words rang in his ears.

It was a little freeing, almost.

Almost.)

===== 

Midoriya remembered the way his chains wrapped around the nomu's chest, tugging, trapping, protecting. He remembered his gritted teeth, he remembered the burning in his hands as he struggled to keep his sweaty grip on his escisma sticks.

And then he remembered the nomu's hands, clenching those metal links, tighter, tighter, tighter...

And when they snapped, Midoriya remembered the way the world seemed to turn on its side, the way the bile instantly rose from his throat, the way iron gently graced his taste buds.

And so when the burning light burst from Todoroki's left side, he could help but feel his stomach sink low, low, low, even as he smiled.

Because there was one, teeny tiny problem.

His chains' type of metal took after the source they originated from. And one of the problems with the panel strapped to his back was that it was a metal with a very, very low melting point. One that could barely take the heat that he sent through them before.

And so, when Todoroki's flames shot toward him, and he sent his measly wall of chains up, the links began to melt.

And he cried from the pain. It hurt so, so much. But that was okay. It was worth it.

It always was.

===== 

Maiko stood in front of All for One and his army of nomus. Surrounding them, dead bodies of their revolution littered the ground. Blood caked the floor. It stained the small group of flowers that sat not too far away. It stained Maiko's jacket and pants, and her arms too. Daizō wasn't covered in red, though only because Maiko had herself curled around him.

"You're not going to win this battle, Father," she said. Her hazel eyes were dark and stormy. "Don't think that you will."

The man in front of her was clearly angry. His voice was cold as he spoke. "So you're a traitor," he said. "Not only to your own people, but to me as well."

Maiko worried her lip for a moment for speaking. "I'm not a traitor to anyone. I serve the good for humanity, and that only. Nothing else matters."

All for One was quiet for a very, very long time. When he finally said something, his tone was as soft as it would ever be. Daizō had to strain his ears to hear him. "If that is what you truly believe, my daughter."
If Daizō had been faster, then maybe he could have stopped it. Just maybe.

But he wasn't, and so his eyes widened as All for One suddenly appeared in front of Maiko. And he felt all the air rush out of him as the dark blade appeared from the skin of his arm. And before he could say anything, before he could finish reaching his arm out toward her, the blade slid right through her stomach. There was a sound of breaking flesh and bones as the end appeared from out her back.

Maiko made a small choking sound as she blinked. Her eyes were hazy as she breathed short gasps, and blood dripped out of the corner of her mouth, and with shaking hands, she raised them to rest on the blade peeking out from her abdomen. Red crawled up her stomach, up to her chest as it stained the floor. There were tears forming in her eyes as a pathetic, wobbly smile tilted her lips.

"Damn you, Father," she whispered. She brought a bloody hand up to place it on his jaw. She let out a choked laugh, almost comparable to a sigh. "It was worth it, though. No matter what you say."

And then her eyes trailed from his face, glancing over to where Daizō was crouching, a hand clamped tightly over his mouth and tears in his eyes. "It was worth it."

All for One tutted before swiftly pulling the blade back out of her. She made a low grunt as the last of her support disappeared. She fell to the ground, a whine of pain making it past her lips, and she gasped desperately for breath as she held a hand over her side. Blood pooled around her, and some dripped from the tip of All for One's blade.

He sighed. "I was really hoping you wouldn't say that." And then he raised his blade back up, and Maiko closed her eyes and laughed.

"Do it, bastard." And then she closed her eyes, preparing for the pain. She'd been waiting her entire life for this moment. This was no surprise.

And then the blade came swinging down, and Maiko clenched her eyes tighter, and the pain would come, any second now—

She heard a soft sob. It never came. And then she opened her eyes blearily, and there, standing in front of her was Daizō. There were tears running down his face, and his arms were raised over his head, and his eyes were clenched tight. She exhaled shakily as she stared at the blade that was mere inches from his face.

"You fool," she whispered softly as she grabbed onto the small boy's arms. She pulled him back toward her, even as her side protested, and she wrapped him up in bloody arms. She swore that he'd never be harmed, not now. Not until he was older. And while she may have failed when they kidnapped him, she would never let it happen again.

From the corner of her eye, she watched as All for One sighed. It was sad, as if he actually cared. Maybe he did. They were both his flesh and blood, daughter and grandson—and all that remained of their family.

But this was All for One. And he did not spend eight hundred years of working on his empire for it all to go to waste. And so the blade, covered in Maiko's blood, shot upward again. And Maiko turned away so his back was toward him, because dying an honorable death was meaningless if it meant that Daizō would be hurt. And so she held a sobbing Daizō in her arms. She was lightheaded, and she felt like any second she would pass out, and her body trembled as she lost more and more blood.
But that didn't matter. It never did. And she placed her cheek against the top of Daizō's head, let a small tear escape her eye, and smiled.

"You little, little fool," she whispered. And she felt Daizō hiccup, and then the pain struck. Eyes closing, she heard Daizō shriek in pain. Not physical pain, perhaps, but the ones filled in sadness.

And then, she felt a sudden twisting in her stomach, a fierce one, and then her arms felt so, so empty.

_He did it._

She hit the floor, alone, bloodied, and cold.

======

"Holy shit is he okay—"

"Oh my god, is he even breathing!?"

"Move out of the way—"

"—happened at USJ, didn’t it?"

"Recovery Girl's coming—!"

======

When Midoriya woke up, he felt numb. He felt bandages, wrapped tightly around his arms and legs and chest and head. There was a cotton ball taped to his cheek. They were almost constricting, _almost_, but they were expertly tied so they gave him enough breathing room and didn’t cut his circulation off.

There was pain there. It was hovering around him, but not quite where it should be. It was dulled, perhaps a mixture of medication and something else. There was an IV in his arm, and a heart monitor off to the side. However, his face was bare of an oxygen mask—a lucky thing, really.

He glanced over to his side to see someone sitting there. White and red hair were burned into his brain, and he blinked lethargically.

He huffed softly before pushing himself slightly upward. Almost immediately, Todoroki’s head snapped toward him, and he leapt from his seat. Midoriya felt his chest warm as the boy helped him into a sitting position, his eyes taking on a whole new light from before their battle.

"I'm sorry," Todoroki confessed as they made themselves comfortable.

A rush of _déjà vu_ overcame Midoriya as he smiled. He placed his hand on top of the other boy's. "You fool," he said fondly.

It was enough of an answer for the both of them.

======

It took a bit for Midoriya to finally get out of bed. Apparently, he didn't miss much—Todoroki and him had effectively ruined the arena, and it took over an hour and a half to repair all the damage.

Asui and Tokoyami's battle took place after that.
Uraraka's voice was hoarse after their battle. It took ages to finish. While it wasn't as glamorous as Todoroki and Midoriya's was, it was still incredibly long. It took twenty-five minutes—which was almost twice, maybe three or four times as long as all the other ones. While Kaminari's was the shortest, probably not lasting more than a minute, everyone else's were around five to ten. Shiozaki's was long because Hatsume went on and on and on about her "babies," but it still didn't go on for longer than fifteen minutes.

And yet, the two of them, both powerful forces to reckon with, went at one another until they were covered in dust and dirt. Over and over again, when one would get close to the line, the audience would cheer their brains out, screaming until they lost their voices—only for them to save themselves and get away from the out of bounds.

It was only due to a misplaced jump that Asui lost. Her plan was brilliant, and she was going to get high enough so Tokoyami couldn't reach her, but Dark Shadow was one step ahead. He slammed into her while she was in midair, even as she tried to protect herself with her tongue, and she went flying out of bounds.

There were just as many groans as cheers. But the crowd was definitely impressed with the both of them. As Asui said when she arrived back, "While I may have lost, I tried and did my best; that's all I could ask for today."

Uraraka was still in tears, but Asui's smile eased her disappointment.

Shouji and Jirou were after. It wasn't as fierce as the other two battles, but you could see the emotion in both of their eyes. Shouji was powerful, and Jirou—though she was the eventual victor—didn't come out without bruises. Shouji could bear through immense pain, and his strikes were both effective and dangerously strong.

Midoriya knew first-hand from their heroes vs. villains exercise. As he watched from the television from inside the hospital room, he couldn't help but wince every time the large male landed an attack on her.

But even so, Jirou wasn't weak, and her sound quirk was an utter bitch to Shouji as well. He was bleeding from the ears, and he had scratches all over him from the ends of her jacks by the time she managed to get him out of bounds. In fact, she used he length of her jacks to push him by the shoulders backward as she sent wave after wave of high-pitched wails from the speakers at her ankles.

By that time, after a very long lecture from Recovery Girl, he was given the okay to step out. He managed to catch Shouji as he walked through the halls. He gave him a smile and a pat on the arm when the boy noticed he was there.

"You were great out there, Shouji. Jirou's a strong opponent, and you did well against her."

Shouji's eyes were wide as he stared at him. He nodded, though he still seemed a little out of it. "Just... as a warning," he said, "be careful with your classmates. They might still be shocked from your display of power, and I wouldn't put it past them if they tried to shake the answers out of you."

Midoriya's eye twitched. "Oh. Thanks for warning me."

Shouji nodded before patting his head. "Hope you feel better. You took a huge hit." He turned away, heading toward the stands reserved for their class. Midoriya watched him go.

Tokoyami would help reassure him, yeah? Yeah.
Midoriya made sure to go down to the waiting rooms for the next match, however. As he opened one of them, he looked inside to see that Yaoyorozu was staring up at the ceiling, breathing carefully. Her head snapped toward him, and her eyes widened.

"Hey, Yaochan," he started slowly. "I know I'm not in the best condition, but I wanted to give you a hug and some good luck."

She stared at him for another second before her eyes began to water. Midoriya smiled at her as he let the door close behind him. He hobbled over to the empty chair beside her. He grunted as he sat down, a sharp, brief pain searing through him before it was gone.

"Are you okay?" he asked quietly.

Yaoyorozu wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. "I-I guess so. Not really. Kind of."

Midoriya took her hands into his own, settling them between the two of them. His knees brushed against hers as he rubbed his thumb along the back of her hand. "You're going to do fine," he reassured. "Don't worry about how you're going to do." He thought about that morning, when he too was nervous. When Kayama had reassured him. "No matter how it turns out, you'll still make all of us proud, you know that?"

Yaoyorozu finally smiled, though it was weak as she took in a shaky breath. She nodded. "Y-yeah, I know that..." She looked down at their hands, and she squeezed his gently. "I just... don't want to disappoint myself."

Midoriya sent her a squeeze back. "You won't. I know you won't." He smiled brightly at her. "Now, can you repeat after me?"

Yaoyorozu blinked, surprised, but she nodded. "Yeah...?"

Midoriya was really hoping that this was going to work, because the corner of Yaoyorozu's eyes were still wet with tears, and he did not want to mess this up. "Okay. Repeat after me: I'm going to beat Sero into the ground."

"I-I'm going to beat- wait, what?"

"Wow," Uraraka commented later. "Yaoyorozu really beat Sero into the ground, huh?"

Asui nodded sagely beside her. Iida was chopping his hands through the air. "I've never seen that kind of fierce fire in her eyes before! To think that Sero, even with the amount of opposition he put forth, was still beaten so ruthlessly..."

Jirou was vibrating excitedly beside Asui. "Oh yeah! Now she's gotten me all fired up too!"

Kaminari was punching the air. "She was like, 'bam!' and 'shapow!' and 'fuck you!'"

Ashido snorted from beside him, obviously not expecting the last one. She held a hand over her mouth as she tried to stop her giggling.

Kirishima rubbed the back of his head. "True, but I feel kinda bad for Sero, you know?" He glanced away. "He tried so hard..."

Asui, as always, was blunt and almost harsh. "We all tried our hardest, ribbit. No offense to Sero, but
his best just wasn't enough." She turned her head so she was looking back at Kirishima. "Even you
did your best, you know. I don't know why you and Aoyama think otherwise." There was a moment
of tense silence before she shrugged at Kirishima's wide-eyed expression. "But I suppose we all have
our own reasons for doing what we do."

Everyone went silent after she finished speaking, even though some of the tension went away. It was
broken by footsteps coming closer. No one really paid too much mind to them, until—

"Midoriya!"

Everyone's heads snapped toward the green-headed boy, who was hobbling along like an old
person. He was covered in bandages, and he squinted at Kaminari, who called out his name.

"Why am I getting the feeling like everyone's about to burst?"

"Dude, how the heck did you make that chained beast thingy?"

"Since when could you make them super hot!?"

"How long have you been able to do that?"

Midoriya proceeded to stare at them with twitching eyes before turning on his heel. He walked down
until he was in the first row, and he plopped himself onto Iida.

"You're comfortable and warm," he answered immediately before the boy could say anything. "Plus,
you're the only one who can protect me from these fricken hornets."

"Are you calling us bees!?"

"Kaminari, he literally just said hornets, not bees."

"Does it really make any difference!?"

Iida scolded them, hands chopping the air as he told them off. There was another moment of quiet,
though it was calm. And then—

"What a mad banquet of darkness."

"Tokoyami."

"Dude, you've officially betrayed us."

=====

Midoriya was incredibly thirsty. Which was probably reasonable, seeing how he hadn't actually had
anything to drink since his fight. So he soon excused himself, only to find himself in front of the
vending machine. As he waited for his bottle of whatever juice he picked (he really shouldn't have
just pressed a random button), he looked down each hallway for some kind of TV.

Bakugo and Uraraka were going to battle. He had hugged her tightly, only to be found by
Yaoyorozu and Iida. And when those two saw the situation, they all formed a group hug.

Uraraka had given them all high-fives before they left, and a good luck to them that they'd move onto
the next round. She looked sheepish when she remembered Midoriya, who had already lost to
Todoroki.
"It's fine," he had said. "I've already counted that fight as a win, anyway." Even if he went down in the first round, he was still happy. He'd obviously left his mark, and even if he didn't get very far in the tournament, he at least got Todoroki to use his fire. It could have gone much worse, all things considered.

Well, it did go worse. About three times, actually. Or four. Or eight.

Okay, leave him alone, he sucked when it came to words and getting his point across. And he timed trying to speak wrong so many times, he ended up having ice shoved down his throat. Sue him for having to go back because his pathetic being couldn't form a reasonable argument to snap Todoroki out of it.

Uraraka and the other two seemed caught off-guard, though he was pleasantly surprised when understanding passed through their gazes. "Yeah, you sure did change Todoroki for the better," Yaoyorozu said. "I've known Todoroki for years, and I have never really seen him go full out like that."

Midoriya snapped out of it as a bottle slammed to the bottom of the vending machine. He didn't even flinch that time. Midoriya crouched, groaning as his muscles burned. He wondered if this was how Yagi felt twenty-four-seven as he reached his hand into the flap. He pulled the drink out to see that he had paid for apple juice.

He shrugged. It wasn't that bad. Could have been worse.

As he twisted the cap on the bottle, he mentally crossed his fingers. He hoped that Uraraka would do well. She had been working very hard, just as Aoyama said, though Bakugo was fierce. He was probably one of the best in the class, rivaled only by Todoroki.

He sighed before bringing the bottle to his lips. He leaned his head back, and the taste of apples and sugar hit his tongue.

Even if Uraraka lost, though, Bakugo would be facing Yaoyorozu next. And there was no doubt that Yaoyorozu would be raining hellfire on him if it happened.

It was when he was walking back to his seat in the stands that he paused yet again.
WARNING
WARNING
WARNING
WARNING

INCOMING MESSAGE:
WOULD YOU LIKE TO DOWNLOAD RECORDING?

...

...

...

OKAY THEN.

DOWNLOAD PENDING NOW:

1%

16%
"IF ANYONE HEARS THIS, WE NEED YOUR HELP. WE HAVE A CODE YELLOW — I REPEAT, WE HAVE A CODE YELLOW. THIS IS KIMOTO DAIZÔ SPEAKING, FROM ALPHA SQUAD NINETEEN OF THE DEPARTMENT OF TIME TRAVEL REGULATION, ACTIVE DUTY. CURRENT TIME FRAME WILL BE ATTACHED IN THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE."

"THIS IS ASAGIRI MAIKO SPEAKING, ALSO FROM ALPHA SQUAD NINETEEN OF THE DEPARTMENT OF TIME TRAVEL REGULATION, ACTIVE DUTY. OUR READINGS SAY THAT OVER TWO HUNDRED UNITS HAVE BROKEN THE UNIVERSAL STRING. THEY ORIGINATE FROM THE TWENTY-EIGHTH CENTURY. THEY ARE CURRENTLY RENDEZVOUSING AT TOKYO. WE NEED ALL NEARBY ALPHA AND BETA SQUADS IN ACTION, NOW."

"MAIKO AND I ARE INITIATING CONTAINMENT POLICIES. WHATEVER YOU DO, DO NOT LET THEM GET TO MIDORIYA IZUKU!"

"WAIT, DAIZÔ... WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?"

"WHAT THE- SHIT—!"

... 
...
...

THIS MESSAGE HAS ENDED. WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEND A REPLY?

... 
...
...
OKAY THEN. RECORDING NOW.

...  
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YOUR MESSAGE HAS BEEN SENT! THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.

"THIS IS TODOROKI TOUYA SPEAKING, BETA SQUAD ELEVEN OF THE DEPARTMENT OF TIME TRAVEL REGULATION, RESERVE DUTY. YOUR MESSAGE HAS BEEN RECEIVED. BACK UP IS ON THE WAY.

"AND DON'T YOU DARE DIE ON ME, YOU LITTLE BRAT."

Chapter End Notes

HAHAHAHAHHAHAHAHAHA I'M GONNA LAUGH AT YOUR REACTIONS SO MUCH LO!

well, thats assuming theyre positive, which i'm super nervous about tbh oh my gosh please don't be mad about this chapter

Okay guys. Here's your last chance to tell me. I've already recorded all of your votes, so please do not try to vote a second time. However, if you haven't said anything yet, or you'd like to change your mind, (please tell me what you originally voted for and what you want now) please write it in the comments!
As of now, this is the last chapter before the question arises: Will Midoriya get One for All?

Please don't rip each other's throats out. And you don't even have to vote if that's bothersome to you, I understand. I'm lazy like that too.
The Casting of Light

Chapter Summary

SO MUCH EXPLANATION, NOT VERY MUCH WOW

Chapter Notes

Traitor Theory:

Shinsou: III
Kaminari: II
Sero: II

Also, I'm so sorry if this chapter is super jarring and yeah. I know, it's kinda bad, but I really cannot handle staying with the sports festival arc much longer. I mean, seriously, we've been on this arc for... pretty much forty-one thousand words now. I'm ready to MOVE ON.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"WHATEVER YOU DO, DO NOT GET SEEN."

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There was a faint humming in the background as she listened to the beeping of the machines. It was a dark room, and it was almost as if everything had been placed under a dark film. If she didn't know better, she would have thought that she was wearing her shades, except they were placed on top of her head, not along the bridge of her nose. The only source of light was from the computer, which sat upon a polished wooden desk.

There was a moment of silence as no one spoke. There were only four of them here—her, the doctor, the mist villain, and the one behind it all.

She couldn't help but smile as she looked at him. She had admired the man for years, and finally, finally, she was getting to meet him.

The man in the chair wasn't looking back at her, though. Instead, he continued to stare in his eyeless gaze back at his computer. "And who might you be?" he finally asked, his voice muffled behind the oxygen mask wrapped tightly around his face.

The woman clasped her hands behind her back as she pushed herself up from where she had been leaning, using only her back muscles to do so. She almost squinted as rays of artificial light from the computer hit part of her face. "Just a stranger."

The man hummed. "And yet you know who I am."
"Everyone knows who you are in my time," she answered. She felt her heart flutter when he tilted his head, acknowledging the choice of her words.

"In your time?" the doctor in the back echoed. "Are you alluding to the fact that you're not of this time?"

The woman couldn't help but want to bounce on the balls of her feet. Oh, how heart racing this was! "That is what I'm alluding to, yes."

"And why are you here?" All for One asked.

Her smile fell as she sighed. "Well, that is the billion yen question..." She felt her shoulders drop as her excitement faded. "It's quite a long story."

"I'm listening," All for One provided.

She sighed again before straightening herself. "All right then. At the beginning, yes?" She took a deep breath. "Around two hundred different units—we call things or people that travel back that—have traveled back through time to your present. I'm one of those two hundred. We came from the twenty-eighth century, breaking our universal strings in the process in order to give you a warning."

"Universal strings?" the doctor questioned.

The woman rubbed the back of her head before nodding. "Yes, the universal strings. We call them that because those are what span our lives. If we go back to a time where we haven't existed yet, then we break our so-called strings." She held a hand up as the doctor opened his mouth to speak. "I'll explain everything. Just give me a moment." Taking in a deep breath, she steeled herself before speaking again.

"Breaking your universal string is viewed as dangerous. Usually, time travelers aren't allowed to do it, because it causes further complications down the road." She cleared her throat. "But first, you'll have to get an image of what our time model is." She placed her hands on top of one another, palm pressing against the other. "We view time as a layered wave in empty space. Other strings of time fill up that empty space, which are alternate realities, but that's not what we're really focusing on. They run parallel to our timeline." She tried to hide her smile as she noticed how intently All for One was watching.

"When you break your universal string, it sends out a wavelength, or what we refer to as the Echo. This Echo will shoot out from your wavelength, which is your time." The doctor was starting to take notes. She wanted to slap him. "These Echoes aren't uncommon, but they're unstable. When these Echoes shoot out, they go on and on and on, for eternity—unless they hit something in our "empty space," usually another alter reality, or those parallel strings. This causes a small glitch in that reality, and it's also what causes things such as deja vu and other unrealistic things." She licked her lips. "When the Echo hits these obstacles, it ends up bouncing back toward our wavelength, our time. This doesn't really do much on its own, and Echoes are constantly being pushed out from our wavelength and returning."

She could tell that the Doctor was starting to wonder why she was telling them these things when they weren't that important. She was ready to throttle him. "However, when these Echoes collide, they create a Wave—a disturbance. Too many Waves at once nearby our time model will cause our wavelength to shift. Eventually, with enough Echoes colliding and enough Waves being created in one central area—" She tilted her joined hands from side to side. "—our wavelength separates into different layers." She separated her hands until they were parallel to one another. "At first, nothing really happens. However, things begin to drift, and some things fall between your layers into
nonexistence. Then, your layers collide back together, forming an almost- replica of the timeline, or wavelength, you had before."

"Almost?" All for One mused. "I'm assuming there's differences."

The woman tilted her head. "But of course." She sighed as she let her hands fall back to her sides. "For example, you, All for One, might have been killed by All Might all those years ago." She placed her hands on her hips. "Or, perhaps, All Might could have died." She shrugged. "Who knows? Maybe Midoriya Izuku was born quirkless and managed to get into U.A. by receiving One for All. There's no endings to the possibilities."

All for One tilted her head, a sign to urge her to continue.

She couldn't help but look away from his face. It was horrific to look at. "But back to the situation at hand. Me and my team have come back in order to create a new world where we aren't restricted in our own bubbles." She tried not to let her frustration seep into her voice as she continued to speak. "With the start of time travelers, rules began to be put into place by what we call the Society of Time. The society is a... platform, I suppose, where time travelers all form together. More or less, they prevent time travelers from growing corrupt, or from stepping too far out of their bounds. As an example, they keep time travelers from aiming for certain controversial events to try and change the result. If we were allowed, someone would go back and try to alter the event because they didn't like what happened, while another group of people would go back to stop that someone because they did like what happened, and then another group would try and prevent the previous group, until so many people were fighting over something so trivial that our wavelength collapsed and time itself ceased to exist."

The doctor gulped. She was finally happy to be getting her point across.

"Unfortunately, the Society of Time is ruled by people who want to do nothing more than the bare minimum. Even with the amount of power at their call and beckoning, they want nothing to do with spheres of power of influence." She could tell that a bit of her bitterness was showing through, though she ignored it. "They have so many people from so many different times that make it up, and yet they all spout the same bullshit. Hell, they have about seven or eight different departments dedicated just to making sure that time remains exactly the same."

"And you want me to make a new kind of society," All for One guessed.

"Yes, that's exactly what we want," she said. "And we can do it if you can prevail in the upcoming battles."

"I see," All for One said. "But tell me this: why did you go through so much trouble to launch an attack with over two hundred people if you're just telling me this? Why waste so much energy?"

She rolled her eyes as she sighed. "That's the thing—we're not wasting energy." She rubbed the bridge of her nose as she tried to ease the oncoming headache. "The Society of Time is still powerful, no matter how little they contribute to the actual flow of the timeline. We needed to launch exactly that many units here just so I could relay this to you without being detected. If they found out that I was telling you this..."

"But why?" All for One prodded. "Why not change it yourself?"

At this, the woman flinched. "We're going to have to use another model."

"Go ahead," All for One said.
She pursed her lips but nodded. "The reason why we can't do anything ourselves is because this period of time is incredibly... sensitive, you could say. Or maybe even delicate." She frowned as she crossed her arms. "Say that our timeline is a tree. The trunk would be around this time era, while everything before it are the roots. The time that passes after this are the branches." She hesitated before speaking again. "This time period cannot be directly interfered with, except for a few small cases. Kimoto Daizō, for example." She knew her voice was filled with distaste, but she couldn't help it. "He's known to be exceptional with these kinds of time manipulation, where you have to be careful with every movement you make. At the moment, he's traveled back to this time period to look over Midoriya Izuku and protect him from any time travelers going back to try and attack him. Which I'll get back to later, don't worry."

She was about to wave off the mist villain, but he was already speaking before she could decide.

"Perhaps you're speaking of the same Midoriya Izuku I'm thinking about? The one in U.A.?" he asked.

She waved her hand. "Yeah, yeah, that's him, but back to the point at hand." She cleared her throat again. "While a few changes to the timeline can be made, they're only done by talented people because, like I said, this time period is delicate. Any time after this doesn't matter. It's like cutting off tree branches, you're not actually hurting the tree that much. But cut down the tree trunk, and the roots will die. That's why we can't interfere directly with people. No touching, no breaking, and no hurting. Those are the rules. I can give you advice, though... hopefully. I'm assuming so, since the world hasn't crashed yet."

"Can the roots not be targeted?" All for One asked, curious. "Can you not go back farther than this time period?"

"It's incredibly unstable," she replied. "I can't answer that question, though. No one has the guts to go back, and the only one that tried was torn apart by the seams." She shrugged. "There's rumors that Midoriya was able to recreate scenes from the past in his sleep, but that's nor here nor there."

And that got All for One's attention, even more than anything else. "Say that again?"

She smiled. "I'll say it exactly like that in a second, right after I explain everything else." She didn't care that everyone else in the room flinched, almost as if they were expecting her to be killed on the spot. "To explain why our "trunk" is like this, or why this time period is so sensitive, we first need to understand where Midoriya Izuku came from. And though we don't know his real name, we found out that he was related to you, All for One, and most likely either your grandson or great-grandson. He's from the future, around my time, actually. He's gone back to defeat you."

She brought up her hologram as she searched for a picture of him. They were everywhere, to be fair. "He's what we nicknamed the First Universal Breaker. And because of the fact that he was the first to really change and alter time in a way that never before happened, he created a sphere, a little bubble where his dramatic shifts had taken place. And, like I said, if any of us try to make any changes to what already happened in this bubble, it'll strike back tenfold." When she found a reasonable picture of him, she turned it toward the four of them. Even though All for One couldn't see, she still found it rude to not let it hover nearby.

"Interesting," All for One murmured. "And why, exactly, are you alerting me of this in the first place, past your own interests?"

The woman took in a deep breath before unfolding her arms. "Because you lost."

A tense silence followed her words. She tried not to wince as she continued.
What happened that night, in our timeline... Midoriya beat you. Maiko, your daughter, traveled back in time just before your fight. She and him both fought against you, alongside All Might..." She swallowed thickly. "And you lost."

All for One hummed. "I see." Another moment of quiet. "And so you created a distraction, one that would challenge the Society of Time, and yet would not directly interfere with our delicate sphere... and you came to warn me. So I could defeat Midoriya and... Maiko, as you said. Because you want a better society. Because you want more control."

"That is what we all want, sir," she said. She loosely threaded her fingers together. "If you could come up with a plan that could change the course of history, none of the other time travelers from the society of time would be able to change what will happen. Other than Maiko and Midoriya, the only ones who might be able to are Kimoto and the Ghost."

"Tell me about them," All for One suddenly demanded.

She blinked but nodded. "Kimoto Daizō is one of the most powerful figures and members of our society. He's who people turn to when they have a problem, even with how young he is." She pursed her lips. "We aren't sure where he came from, or what his background even is. We do believe that, while Midoriya was in U.A., he also took the role of a student, though we can't be for sure if he did or which student he was. All we know is that he had some relationship with Midoriya, the two are the same age, and he went back in time when he was seventeen to make sure that no one would attack the boy. If I remember correctly, currently Kimoto is still protecting Midoriya at this moment. While Midoriya was and is the figurehead of our society, after he left, Kimoto was the one that prevailed with his ideas and morals. When people wonder what Midoriya would have wanted, they turn to Kimoto." She hesitated. "He's talented, but I don't think even he could step into the battle if he wanted to."

All for One nodded. "And the Ghost?"

At this, the woman froze. She seemed to pale. "The Ghost..." She faltered. "We aren't really sure how he was created," she started slowly. She raised her hands out, palms up as she began to continue her story. "He used to be one of your followers, though we don't know who. All we know is that, when history was being erased after your downfall and being recreated—you had originally taken over the world without Midoriya's interference—something... happened. A shift, like a plate under the earth's crust, for example. Or maybe a Wave or an Echo that hadn't appeared until the wrong time at the wrong place..." Her fists clenched.

"All we know is that something happened to him, and he doesn't obey the laws of time. Nothing works on him like it would on others, and he never suffers from the repercussions of his time manipulation. And when he does something drastic with time, the timeline doesn't suffer, either." She was no longer smiling.

"He's called a Ghost because he fades into the background. No matter where he goes, he never really... seems to belong, and yet he does. It's almost as if he and time are one and the same. I'd like to say that he's not anything to worry about, but he cares about Kimoto, and that means Midoriya by default. I wouldn't be surprised if he showed up that night to go up against you." She ducked her head. "He is a fierce opponent to go up against. I wouldn't pick a fight with him, especially because he's known you longer... well, probably longer than you've known yourself, currently."

The doctor finally spoke up since his first interruption. "And does he have any defining features?"

The woman nodded. "Yeah. They say he always wears a green mask..."
As the woman disappeared, All for One hummed curiously to himself.

"You know, I find it odd," he mused to the doctor. "She says that Kimoto and Midoriya are two different people, but..."

He chuckled.

"It just seems so out of place, doesn't it?"

=Touya, seventeen-year-old Daizō said softly. "You're here."

"You called for help," Touya replied. Most of his face was covered with the hoodie of his dark cloak, which masked his identity. However, sitting carefully on his face was a green half-mask, which had been polished to a shine. It was a quaint design, neither extravagant or overdone. There were small simple carvings around the holes of the mask for the eyes, but otherwise, it was rather plain.

And that was why it was so beautiful.

Future Daizō dropped the dagger in his hand, and it clanged loudly as it hit the ground, before rushing over to him. The man caught him as he leapt onto him, and he wrapped his arms around the smaller boy's shoulders.

Daizō felt like crying. "There's over two hundred of them, Touya, I can't keep up. And they're trying to kill me— not me me, but my younger self, and I have no idea what to do. There's too many of them, and we can't just act like his bodyguards, that'd have too many repercussions on the timeline, and it could collapse—"

"Brat, hey," Touya said softly, "calm down. It's gonna be okay." He rubbed his hand in circles over the boy's back awkwardly. He wasn't very good with the whole comfort thing.

Daizō took in a shuddering breath before slipping out of Touya's hold. He looked exhausted, and there were bags under his eyes.

"How many times have you gone back?" Touya questioned as he looked at his bloodshot eyes. Daizō sighed.

"Eleven, so far," he admitted. "If even one person sees us, we're screwed."

Touya hummed before his lips quirked up into a smile. "Perhaps not..."

Daizō stared at him. And then his face paled. "No..."

Touya patted his shoulder comfortingly. "Don't worry about a thing, Daizō. While time might break seeing you, it's a different story for me. The perks of being the Ghost, I suppose."

He grinned.

"I am so ready to see your past self."
Translation:

Hey... it's future self here.

Hah. It's been a while since I wrote in this, huh? Even though I'm only two years older than the self I'm protecting...

Look, I know that going back in time to protect my past self was dangerous. But I had to do it. Granted, continuing a time loop was... not the most effective decision in the world. But it's not like I had a choice.

Back when I was current Midoriya's age, I was protected by my future self. And my future self, when he was current Midoriya's age, was protected by my future-future self.

And when current Midoriya grows up, and when he turns seventeen, after he meets his version of Maiko, he'll go back. And he'll protect a younger version of himself, until that version can protect himself. And then current Midoriya will escape the loop and move on without looking back.

Well, that's what I plan on doing. The second my younger version can protect himself, I'm out of here. And I'm pretty sure that every other version of us can agree with that.

It's been done for... who knows how many loops. It's integrated into this time period. If I didn't go back, then what would happen to the timeline?

This is the only way to keep it the same.

This is the only way to make sure that everything goes right.

And yet... it's not just my younger self that has to do everything perfectly. It's me too. Everyone knows that it's dangerous, highly so, to mess with this time period. It's too fragile. If I mess one thing up, who knows what'll happen.

I don't even know for sure how smoothly it's gone so far. I'm not even sure if this attack has happened in other loops. Maybe it hasn't. Maybe it has. But it's dangerous, and so I guess it really doesn't matter, huh? I have to get rid of it either way.

I'll be honest with you. When the time comes that my younger self has to fight All for One, I won't be able to step in. People overestimate how powerful I really am. Maybe Ghost might be able to, but that's a different story.

But here's the basics.

When Maiko and I get Erased, we come back. It's as simple as that. That's how this loop even exists. But if this attack really changes anything...

That might not happen. And then what?

Well, I'll disappear too. And so will Maiko. And because of that, there's no loop. There's no "current Midoriya" to go protect a younger version of himself.

And if that happens... Our timeline's gone. It breaks. It snaps.
And honestly, people, when you put it into perspective, here's how it is: If current Midoriya dies... everyone dies.

And here I was, thinking exams were stressful. Think about it—all life ceases to exist if you can’t stay alive.

Thanks, universe, and all my past selves who thought that creating a loop was a brilliant idea. Thanks a lot. I’m really feeling that pressure right now.

(So why am I writing this at the moment? Well... call it an old habit that refuses to die.)

 McCoy

Translation:

I've been... putting this off, for a while now.

I don't really like thinking about this, much. But it's fact, and I suppose it just might make everyone's lives easier if I explained this.

The reason why I'm leaving these books behind...

Let's just... put this into perspective, yeah?

I'm Kimoto Daizō. I'm the grandson of All for One. And that's fine, really. I got over that a long time ago. (I think I did, anyway.)

If... If I defeat All for One, then he won't take over the world. He'd probably either be dead or stuck in a prison cell.

And that's great. Except, he won't fall in love with my grandmother. And he won't have children. And those children won't have children.

And I simply won't be born.

We call this Erasure. You simply... cease to exist.

Nedzu? You'll... you'll tell them, if I don't get the chance, won't you? You'll tell them that I really did care for them?

Because I do. I love every single one of them.

I... god, Nedzu. I don't want to die. I really, really don't want to die.

I thought I could handle it, you know? I've been preparing myself for years, but now that I've gotten to know them...

God, how am I supposed to tell Yaochan? How am I supposed to tell Kayama, or Aika and Hiroji, or Aizawa and All Might?

Oh shit, how am I supposed to tell Juni?

 McCoy
She was lightheaded, and she felt like any second she would pass out, and her body trembled as she lost more and more blood.

But that didn't matter. It never did. And she placed her cheek against the top of Daizō's head, let a small tear escape her eye, and smiled.

"You little, little fool," she whispered. And she felt Daizō hiccup, and then the pain struck. Eyes closing, she heard Daizō shriek in pain. Not physical pain, perhaps, but the ones filled in sadness.

And then, she felt a sudden twisting in her stomach, a fierce one, and then her arms felt so, so empty. He did it.

She hit the floor, alone, bloodied, and cold.

Maiko sighed deeply as she stared out at the ocean surrounding her. Her back and stomach still stung in pang. Her hands felt empty without her Chain Conjuring. But she had given it away, to Daizō, just before he went away.

And he was long, long gone now.

She heard the soft sounds of the sand being pushed on in even strokes. Footsteps, probably. Maiko didn't turn to look as she took in the deep breaths of the salty air. Waves from the calm sea crashed gently against the wet sand as the sun began to rise, its soft rays covered just lightly by clouds. There was a breeze too, one that made the hair on Maiko's arms rise. It was chilly, and it gave her goosebumps.

"Maiko."

She shuddered as a pocket of cold air washed over her. The waves rolled up to her toes. She glanced back to see a man with coppery-orange eyes and windswept hair.

"Hey," she called.

Daizō's father raised a hand in return. He walked up to her so they were standing, side by side. They watched the sun continue to rise.

Behind them, Daizō's parents' house stood. It was a small cottage, just barely enough room for three adults and a child.

Maiko sighed again as she looked over to Daizō's father. "How's she doing?"

The man shrugged. "Do you mean my wife or my daughter?"

Maiko clicked her tongue. "I don't think I have to specify."

Daizō's father let out a huff of laughter. "You really don't like my daughter, do you?"

"I don't hate her," Maiko said. "I just find it despicable that you and your wife abandoned your child, burned them, and then decided to have a new one."

"You make it sound like she's disposable."

Maiko rolled her eyes. "Well, you treated Daizō like he was, so I think that's fair. And like hell he knows he has a sister. What the hell's her name again?"
"Nana."

Maiko raised an eyebrow. "Isn't she one of those One for All users or some shit?"

Daizō's father snorted and shook his head. "I swear, we've had to have had this conversation at least a hundred times."

"And yet I get surprised every time," Maiko replied dryly. "You're not really One for All "hero" material."

Daizō's father sighed. "No, I guess I'm not." He pressed his toes deep into the sand. "The only reason I even got One for All was because my family was desperate to pass it on."

Maiko tutted. "Well, I have to thank you for your memory manipulation quirk," she admitted as she stared up at the sun. "Came in handy."

"What for?"

Maiko shrugged. "See, Daizō might be easy to manipulate..." Her eyes softened. "But he's a damn smart kid. And he managed to figure out what would happen to him when he defeated All for One."

"And that was?" he prompted.

Maiko sighed. "Well, All for One wouldn't take over the world. He wouldn't fall in love. He wouldn't have children." She hesitated. "And those children wouldn't have his grandchildren."

There was a moment of silence. The waves crashed heavily, and the water reached Maiko's ankles. Maiko pulled her cardigan tighter around herself.

"So he'd cease to exist."

Maiko made a sound of confirmation. "So he would." She stretched her back, ignoring the pain that shot through her. She didn't need the man beside her, or his hospitality, or his fake smiles. She had herself, her quirks, her Second Chance, which is what revived her in the first place...

She had her time travel quirk, too. Got it from Seiya's cousin, which was a weaker version of the same thing. The only difference was that the body went back instead of the mind, which meant she couldn't use it but in special cases unless she wanted to meet herself.

Daizō hadn't been lying when he said that she had been planning this from the very start, and she would see it to its end.

She turned her back to Daizō's father and began walking along the side of the beach.

"There's a reason he has to be erased, Hayata," she called over her shoulder. "You may not see that reason yet, but it's there."

And the sun's rays hit the water. And Kimoto Hayata squinted his eyes as the bright light hit his face. His eyes watered.

When the clouds covered part of the sun again, she was gone. Her footsteps in the sand would be washed away by the waves of time.

She had gone to see Daizō again.

=====
Seventeen-year-old Daizō felt his stomach squeeze painfully. He glanced over to Touya, who looked barely winded after their small fight, and then his version of Maiko, who looked confused.

"Did someone just go back in time again?" he asked frantically.

Maiko blinked. And then she blinked again. And then her eyes brightened, and her mouth went into a small "o" shape.

She turned to the both of them, giddy with excitement.

"My past self- I just went back into time!"

=====

Midoriya's stomach had been bothering him for almost half an hour now. And now another pang went through him. In the back of his mind, he registered that yet another universal string had been broken.

Part of him was panicking.

Another part of him was pretending that nothing happened.

(He felt faint fingers brush against the back of his neck. Suddenly, all memories of hundreds of pangs in his gut faded and warped, until he was convinced he was merely having a stomach ache.

Unbeknownst to him, those fingers belonged to Maiko. Time travel police force Maiko, not the one that had just gone back. And she sighed in relief when she saw all the panic ease from his eyes and posture.

"All clear," she whispered into her comm.)

=====  

There was a man with gentle features sitting on a bench. Beside him sat Midoriya. The two watched the dark red and brown leaves whip past the empty streets. They were in Midoriya's "dream" again. Midoriya supposed he should have guessed it, seeing how he was knocked unconscious while emotional after Todoroki sent that wall of flames at him.

"So," the man started, "I'm assuming your fight with Todoroki went well?"

Midoriya shrugged. "It went as well as it possibly could have." He sighed as he ran a hand over his face. "I just got knocked out, though. I'll probably have to wake up again to see if my words actually meant anything to him."

The man shot him a gentle smile as he patted his shoulder. "You did fine, I assure you." There was a moment that neither spoke as the awkwardness settled back in. It wasn't an uncommon thing, the two of them having not much to speak about. He leaned back into the bench, his smile fading away from his face. He looked away from Midoriya, eyeing his clasped hands.

"Is it one of those days?" Midoriya asked quietly. The man exhaled sharply through his nose, though it was gentler than usual.

"Yeah," he agreed offhandedly. "One of those days."

Midoriya frowned. He didn't really have anything to say as the man turned solemn. There were days were he was brighter and happy, but more often than not he was serious and quiet. Usually, on
those days, they wouldn't exchange any words, instead watching the world pass by.

"Would you change anything?" Midoriya blurted out. "If you could go back, I mean. Would you be harsher on All for One when he started showing the signs?"

The man glanced toward him before looking away. His eyes turned somber. "That's a good question." He was silent for a while. After a few minutes, Midoriya was sure he wouldn't answer at all, the silence stretching further and further. But, finally, the man spoke. "I should probably say yes, shouldn't I?"

Midoriya remained quiet. No matter how much he wanted to respond, it would be best if the man could sort out his thoughts first.

"I mean," he continued, "he did awful things to me. To a lot of other people. He caused so much pain." He sighed as he turned his head away from Midoriya, so that the boy couldn't see his face. "But..." His voice cracked. "I can't bring myself to want to change it, you know? Even with all the pain and suffering I've caused, I wouldn't..." He chuckled shortly, his laugh pathetic and weak at best.

"Even if I could go back, I probably wouldn't want to," he admitted. "I wouldn't change anything. Not for the world." His shoulders sagged. "He may have hurt me, but..."

He trailed off. It took a minute for him to regain his voice.

"I... could never bring myself to hurt my brother."

Midoriya blinked the memory away as he recognized the gangling form sitting on the bench right outside Recovery Girl's office.

"Yagi?" he blurted out, and the man glanced up toward him. He broke out into a smile.

"Ah, Young Midoriya! What a pleasure to see you again." He patted the spot beside him. Midoriya felt a wave of deja vu overcome him... again. "Perhaps you'd like to sit down?"

After a moment of hesitation, he nodded. It felt a little odd, to be honest. Once again, he had been injured, and once again, Yagi was opening his arms in kindness. He was careful as he sat beside the male, though he was closer to him than the last time. There wasn't enough bench to put two feet of space between the two. "Is the view in the teacher's box good?" he asked quietly after a moment of silence.

Yagi hummed. "It's great. We get a wonderful view of you guys. Speaking of which—" He glanced toward the boy. "—you really ought to be more careful. That battle with young Todoroki really scared all of us."

Midoriya laughed sheepishly. "Sorry about that. I had..." He hesitated. "A few things to accomplish, then."

Yagi's eyes seemed to fill with a certain amount of curiosity. "I see." He cleared his throat. "Well, despite that, you really should be aware of your health. During the clean up period after, Present Mic was in a panic, and Midnight was about to pull her hair out from worry. You really shouldn't worry your guardian so much."

Midoriya suddenly paled. "She... worried?" He pressed his palms against either side of his face. "Oh no. I didn't- I mean- oh my god, I'm going to have to apologize to her later."
Yagi seemed a little surprised by his reaction, though his lips quirked upward into a smile. "Yes, well, make sure to include your homeroom teacher in that apology. While he would never admit it, he was worried about your well being as well."

Midoriya's eyes widened further. "Aizawa-sensei? He was worried too? But- I don't- huh?"

Yagi laughed. "The look on your face is priceless."

"You're not helping me at all."

"No," Yagi agreed, "I suppose I'm not."

Silence overcame them once again. Midoriya glanced down at his hands, trying to ignore the fact that they were sweating. He swallowed thickly as he tried to get past the lump in his throat, the air around them suddenly turning serious again. "May... may we talk about something, please?"

Yagi tilted his head to the side. "But of course. Is something bothering you?"

Midoriya nodded. "Two things, actually." He pressed his fingers into the back of his hand. "Your quirk... One for All." Yagi flinched. "You're looking for a successor, aren't you?"

Yagi was silent for a moment. "I'm going to assume that answering your questions first will be easier than asking you questions."

"Perhaps," Midoriya admitted.

Yagi opened his mouth to say something, but he paused as he turned to cough into his hand. After a few seconds, he turned back toward Midoriya. (The boy tried to ignore the way his fist was covered with blood.) "That is true. Why, are you asking for it?"

Midoriya felt his chest constrict with fear at the thought of One for All being passed down to him. The expectation that would come with it, the responsibility of taking the title and the secret, the power that would come with it...

*And to be the next symbol of peace. To be the next number one hero.*

Midoriya felt nauseous. "No," he blurted out, feeling his skin crawl, his head ache. "No, I... No. Definitely not."

Yagi raised a brow at his reaction, surprise flashing across his face. "I never thought the day would come when someone would say no to that question, even if I wasn't planning on giving it to them."

Midoriya grasped his pants. His fingers stung, and a low thrum of pain hung under his skin. "Well, you've never asked me before," he forced out.

Yagi was quiet. "You didn't hesitate."

"I don't need to," Midoriya responded. "I didn't ask because I wanted it. I asked because I was wondering if you needed help finding someone." He tried to calm the hard beating of his heart. "A successor, I mean."

Yagi frowned. "That's not your decision to make."

"And you're running out of time," Midoriya reminded. "Not that you have to take any of my suggestions. But I feel as if you need a few. You don't seem like you're going to make any decisions any time soon."
"There it was. The nail on the head. Yagi flinched, almost as if the statement had been burned into him—or as if someone had been repeating that to him over and over again. Midoriya frowned.

"If you already know, why are you procrastinating so much?" he asked curiously. Did the man just not find someone he liked? Or did he not want to give One for All up? Yagi had had it for a very long time. It wouldn't be surprising if the man was a little unwilling to pass it on. He did, after all, pride himself in being the number one hero for a long period of time.

Yagi coughed awkwardly. "I'm not procrastinating." When Midoriya raised an eyebrow, the man's cheeks flushed as he looked away awkwardly. "Anyway, you shouldn't even know about One for All. Not to be offensive or anything, but that kind of information makes you out to be incredibly suspicious." Yagi interlaced his fingers, his expression growing solemn. "Even if you are a student and merely a teenager, people would kill for that information. And while it would be nice to trust you, it is very hard to bring myself to do it. Hero-in-training or not, you're holding onto information that I've only revealed to enough people I can count on one hand."

Midoriya glanced toward him. He felt his stomach clench uncomfortably as he tried to find an answer for him.

_When you're stressed, you see a flash forward of the future. When you're emotional, you get warped into the past._

Midoriya latched onto that thought. And then he took in a deep breath and exhaled shakily. He ran a hand through his hair. "There's... something I haven't really told anyone," he admitted. "I'm not sure if it's a weird part of my quirk, or if it's a mutation or something..." He tried not to feel bad about the lie that was just about to leave his mouth. "But if I go to sleep when I'm super emotional or stressed, my dreams get warped."

Yagi blinked. "Okay. And this explains that, how?"

Midoriya licked his lips. His throat suddenly felt dry. "Sometimes, I get... transported, almost, into the past. My mind only, though." He frowned as he looked away. "Usually, I can't interact with anything. But there's a couple people that have died in that time period, or around it, and they sort of... wander. I can speak with them, and sometimes interact with them."

Yagi's pallor had gone ashy white. "That's an incredible power."

"It's exactly why I don't say anything about it," Midoriya said as he tapped his fingers together. "Just like how you don't say about One for All." Midoriya cleared his throat. "I managed to figure your quirk out because of a certain person I keep on finding when I go back. He knows about your quirk, and so he's mentioned it to me a couple times."

Yagi raised an eyebrow. "Who?"

Midoriya paused. He thought about the older man with the gentle expression and kind eyes. The one that he talked to when he watched the Shining Baby cry, the one that sat with him on the bench as they watched the leaves whisk by.

The one who suggested to him that he let All Might take care of All for One.

Yeah. He knew exactly who he was.

"It's the first user of One for All," Midoriya finally said.

Yagi spluttered in surprise before he forced himself into a coughing fit. "The first user?" he asked.
"All for One's brother?"

Midoriya nodded sagely. "Yes," he echoed, "his brother." He sighed as he gained a far-away look in his eyes. "He talks a lot about him, you know. It's why I know so much about it."

Yagi wiped the corner of his mouth. "But that doesn't explain how you know about my injury. The first user couldn't have possibly known about it."

Midoriya shrugged. "I wouldn't be so sure. It seems like the people who I can interact with know more about the world past their time of living." He sighed. "Heck, the guy even said that death made him more experienced." He hummed curiously. "Perhaps he knows what happens to all the future One for All users..."

Yagi flinched at that. "I should hope not," he said. "Not after..." He didn't finish his statement. There was no need to. He quickly averted from the conversation before continuing to the next. "Well, I appreciate your offer, and for confiding in me. And make sure to be careful with that kind of power..." He winced. "Who knows what people would do with that information."

"I will be," Midoriya promised.

Yagi nodded. "All right then. Now, before I let you go to cheer on your friends—" He waved towards the television hanging in the corner of the room, displaying the current happenings of the festival. "—you said that there were two things you wished to talk about?"

Midoriya blinked. "Oh," he said. "Yeah. Uhm." He pulled the neck of his jacket away from his neck, letting cool air wash over his skin. "I was just wondering something."

"Fire away," Yagi responded immediately.

Midoriya bit his lower lip. "Kayama told me that dorms will be finished after the Sports Festival is over. If Todoroki is allowed to live there..." He hesitated. "Will Endeavor be allowed to enter whenever he wants? Since he's the number two hero, I mean."

Yagi stared at him. A wave of different emotions crossed his face. "I... don't know," he admitted. "I can ask Nedzu, though."

"Actually," Midoriya said as he stood up on shaky feet, "I think I'll ask him myself. If you don't mind."

Yagi nodded, though he looked a little confused. "Is there a reason you're asking specifically?"

Midoriya pursed his lips and shrugged. "Perhaps."

=======

Kayama liked to believe that she was a hero who could keep up facades.

But Midoriya was going to kill her. Or maybe she'd throttle him instead. Who knew, who cared? She wanted so badly to cut the fight between Todoroki and Midoriya when things started to get dangerous, but did she? No!

Why not?

*Because she had a fricken' job to do!*

Did she still want to strangle Midoriya despite this fact?
Yes!

Don't get her wrong, she would strangle him entirely out of love. Because she cared about him sincerely.

Which was why she was on the verge of getting hives when she saw him collapse. Because yeah, they hadn't known one another for long, or that personally, either. He'd only been with her for about two weeks now. But in that time, they'd gotten matching hoodies, they played board games almost every night, they cooked together, they marathoned Disney movies...

Pretty much, they put aside their obvious ages and acted like little kids. There were times when they had pillow fights because a game of Uno had gotten too competitive.

Did she care that her image was thrown out the window? No! Why not?

Because Midoriya was a sweet child. Try and lay a hand on him, she'd dare all of you.

Was this her momma bear coming out? Maybe!? She didn't know! Usually, they all teased Aizawa because he pretended that he didn't care about his students, even though they all knew otherwise. She wasn't used to being poked and prodded and teased when she mentioned that Midoriya had the cutest laugh ever because have you heard it before?

She wasn't used to it. The closest kind of figure she got to being was like an aunt. And that was only for very certain students, ones who had certain tastes. Like having their costumes put together so that their bodies were almost on full display. Those kinds of students got close to her because they asked tips from her, like how to seduce someone, or how to get someone to lower their guard.

She had never ever gotten particularly close to people like Midoriya, conservative in all senses of the word with his turtlenecks and scarfs and jeans and socks with the cat paw designs on the bottom. Which were utterly adorable, by the way, and she searched for hours for a pair to match. And Midoriya was... Midoriya. Kind of shy, but also honest. Hovering like a shadow, like he didn't want to intrude on her too much, but also curious as a little kid in a candy shop. And sometimes she wanted to squish his freckled cheeks because goddammit kid, give her damn heart a break.

So what were the thoughts going through her head when she was watching the fight?

It was a good question.

At first, she was disappointed. She thought that Midoriya wouldn't have been unable to get out of Todoroki's humongous ice attack.

But then he got out. And she was elated. And then the fight continued.

And everything kind of blurred out from there. The most she remembered thinking was, touch him again, Todoroki, you won't see the light of day.

Holy hell. So that was why Aizawa was grinning when she firmly repeated that Midoriya would stay with her. He knew this would happen. Of course he knew. Because the exact same thing happened to him.

Why. Why, Aizawa. Why would you let her get herself into this mess. Being a parental figure was nothing but stress. How was she even supposed to live for the rest of her life like this?

As Uraraka and Bakugo were called to the next stage, a movement in one of the entryways caught her attention. She glanced over to see—
"Well," she muttered, "speak of the devil."

Midoriya was standing there, bandaged up, and looking extremely tired. There was still a slight flush to his cheeks—Recovery Girl reported to them that he was sick, and yet had tried to ignore it. Which was yet another thing to panic over relentlessly. Her nails were probably bitten to the quick at this point.

The boy's expression lit up as she noticed him. He raised a hand, which was shaking slightly, to make a sign with his fingers as he made a few swift movements. Midnight recognized it, after all, people in hero classes were required to know at least the basics of sign language. While it was a skill they learned mostly through the second and third year, some learned earlier. Like Koda, for example, who was selectively mute.

_I'm sorry for worrying you_, she roughly translated. While it wasn't word-for-word, she still gathered the basics of the message. _And I hope I can make it up to you._

Midnight smiled at him as she lightly nodded her head. Beside her waist, and hopefully without gaining any attention to herself, she made a simple gesture—_It's okay_—before turning back to the fight.

He was so sweet. She wished she could run her fingers through his hair right now. It was fluffy, and it never failed to make her happy. And he liked when she did it, too.

Which was all she wanted from him, really. To be happy.

=====

As Mt. Lady walked past the crowds, eyes peering around the crowd, she did her best to look for any suspicious activity. Kids with candy in their mouths ran past her, giggling and smiling as they called out for their parents. Booths sold all sorts of food and trinkets, racking up the cash as group upon group of people stopped by their stands.

Behind her back, in the shadow of one of the alleyways behind a booth, a man stood. He was gripping the handle of his dagger tightly as he tried to calm his racing heart. He couldn't get found, _couldn't_—not if he was going to contribute to this distraction. The best way to handle this was to remain in public eye, where they couldn't take care of him.

He breathed out shakily before he turned to step out of the shadows. However, before he could, a hand was pressed tightly over his mouth while something sharp dug into his side. Almost instantly, his entire body went numb, and he fell limp to the ground.

He gasped like a fish out of water as he tried to move his body, to no effect. As he glanced behind him, his body went cold.

A woman with blonde hair and brown eyes stood. She sighed.

"Asagiri Maiko speaking, part of the nineteenth squad of the department of time travel regulation. Another subject has been found. Moving him to the attached coordinates—please restrain him and lock him up as soon as he appears. He's a bold one."

He tried to scream as she grabbed onto his bicep, but the muscles in his mouth refused to work. And so he disappeared without a flash, without a sound.

And no one was any the wiser.
Uraraka was all nerves and very little confidence.

"Just do your best," Asui said as she brought her into a hug. "That's all we ask for. That's all any of us ask for."

But Uraraka didn't just want to do her best. She wanted to win. She wanted to stand against one of her strongest classmates and hold her ground. She wanted to beat Bakugo, to prove that she wasn't weak. That she could become a hero, and help her parents, and do what she's always set out to do since she was little—

But this was Bakugo. Bakugo.

Uraraka swallowed thickly as he stared her down. There was a sudden seriousness in his eyes. She would be lying if she said that she wasn't intimidated.

But... she didn't get it.

Because Bakugo... didn't look mad at her? Well, that was hard to say. He was mad about everything, about everyone. But this time, he didn't look pissed at her. Which didn't make sense. She was almost positive that he would be angry—after all, he attacked her with an explosion from behind, meant to take her out after she caused him to use one of his quirk chances up in the Floor Is Lava event. Midoriya was caught in the crossfire, and the two of them supported the other to get back up.

So she didn't get knocked out of the event, just like Bakugo had wanted.

Or, at least, that was what she assumed he wanted. But here he was, looking strangely... calm, in a way. Not peaceful, but calm.

So... did he really want to knock her out of the event?

"Die, you son of a—"

Uraraka blinked. Those were the words that he screamed right before aiming his explosion at them. And maybe he didn't care for the pronouns, but it seemed like he was speaking to a guy. So unless he was indirectly insulting her by calling her a boy, he was speaking to someone else.

But that would mean he was aiming for Midoriya.

Why?

Before Uraraka could say anything, Present Mic began introducing them. Uraraka ignored the sweat that was already gathering on the back of her neck and in her armpits. Oh man, she really was nervous. She swallowed thickly before putting on a brave face, her body moving instinctively into a fighting position. She knew it was sloppy, and that she was too rigid, but her muscles weren't working the way she wanted them to.

Ojiro and Midoriya made it look simple and easy, like they had practiced those movements all their lives. Though their forms were slightly different, it was the same basic principle.

Uraraka took in a deep breath as Present Mic's last words rang through the arena. And then Midnight snapped her whip down. And Uraraka exhaled, trying to make it last as long as possible.

And then she sprinted forward, her body low to the ground, hoping with all of her might.
Midoriya hated cold water. He hated taking cold showers, too. He didn't know why. Well, he did know why, but he didn't quite understand why he struggled so much with the connection. He obviously wasn't there, so he should have been fine. He should have been fine.

But no. Cold showers still never failed to get a reaction out of him. So no, he wasn't really fine.

He had a feeling he was still suffering from PTSD from that one event. The others, excluding the hand incident, he was getting a bit of a handle with. Maybe physical contact still made him squirm, but it wasn't so overwhelming like it used to be.

So he was getting better.

Well, kind of.

He still struggled with the hand thing.

And the other one.

That was the worst.

Even at USJ, before the villains attacked, the memories were fresh in his mind. He hated the sight of that huge mountain in the mountain zone, and the downpour zone with the rain and powerful winds.

All for One and Shigaraki didn't hurt him physically that often—the two merely used force at the beginning so he wouldn't try to fight back as he had previously tried (like stabbing Shigaraki in the throat that one time. Yeah, that was fun, except the man merely laughed at him and brushed it off because of that damn regeneration quirk.) But pain? No, that wasn't a common factor in Midoriya's old life. As surprising as it might be, the two were actually... relatively nice to him.

Well, define nice.

But they treated him respectfully—they asked what he was doing, what he would do throughout the day, what he was going to learn and teach himself. Mostly, if he stayed out of the way, they didn't care what he did. He often found himself reading in the library, hiding himself in one of the corners as he imagined himself somewhere far, far away.

Of course, there was training. Some of it was mental, others were physical. Some twisted his mind—in this situation, would he kill off several people in order to provide sufficient protection for the rest? Or would he risk thousands of people's lives for the sake of number?

He could tell that All for One was trying to get him into the habit of thinking like him. He had eternity, after all. Decades of brainwashing were nothing for him.

Absolutely nothing at all.

Of course, those ideas hadn't had enough time to be planted into his brain. He was only there for a year.

But in that year, two large punishments happened to him.

His left hand.

And the other one.
He hated mountains. And lightning. And thunder. And ice cold rain.

And storms.

He was petrified of storms.

=====

Shinsou had his hands buried deep into his pockets as he walked through the halls. His second match would be coming up soon, and he wanted to be prepared for it the best he could. However, there was no doubt that Shiozaki probably already knew what his quirk was. So unless he could really anger her and get her to speak that way, there wasn't a good chance of him winning.

Not that he wasn't going to try, of course. But trying did not always guarantee your success.

Shinsou learned that a long time ago.

He sighed as he turned the corner, entering a new hallway that was almost bare of all people. He froze as he noticed the three that were in a small huddle off to the side, however, speaking in lower voices.

It was Kirishima, Kaminari, and Aoyama.

He felt glued to the spot as their attentions swiveled over to him. Immediately, Kaminari's somewhat brightened face clouded over. Kirishima and Aoyama seemed to wince.

"Oh, hey Shinsou," Kirishima said, his voice strained. That was his name, right? He was the redhead with the spiked hair. "Your round is coming up soon, isn't it? I hope you do well."

Shinsou narrowed his eyes before scratching the back of his head awkwardly. "You do realize that you're cheering on the person who brainwashed you, correct?"

Kaminari frowned. "It's called he's being polite and kind," he retorted. "You should take lessons."

Sure, Shinsou thought bitterly. I'm always the one in trouble, the one hated. But when everyone else used their quirks on me as a kid, no one said anything about that, huh?

But Shinsou could understand how they were feeling. If he were in their shoes, he'd be feeling pretty angry too. But he'd spent years in resentment, in the shadow of others and on his knees just because his quirk wasn't "fair." As if he actually liked his quirk. He'd do anything to trade it in for a different one—though he would admit that it could be worse. He could have eyes that melted in their sockets once a month before slowly regrowing in the following week. (He had a classmate who had to do that. He also had to shed his fingernails.)

Shinsou exhaled sharply through his nose at the boy's comment. It was obvious the canary-blonde was upset with his results, but blaming it all on him was uncalled for.

But, even so...

Even if he wasn't there to make friends, the least he could do was not make enemies. Especially among a future (hopefully) fellow hero.

"Well," he forced out, "I'm sorry about brainwashing you. I know it's an uncomfortable experience."

He cleared his throat the second that Kaminari opened his mouth. "I'm not sorry for the entire "I'm
giving up my place in the tournament," though. You're both idiodic. You earned your spots, even if it was by what you would define as luck. You picked the right team, didn't you?" He scoffed as Kirishima and Aoyama's eyes widened. "You're not always going to be able to support your team. Sometimes, you'll even hinder them when you're weakened. But just because it happens once or twice doesn't mean you're not worth being on the team. That means you just have to work harder to make sure it doesn't happen again." He rolled his eyes as he gestured at them aimlessly. "So, as I was saying, you're idiots. I don't plan on apologizing for that. Get a grip."

And he walked right past their group and out of their sight.

Perhaps he sighed in relief. He felt better, apologizing for it, even if he called them an idiot in the process. And no, they weren't going to be friends. He didn't come to make friends. It just helped relieve some of the weight on his chest. Nothing more, nothing less. This wasn't the beginning of a friendship.

Green eyes, freckles, and scarred hands cradling a fluffy cat flashed through his mind. He shook his head, trying his best to shake the image away.

_No, they weren't friends_, Shinsou chided himself. _They weren't._

_Absolutely not._

=====

("All for One didn't invade U.A., Daizō. He didn't cause U.A.'s Judgement Day. There's a reason we sent you."

"You're the only one that matters, Daizō."

=====

Every time she got knocked down, she came back up.

She did.

Every time.

She used the smokescreen that came from his explosions to her advantage.

She did.

She made every kind of debris she could weightless.

She did.

Every time.

There were boos in the crowd toward Bakugo. Apparently, he was being too "harsh" on her. Which was blatantly rude. Harsh? Why, so he should just toy with her? So he shouldn't go all out, just as everyone else was?

Aizawa stepped in and told them off. Bakugo did, too. He said that she wasn't weak.
That made her a little prouder. But the fact still remained—she didn't want recognition. She wanted to walk away from this battle, victorious. And going onto the next round, where she would be congratulated by her friends, where she could look at her parents and give them the brightest smile she could muster.

And so she ran forward again.

And she got knocked down. Again.

And then she got back up. Again.

And again.

And again.

And again.

And again.

And again.

And—

=====

Midoriya sat outside the door, listening in as Uraraka called her parents. She was crying, and he could feel the disappointment rolling off of her in waves.

It made his chest ache. He wanted to go inside the room and hug her, because he couldn't stand seeing their class sad. It made him hurt.

But this conversation was obviously private. And he had no place here.

And so he waited.

And waited.

And waited.

And when her sobbing started to cease, and she had hung up on her call with her parents, he knocked on the door. He could hear her hiccups freeze in their tracks, and the scraping sounds of chair legs against the floor could be heard through the door. The door slowly opened a crack, and Uraraka peered through.

At seeing him, she attempted to put on a smile. Her eyes were pink, and it was obvious that she was trying to give off the impression that she hadn't been crying. "Hey, Midoriya," she said weakly. "What are you doing down here?"

Midoriya tried to think of something to say. But fancy words didn't seem to be much of his forte, seeing how word vomit was much easier to do. So, instead, he opened his arms wide. "Hugs make people feel better," he explained.

Uraraka stared at him. And then her smile cracked, and her eyes watered a bit more, and then she fell into his arms. He wheezed as she pulled him into a bone-crushing hug, but he didn't tell her to let go. She deserved this.

He felt her shoulders begin to shake underneath his fingertips as he wrapped his arms around his back carefully. He wasn't sure what to say. So, instead, he let the silence remain. He heard footsteps
behind him grow closer, pause, and then pass. He didn't give whoever it was a look, instead focusing on the girl who was starting to stop crying again.

He had no idea what to say to make her feel better. *You did a good job?* No, that was plastic and cliche and meaningless, no matter how true it was. *Your plan was amazing?* No, that was obvious. Did she even want to talk about the fight? Probably not.

So, instead, he sucked in a sharp breath and went for the least obvious answer and hoped for the best. "You can call me Izuku, if you'd like. I think Midoriya is a bit too formal, especially since we've been friends for so long."

**Shoot. That's not what he wanted to say.**

Well, at least it could distract her from her loss, right?

Uraraka stiffened in his arms before pulling back. She blinked up at him, staring at him incredulously, before bursting into laughter. "Sure," she finally said as she smiled. "I'll call you Izuku. But only if you can call me Ochako."

Midoriya felt the tips of his ears turn pink as his face flushed. He hadn't reacted like this when Yaoyorozu asked him to make a nickname for her. Maybe it was because her nickname was still based on her surname? Or maybe it was because he was younger and calling people by their first name didn't seem so special. Maybe? Maybe. Or maybe this was puberty kicking him in the gut. Probably. Perhaps. Yeah.

"I-if you want me to, I mean, I guess," he stammered. He hadn't called anyone but Aika by their first name. And Maiko. And Seiya. But those were a long time ago, back when he hadn't even hit double digits—including Aika, but she was practically his sister. Plus, it was awkward to try and call Hiroji... Hiroji, since it was Aika's last name too. But this was different.

A nice kind of different, but a different all the same.

Uraraka laughed again at his expression, and she nudged him in the side. "You look like a strawberry at the moment," she said while giggling.

Midoriya chuckled awkwardly as she spoke. Being compared to a strawberry wasn't something he was really expecting, but it could be worse. His embarrassment was worth seeing her cheer up a little bit. And maybe it wasn't the best way to distract her from the fight, and maybe he really should have attacked the heart of the problem, but Uraraka was strong. And she would get through it, tooth and nail, and would come out stronger on the other side.

And maybe he admired her for that.

=====

Shinsou was pleasantly surprised as he walked out of his second round with another win. Shiozaki was strong, though he hadn't expected her to be so quick to respond to him when he brought up the whole "assassin" thing. She had been quick to correct Present Mic when he mentioned it, and so he thought that it was his best bet to bring it back up.

So when she immediately went to fix his judgement of her, he was internally cheering. He had not expected that to work. At all.

His next round, however, would be more difficult. It was either going to be Iida or Todoroki,
depending on who won.

He wasn't sure who he was hoping to win. Todoroki was stoic and not easily swayed, but he was also instinctive and even brash in some cases when it came to his foul mouth. Even though he didn't curse like Bakugo did, who was just as bad as a sailor, he was also quick to make snarky remarks and didn't hesitate to speak his mind.

Then again, Midoriya seemed to make a mark on the boy.

*But isn't he making a mark on everyone?*

*Shut up. Midoriya did not make a mark on me.*

*Uh huh. Sure.*

*Keep your mouth shut!*

But if Iida won, the only thing that Shinsou knew how to say was something about breaking the rules. Wasn't the boy obsessive over those kinds of things? Though, to Shinsou's knowledge, the boy wasn't even class president or vice president. Which was odd. Wasn't the creation girl the president, and Midoriya vice? Or was it the other way around? He couldn't keep track, and, honestly, he didn't really care.

Okay, he cared a little bit. But not *that* much.

Shut up. He was a teenager with conflicting emotions, it was *normal* for crying out loud.

The students who made up General Education were all incredibly proud of him. They puffed up their chests and gave him a high five whenever he passed by them. It was both simultaneously annoying but also gratifying, that he had a whole department on his side that was proud of him. The only thing that slightly peeved him was the fact that some of them acted like they earned something as well because of his efforts, even though they were knocked out in the first round. Usually, it was something Shinsou could ignore, but those same people also glared at him not but a few days prior because of his quirk.

Which was annoying. They only addressed him in a friendly manner because of his accomplishments, and because it looked good on them. But Shinsou was expecting this, so he merely bore through it without looking back. Aizawa had also warned him about it, so it wasn't surprising in any way.

Did it hurt him slightly, though? Maybe. Just a little bit.

Shinsou sighed as he looked down at the two boys who were making their way onto the field. He had a feeling, though, that things would go back to normal after the Sports Festival was over.

He just hoped that he made a good enough impression to make a difference. He wasn't planning on being stuck in General Education for the rest of his time at U.A. Even if he had to work himself into the ground, he was going to get into the heroics classes.

Even if it was the last thing he'd do.

===== Iida lost.
Midoriya and Uraraka were currently comforting him. Iida had wanted to do his best, to make his brother and parents proud—after all, Tensei had gotten into the final round in the Sports Festival. He wanted to do his best as well, but his classmates were tough. Todoroki was no exception, and he won the battle with a sort of grace that Iida lacked.

"It's fine, though," he reassured the two as he chopped his hands through the air. "I'll just have to do better next year!"

Midoriya smiled up at him, the curve of his lips soft and gentle. He had this relaxed emotion in his eyes, and his posture was sloped and comfortable. Iida hadn't seen him this unwound since before the attack on USJ, when he, Iida, Yaoyorozu, Uraraka, Sero, and Kirishima had gone out on their shopping trip.

Uraraka sent Iida another blinding smile. "I think I'm going to go back up," she said as she motioned to the ceiling above her. The three of them were hanging out in the hallways where the contestants were remaining. "Jirou's up against Tokoyami next, and I want to cheer her on."

Iida nodded as he readjusted his glasses. "I will join you as soon as I can!"

Midoriya hesitated. "I'll come up in a minute, Ura—" His cheeks flushed. "—Ochako."

Uraraka giggled. "Sure thing, Izuku!" She twisted on her heel and skipped down the hall until she was out of sight.

Iida coughed awkwardly into his fist. "I wasn't aware you two had gotten onto a first-name basis."

Midoriya squinted up at him. "It's... a recent development."

"When you were trying to make her feel better?" Iida attempted.

Midoriya raised an eyebrow. "What are you, a Seer?" He sighed and shook his head. "But yes, that's exactly it."

Iida smiled down at him. "I try to understand my fellow classmates to the best of my ability. It seemed like the only logical explanation." He winced as his thigh suddenly cramped, sending a jolt of pain up his leg. He looked around for a place to sit, seeing a simple bench not but two feet away. Ignoring Midoriya's questioning look, he sat himself down on the cool surface. The smaller boy plopped himself beside him.

"Legs hurting?" Midoriya questioned.

Iida laughed. "Who's the Seer now, huh?"

The freckled teen snorted. "I feel you. Todoroki wasn't very nice to my legs either."

"You collapsed."

"And?" Midoriya shrugged. "It still hurt my thighs."

Iida sighed. "You are going to give our class a heart attack, I swear," he muttered. "But we are not in the same boat, Midoriya. You and Todoroki had a full-on war out there. Everything else pales in comparison."

Midoriya knocked his shoulder with Iida's—or, he tried to, but Midoriya was much shorter than Iida was, and so he instead hit the side of his bicep. "Excuse me, don't underplay your battle. You put up
a good fight. And your Recipro Burst is incredible. If it weren't for the fact that Todoroki clogged up your engines with his ice, I'm sure you would have won." He huffed. "Instead of underestimating yourself, you should be taking what you did right from that battle and propelling yourself forward. You did great."

Iida was quiet for a moment before he smiled. "Of course, you're right! I'll definitely—"

He was abruptly interrupted as his phone rang in his pocket. Midoriya looked confused, and Iida could share his reaction. *Who would be calling me at a time like this?*

Without thinking, Iida whipped his phone out to see that his mother was calling him. Immediately, he swiped his thumb across the screen and held it up to his ear. "Mom, what's going on?"

He listened.

And then he paled.

And then he stared at the wall.

"Iida?" There was a hand on his arm. "Iida, is something the matter?" Midoriya's voice was soft and gentle and careful, and his eyes were full of worry.

The call beeped as his mother ended the call. He stared at his phone for a second before he stood up, the pain in his legs long forgotten.

"I'm sorry," he said coldly, "I have to go." He stuffed his phone in his pocket and then rushed down the hall.

He felt Midoriya's eyes burning into his back.

=====

Tokoyami won. Uraraka patted Jirou's back comfortably.

"Oh, Midoriya!" she called when she noticed him coming up. "What took you so long? I thought you guys were only going to take a minute." She frowned as she looked around. "Wait, where's Iida?"

It was then that she saw the concerned look plastered on Midoriya's face. "I don't know," he admitted as he sat beside her. "He was talking with me, and then his mom called him, but..." He shook his head. "I don't know."

Uraraka felt dread bubble up in her gut.

=====

Midoriya was right.

Yaoyorozu really did reign hellfire on Bakugo.
It still wasn't enough.

===== Shinsou could take third place, he decided. Even if it wasn't the best, he really wasn't expecting anything more. Not when he was up against the son of the number two hero himself.

He felt awe overcome him as All Might took to the stage. He said a few words to Tokoyami, who shared his place with him. And then he turned to him, placed a metal around his neck, and then shot him a thumbs up.

"You did well, Young Shinsou," he praised. "But always remember that you're more than your quirk. And that goes for everyone else, too."

Shinsou stored that knowledge in a place where he would never forget it. He chewed on it throughout the rest of the event. And he chewed hard and long.

And he was right, he decided. Despite the fact that people often represented a sort of personality that corresponded to their quirks, they were much more than that. And so, when he looked up into the crowds and saw Kaminari staring down at him, he sent him a peace sign. And the boy's eyebrows shot way up, but he reciprocated the gesture. Even though Shinsou could barely see it since the blonde was so far away, it was good enough for him.

And that was what it was. A peace. An agreement between the two. A realization.

At second podium, Todoroki stood. He still had that conflicted look in his eye, but it was clearer than Shinsou had ever seen it before. Midoriya really did a number on him, Shinsou supposed. It was certainly showing.

And on top—at number one—was none other than Bakugo, who delivered on his promise, even though he was chained to a pole sticking upward from the podium.

Taking All Might's words into account, that meant that there was more than Bakugo than an explosive personality. There was more there than anger and frustration and hatred.

Shinsou couldn't see it, no matter how hard he looked.

Perhaps Bakugo was really good at hiding it.

===== The doctor was fiddling the the tubes that circled the body of All for One. His fingers were agile and precise, though only gentle when needed. He had no time to waste, even if he made sure he did everything perfect under All for One. He was careful like that.

After a moment of contemplation, he finally paused in his working to glance at All for One's face. His breathing was even, though he seemed to pause for an extra second before inhaling again, which made the doctor's nerves spike.

"You want something?" All for One's voice spoke, and the doctor jumped. It was gravely and low, caused by a lack of use.
"Just thinking," the doctor responded. After a moment of silence when he got back to triple-checking his work, he spoke up once more. "It seems to me like you're wondering about something."

All for One hummed. "So you say."

The doctor didn't push the man any more. Not if he still wanted all his fingers intact. While he was no doubt curious, work came first, and the last thing he wanted to was make All for One angry.

But it seemed as if his gentle prodding did the trick. Before long, All for One's voice rumbled back into action.

"Kimoto Daizō." He paused. "Midoriya Izuku. His quirk is Recipience. He can accept any quirk with the original owner's permission. He can also return it to the original owner. And what's so odd about that?"

The doctor paused. He wracked his brain, but nothing came to mind. "I'm afraid I can't say."

All for One chuckled. "Oh, come on, doctor," he said, amused. "You specialize in the study of quirks. Surely you understand the rule of quirk evolution."

The doctor pursed his lips, slightly annoyed that he was being talked down. Not that he would ever voice that, because that would mean the end of him. So, by memory and thousands of times of recital before he met All for One, he said, "Of course. Quirks evolve over time to become more powerful than their predecessors. Unless someone's quirk cancels itself out, like Todoroki Natsu's had, they'll usually always be more advanced."

It took a second to register what came out of his mouth. And when he did, his fingers paused over the tube, freezing in its place.

All for One chuckled again. "So you finally understand," he said.

"If Midoriya Izuku is my grandson, why is his quirk worse in every way than mine?"

=====

Midoriya was washing his hands at the sink. All the students were making last-minute trips to the bathroom before they got onto the buses back to the school. A few students were only a couple minutes away from home by subway, so those were allowed to go back that way. But most were heading back toward U.A., where they would be picked up by parents or find some other kind of transportation home.

Midoriya was pretty early compared to the rest of the students. In fact, they weren't going to leave for another half hour, so he had time. While some were waiting to use the bathrooms last, he knew that that would be his doom as he ended up being crammed up against two boys while using the urinal.

The only reaction that came to mind was haha, no thanks.

He sighed as he reached for the paper towels, rubbing them against the wet skin of his hands. We watched in mild fascination as the paper soaked up the water in faint patterns.

The small things in life, yeah?

He was just about to throw the wet towels away when a voice spoke up behind him. It made him flinch, not realizing that anyone else was in the bathroom with him.
"You're Midoriya, aren't you?"

He froze. And then, slowly, he twisted his neck to see a man with broad shoulders standing there. He was grinning, his silver teeth gleaming in the light.

"This is just perfect." He chuckled lowly as he reached for something in his belt. "I was hoping I'd get to corner you."

Midoriya felt panic bubble in his gut. What the hell? What does this guy even want?

Instinctively, he took a few steps backward. He felt the side of his hip bump into the sink, and he stumbled. His arms flailed as he caught himself on the side of the offending basin. The ceramic felt cold against his fingertips. Breath caught in his throat, he tried to look for anything to defend himself.

The man lumbered closer to him, grin widening. "This'll be good," he muttered to himself as he flicked open the device in his hand, the one that had been strapped to his belt. It was a switchblade, and it glinted in the dingy overhead lights.

Okay, Midoriya fumbled. I can do this. I can defend myself. I just... I just need something metal... His eyes glued onto the faucet for the sink. That. I can use that to get away for just long enough—!

The tension was suddenly broken when the door creaked open. Midoriya flinched before whipping around.

There was... someone there. Someone with a thick black coat and a hood that covered his entire face. He was more slender than the guy with the switchblade, and he oozed a sort of confidence that the other didn't. It was the kind of relaxed self-assurance that the muscled man lacked—instead, he had a more... violent assertiveness.

Midoriya heard the man behind him suck his teeth as the door closed behind the new arrival. Whether or not it was from fear or frustration was debatable.

"Huh," the cloaked figure said. "And here I was, expecting that you guys actually had a few brain cells."

Midoriya blinked. He regretted it a second later when he felt a powerful rush of air run past him. He twisted back around with wide eyes to see that the man with the switchblade was on the ground, coughing with an arm held over his stomach. He was wheezing for breath as the other man stood high above him.

"Honestly, you really should have done better." He clicked his tongue. "Izuku over here wouldn't have had any problem taking you out."

Midoriya had no idea what was going on. What was going on? He was incredibly lost and didn't have a single idea what to say or do. And why was this weird person calling him by his first name?

Without warning, the cloaked man pressed a hand against the other's chest. And, just like that, the man was gone, disappearing without a trace. Midoriya could feel his breath rattling in his throat, struggling to come out.

"What the hell," he blurted out. It seemed to finally gain the attention of the man in the dark cloak, and he turned around slowly.
Midoriya felt his mouth grow dry as he saw the mask resting on his face. All thoughts seemed to cease, and he could only cough out a few weak syllables. His heart seized, because really, what was he supposed to say? His stomach dropped low, low, low, burrowing deep into the ground. When he could finally form a single word, his voice came out as a breathless whisper—almost indistinguishable among the pounding of hundreds of footsteps on the floors around them, in the muffled laughter and screams of happiness.

"Dabi?"

=====

Shigaraki stared at the picture in his hand. In it was the face of one of the U.A. brats. He recycled his sensei's words in his head, again and again.

"Midoriya Izuku. In your next attack, I want him. Dead or alive is up to you."

He huffed before glancing over to the boy sitting at the counter. His shoulders were tense, and he was staring at the counter with a combination of fear and dread in his eyes. But there was a bit of rebelliousness in there too, hidden just beneath the surface.

Of course. Shigaraki should have known better than to pick one of the hero class brats.

"Hey," he started, rubbing the tips of his fingers against his neck, "I think you're lying to me, eh?"
He waved the picture closer to the boy's face. He flinched. "So I'm only going to ask you one more time. What do you know about Midoriya?"

The boy winced. "I don't know," he said nervously.

Shigaraki ground his teeth together. "Of course not," he said softly. And then he stood up from his chair, letting the legs scrape against the floor before he started to make his way out of the room. The boy's eyes widened in fear, and he leapt up from his own chair.

"Wait!" he cried. Shigaraki paused as he glanced at the boy. His hand, which was outstretched toward him, was trembling. "Wait," he repeated in a trembling voice. "I'll- I'll tell you. But please, don't- don't hurt my family." His voice was quiet at the very end, no more than a whisper.

Shigaraki hummed as if he was contemplating before making his way back toward his seat. He stared the boy down as he sat down. Sliding a pad of paper and a pen toward him, he growled. "Write. Now."

The boy's eyes watered as he gulped. There were tears in his eyes, and he looked incredibly regretful and relieved at the same time. Shigaraki watched him like a hawk as he adjusted his hold on the black length.

And then, with a shaking hand, he began to slide the tip of the pen across the surface of the paper.

Chapter End Notes

*pops a pile of pills into mouth* I've been ignoring Bakugo's arc for who knows how long, but here we go. Please lord have mercy on me for what I'm about to write. I'm going to need Jesus on my side for this.

But we're finally getting to the last bits of new branches of non-canon information. Most of everything from now on will be building off of what you guys already know, rather than introducing a whole new slew of things. Which, thank fricken god. I don't know how much more this story can handle, jeez. Of course, I still have to introduce a few more things, but only, like, one thing is actually major, so... yay?
Hey, so I'm just... gonna need you guys to be patient with me. I'm very... meh at the moment, and so I honestly really don't feel good. At all. I've kinda been ignoring it, but I may need a few days to just... pay attention to me, if that makes sense. And I'm sorry if this is short as hell, or just flat-out awful, I just wanted to give you a present.

Traitor Theory Count:

Shinsou: III
Kaminari: IIII
Sero: IIII
Mineta: II
Iida: I
Bakugo: I

You know you've done good when no one can decide on a maximum of three people. Hell, there's six people now and I haven't even given others their screentime lolllll.
Can't wait to add more characters to the mix and fuck you guys up.

Anyway, for a recap of last chapter's mess, all you need to know is this:
- there is a loop going on with daizo and maiko two years in the future
- time traveler society
- breaking universal strings create echoes, echoes collide create waves, waves do bad things to timeline
- current time period is delicate and that's why time travelers have to be careful

Midoriya felt breathless as he stared at the scarred form in front of him. He didn't know what to say. Dabi? Here? How—?

"You're thinking too hard," the man said as he sidled up closer to him. "I can hear it from here."

Midoriya didn't know what to say. He didn't know how to react. "H-how... how is it possible that you're..." He gestured aimlessly at the place around him.

Dabi sighed as he rubbed the back of his head. "See, you know how you changed the future?"


Dabi snorted. "Well, crap hit the fan, and something went wrong when the future was being erased and rewritten. Think of it as a glitch. I wasn't erased properly, so now I'm here." He pressed the end of his index finger against Midoriya's forehead. "So, instead of me getting an upgrade, I've been basically transformed to be one with time. Call me a god if you want, but all my friends call me Ghost."

"Ghost," Midoriya echoed. "And you're here... why?" he asked shakily. He still couldn't
comprehend that this figure was back into his life.

"People are trying to kill you," Dabi said simply.

Midoriya waited for any kind of addition to his response, but when nothing came, he nodded his head dumbly. "Okay," he said, his voice high pitched. "That... makes sense. Totally." He cleared his throat as he pointed toward the doorway. "I'm just... gonna leave now, Dabi. I guess. Thank you for saving me?" He started to make his way to the door, arm at a ninety degree angle backward to make sure he didn't run into the wall as he continued looking at Dabi. "Yeah, thanks for saving me. I think. Not really sure how I actually feel at the moment, so... bye?"

"Hey, wait a minute," Dabi called.

Midoriya flinched and froze as the man came closer to him. He was having a bit of trouble comprehending everything that was happening at the moment. First there was a random stranger who knew his name and wanted to kill him, and then there was Dabi randomly appearing, and then there was his random explanation of glitches or whatever...

He was really struggling to keep up.

Midoriya tried not to shiver in fear when Dabi came really close to him. And then, without warning, the taller man pulled him close to his chest and wrapped his arms around him.

It felt... warm. And safe. Dabi was emitting a lot more heat than the normal body would, and it eased his muscles like butter. He had that faint smoky smell that always clung to him, but it was different than usual—before, Dabi also had smelled of a faint caramel mixture. Probably the shampoo that he was required to use. But now, instead, he smelled of pine and dew, if that was possible.

It was a little weird too. Dabi wasn't a huggy person, but when he did it before, Midoriya had only reached his lower chest. Now, his forehead made it to the curve of his shoulder.

"I want you to remember this, Daizō," he said quietly. "You may be tasked with saving Class 1-A, but that doesn't mean you can't reach out for help, too." He released the hug, which seemed too soon, and looked him in the eye. "It's okay to put you first. Your life means just as much as everyone else's." His eyes softened fractionally as he flicked his forehead. Midoriya flinched. "And you don't have to wear those silly contacts either. I like your eye color."

Midoriya stared at him. He opened his mouth to ask something, but he blinked and Dabi was gone.

Midoriya held a hand up to his chest as he looked away, pondering over what he had said.

He... didn't really have any idea what to think about it.

Sighing, he turned away and pulled the door open. He squinted at the overhead lights in the hallway, which had to be eight times more bright than the ones in the bathroom. Ignoring the sweat that trickled down his neck, he put on a face of peacefulness, ignoring the fact that he just met one of his old... acquaintances from eight hundred years into the future.

His brain was starting to really hurt.

===== 

Todoroki sighed as their class all settled down into their respective seats on the bus. Well, most of their class. There were a few of his classmates that had gone home early, though at first glance, Todoroki couldn't tell who.
Todoroki was sitting beside Midoriya, who looked... like he was struggling to comprehend the world. He was half tempted to ask him why, but he decided that he would be better off leaving him to figure it out for himself. If Midoriya was confused, he didn't want to know what it was. It'd probably blow his brains out.

Asui sat on Midoriya's other side. Uraraka sat across from them, as did Yaoyorozu and Jirou. Tokoyami, Shouji, and Kouda took up seats around them. Todoroki stopped putting names to faces after that. Maybe it was because he was still struggling to think about what he wanted to expect from himself from now on.

Luckily, or unfortunately depending on the way you look at it, conversation struck up around him, easing him away from his thoughts. He listened intently as they talked about their performances in the Sports Festival, some complaining that they were knocked out too early while others were upset that they didn't do better.

"I think we can all agree that Midoriya and Todoroki's battle took the cake, though," Kirishima said. "That was intense."

"I don't know," Uraraka said, "Yaoyorozu and Bakugo's battle was pretty good too."

Yaoyorozu smiled. "Don't put yourself down so much. You fought well against him too."

Midoriya hummed in agreement. "Yeah. I actually thought you'd beat him, Ochako."


Midoriya suddenly gained a very apathetic expression. "I'm forty-three percent sure that I'm aromantic."

"Forty-three seems pretty low to me," Tokoyami said dryly.

Midoriya's cheeks flushed as a red tick mark appeared at the corner of his head. It was obvious he was flustered at being called out for it. "Shut up, I was at sixty-three percent at the beginning of the year! It's not my fault our entire class is made up of hot people!"

Satou, who was taking a sip of water from a canister, spat his water back out. Jirou choked on her own spit, sending herself into a coughing fit. Tokoyami's feathers fluffed up slightly as his eyes widened.

"Honestly, same," Ashido said as she ran a hand through her short hair. "Everyone here has some sort of attractive feature and I really don't know how to think about it."

Hagakure waved her arms around. "I'll be completely honest, Yaoyorozu made me question my sexuality."

"Oh thank god," Jirou said as she held a hand over her heart, finally over her fit. "I thought I was the only one."

Asui held a finger to her chin. "Did Todoroki turn you back straight, kero?"

Uraraka interrupted before Hagakure could say anything. "Todoroki, promise me you'll be a model if this hero thing doesn't work out for you."

The male in question seemed to be slightly uncomfortable at the statements directed toward him.
Kaminari laughed as he pointed toward the back of the bus. "You know, Bakugo would be a pretty good model if he wasn't so angry-looking all the time. He has the looks, and if it weren't for the crap personality, he'd have girls all over him."

"What the fuck did you say!?" Bakugo shouted as he leapt up from his chair.

Kirishima waved his hands around complacently. "Kaminari, please stop teasing Bakugo all the time..."

Midoriya looked around at the chaos before holding his hands over his head. "What have I done," he groaned. "How did we even get from talking about the sports festival to this."

Asui keroed. "Speaking of the sports festival, I have a question for you, Midorichan."

Midoriya glanced up at her. He seemed mildly surprised. "Ask away."

Asui seemed to hesitate. "I always speak my mind. And I am quite curious—you didn't use your quirk at all at the beginning of the year, which leads me to believe you didn't use it often, and yet you have such a fine control over it. How is that even possible?"

Todoroki paused as he thought about it. That... did make sense. And why was Midoriya so hesitant to use his quirk? He also didn't use the heat side of his abilities until today, which was odd.

Todoroki pursed his lips as a thought suddenly struck him. Has Midoriya been forced to train with his quirk? He glanced over at the boy, who was currently tying his hair up in a messy ponytail, his eyes glassed over with thought. Is that why he's so good at controlling it?

"I... don't know how to answer that," Midoriya admitted. He ran a few fingers through his bangs, which were getting long and hanging in front of his eyes. "I mean, my quirk's biggest flaws are its backlash when the chains are destroyed and how you have to always be in contact with metal." His brows furrowed. "But in all honesty, power output isn't really that hard on my body. It's when I have to control individual chains that make it really difficult. It's easier on me when I move all of them in the same general direction."

Satou leaned forward in his chair. "Don't answer this if it's too forward, but why exactly did you not want to use your quirk in the first place?"

Todoroki felt it in the air—a shift in energy. The previous lightheartedness was gone, and the atmosphere was tense. He saw Aizawa shift in his seat ever so slightly from the corner of his eye.

Surprisingly, Midoriya was not the first to reply.

"He doesn't have to answer shit."

Todoroki blinked and turned his head so he was facing the owner of the voice, who was none other than Bakugo himself. The boy had the beginnings of a snarl on his face, and his eyes were swimming with untold emotion.

Midoriya flinched, though Todoroki noted that he seemed just as surprised as everyone else was. "Ah," he started, clearing his throat awkwardly. "Well, I mean... I appreciate it, Bakugo, but... " He seemed to struggle over what he was trying to say. "It's just- how do I say this..."

"Bakugo's right, if you don't want to say anything, you don't have to," Yaoyorozu said carefully. "If you do, that's a different thing entirely. But you shouldn't be pressured into it."
Midoriya shrugged. "It's not... really bad or anything." Todoroki caught the slight lilt in his voice. "Lie?" "I just... had an aunt with the exact same quirk, and she wasn't... all right in the head, I guess." He tapped his temple meaningfully, and Asui tilted her head.

"Are you scared of your quirk because she did something wrong with hers?" she questioned.

Midoriya winced and leaned back in his chair. "I... guess you could say that, yeah."

Kaminari leaned over toward him and shot him a thumbs up. "Well, I think that it's really cool that you pushed past that to do good, you know?"

Midoriya's face flushed before he sunk into his scarf and mumbled several unintelligible things. It would be nice to understand him, but Todoroki was overwhelmed with the thick accent that Midoriya suddenly layered onto his words. He could barely make out what he was even trying to say.

Heck, it even sounded like he was speaking in an entirely different language.

=====

If anyone is uncomfortable with the above passage relating to sexuality, I want you to know that I had this conversation with my friends (who are all as straight as a pole.) I know that it seems like I'm heavily hinting toward them having different sexualities, but this is conversation I've had as a teen even though my friends were (as I've already stated) not bi or gay or any other thing but straight. Teens will say things they do not mean, and as such, this is not me projecting sexualities onto my characters. If you want to imagine them being said sexuality, that is also fine, and I'm not saying you can't do that. But to those who might assume that I am trying to do this, I'm not making it "law" in this storyline. What kind of sexuality they take after is totally up to your interpretation.

I'm sorry, I panic when I see paragraphs that might trigger some people so... here you go.

=====

The first thing that Midoriya did when he got home was hide Juni in his scarf and go to his favorite cafe, the one he met Yaoyorozu at. Of course, this was after Kayama's permission, who gave it to him tentatively—he could see that she was eyeing him for any of his injuries. She made him promise that he'd save a seat for her, and that he could go early only if he called her immediately if something seemed wrong. He sat at the smallest table outside, the one shaded from the sun by the simple tree that sat next to it. The same woman from years ago came up to him with a smile on her face, and her eyes brightened when she saw him.

"Ah, if it isn't my favorite customer," she said as she placed a menu in front of him. "It's been a while, huh? I saw you on TV today."

Midoriya shot her a smile. "Hope I didn't freak you out. And yeah, I really should stop by here more often. Maybe I'll bring a few friends."

"Oh, you didn't do nothing. And please do, I'd love to see them. It'd be good for business." She winked at him before whipping out her notepad. "Now, anything specific you want to drink or eat?"

Midoriya hummed. "I think I'm in the mood to be spoiled." He blinked, and then his menu was suddenly gone from his fingertips.

"Sure thing hun!" the woman said as she twirled the laminated paper in her hands. He really should learn her name. "I have a new surprise special I'd love for you to try." She placed a small palm-sized
plate onto the table, and she laughed as Juni poked her head out from the folds of his scarf. "For you, mademoiselle."

Midoriya shook his head. "Spoil her any further, and she'll think she's a princess," he mumbled under his breath. The woman apparently heard, because she burst into laughter as she twirled on her heel and back into the restaurant.

Midoriya sighed as she disappeared into the building. He stretched his arms high over his head, wincing as his sore muscles burned at the stretch. He was starting to feel a little better, though he was sure that he would fall asleep the minute he flopped into bed. Recovery Girl had healed him right before he left, and he could feel the exhaustion seep deep into his bones. He hoped that Kayama wouldn't mind if he went straight to bed after this. He didn't know how tolerant she was of it.

Before long, Midoriya managed to spy Kayama. She was wearing form-fitting jeans and a simple blue t-shirt that matched the color of her eyes. A light gray jacket was thrown over her shoulders, unzipped and kept in place with the thin strap of a purse, which was crossed over her chest military style. Probably so no one could steal it without pulling it around her head first.

It took a few seconds before she noticed him, but she caught him waving his arm not a few seconds after arriving at the restaurant. She smiled when she noticed him there and sidled into the seat across from him with a sort of grace that she always seemed to carry with her. Midoriya didn't fail to notice the eyes that followed her movements, almost entranced. It seemed as if she was always worth drooling over, even when she wasn't in her revealing costume.

"So this is the place you've been ranting to me about," she said as she looked around the area. "It's very pretty. I can see why you like it." She noticed Juni in her small plate, and she chuckled lightly. She ran the tip of her finger across the top of her moisturized head.

"You're not disgusted?" Midoriya asked, incredulous. She laughed.

"I've encountered much worse, trust me," Kayama said. She tapped Juni's "chin" lightly. "And anyways, she's a cute little thing."

Midoriya smiled up at her, his cheeks growing pink. "Not a lot of people think that way," he admitted shyly.

"Well not a lot of people are heroes like me, huh?" Kayama countered.

Midoriya was about to respond when the waiter (owner? She owned the cafe, but she mentioned that she liked working as a waitress as well, if only to make sure that her customers were happy) came back out of the restaurant. In her hand was a small plate, and though he couldn't see what was on it, steam rose off the surface. The woman's eyes widened as she noticed Kayama there, though her smile remained polite and light.

"Oh, Midoriya, I hadn't realized that your mother was coming over!" she gushed as she placed the plate in front of him. "You should have told me, I would've gotten a second special for her as well. It wouldn't be fair to not treat my favorite customer's mother for raising someone so special, you know?"

Midoriya was sure that his entire face was beet red. Even Kayama had the lightest flush to her cheeks. He attempted to splutter something out along the lines of, "I'm sorry, but she isn't my mother," but the woman was already heading back inside.

"I'll go get a menu for you!" she called over her shoulder, disappearing back into the cafe.
Kayama cleared her throat awkwardly. It was obvious she was trying to play it cool. "So... favorite customer, huh?"

Midoriya rubbed the back of his head. "Yeah, I've been coming to this place since I was... eleven, I think? I've chatted with her on several occasions, and I guess I just got really close to her..." He picked up the handle of the spoon she gave him as he peered at the dessert she handed him. "Well, as close as I can get without knowing her name. I feel like I should really ask her one of these days..."

Kayama raised one of her eyebrows. "You've known her for years and had several conversations with her, and yet you didn't bother to learn her name?"

Midoriya waved his spoon at her. "Leave me alone, I thought it would be embarrassing to ask her after all this time." He took a bite from the dessert, and he groaned. It was an apple crisp with just a hint of cinnamon. A thin layer of cream had been added to the inside, enough to not be overwhelmingly sweet.

Kayama laughed. "I'm guessing it's good?" she asked.

Midoriya waved his utensil at her again. "Yes. But don't tell my martial arts instructor. He'd kill me."

Kayama shook her head. "What, would he make you do ten times the workout?"

"Yes." Midoriya was completely serious as he spoke. "It'd be a nightmare and a half." He tapped the end of the spoon against his bottom lip. "Though maybe he'd let me off because of my injury... I haven't seen him since USJ."

Kayama nodded. "That's right, you haven't..."

Midoriya hummed. "When we move into the dorms, will we be able to go out as we please anymore?"

Kayama sighed as she leaned forward, resting her arms on the table. "There'll definitely be some restrictions, so I'm not sure if you could get away with going to your lessons every day." She shrugged. "We'll give you permission to go out every once in a while, but we have to make it seem randomized so no one catches on. Things like grocery shopping for your class will probably be done in pairs, where two people go out and shop for everyone." She tapped her bottom lip. "It depends on how the class wants to do it—maybe the class reps will go, or maybe a pair will be assigned every week. Supplies will run out, though, since there'll be twenty of you in the same place with shared supplies."

"All of us agreed to live in the dorms?" Midoriya asked. "I wasn't expecting that."

Kayama nodded when her eyes suddenly lightened up, and she grinned mischievously. "By the way, if any of the girls ask for tampons or pads, make sure to text them to ask which brand. We all have our different tastes."

She snickered as his face turned red again, and his spoon clattered as it hit the plate, the utensil slipping from his fingers in his surprise. He held his hands over his face as he groaned, embarrassed down to the core. "Kayama, no, please don't say that," he whined. He could feel the heat in his ears and cheeks.

She patted his head teasingly as she did her best to repress her giggles. "I'm just preparing you for the worst, honey. I did that all the time to Shouta and Hizashi when we were in high school."

Midoriya spread his fingers wide, his eyes peering out curiously. "You... did that to Aizawa and
"Yamada-sensei?"

"Yep," she said, popping the 'p' loudly. "Shouta didn't give a crap, Hizashi was a blushing mess, and Tensei was face palming the entire time." Her eyes lit up again. "Also, if Shouta ever says that he was a responsible teenager, don't believe him. While Tensei was asleep, Shouta and Hizashi painted his face with cat whiskers and a nose and then proceeded to drag him into a cart." Midoriya choked on his own spit.

"They then walked him around the city with a sign that said "Pet the cat, please." And Tensei, being the heavy sleeper he was, didn't wake up until around midnight. And when he did, he got so embarrassed that he pushed Shouta and Hizashi into the cart and used his quirk to speed them all the way back to his house." Kayama looked like she was on the verge of bursting out into laughter. "Unfortunately, he got caught by the police and had to explain the entire situation to them and his family. It was amazing."

Midoriya held a hand over his mouth as he tried not to burst out into noisy laughter. "Aizawa actually did that?"

Kayama nodded. "I'm sure Hizashi dragged him into most of it, but Shouta pretty much did what anyone said as long as if benefited him in some way."

Midoriya shook his head. "You don't understand, now I'm going to struggle to look at him in the eye from now on."

Kayama shrugged. "Don't worry about even trying, it was about time before I revealed to you his secrets. He already had a feeling I'd do it." She smiled. "But back to the topic of dorms, I'll be moving into one myself. The teachers are getting their own rooms back at U.A., and it's a requirement for me to stay there. So I'd recommend taking everything you need, because it's more than likely that you're not heading back to our apartment anytime soon."

Before she could continue, the woman from before came back with another plate of the apple crisp and a menu. She whipped her notepad out and smiled at the two of them. "Anything you'd like to drink?"

"Water's fine," Kayama said. Midoriya echoed her. The woman then asked if they wanted anything else to eat, which they politely declined. When the woman was out of earshot, she continued back from where she left off.

"We can also head to your old apartment and take whatever you want from there," she added. "I know that we didn't have much time to actually move everything, but I guess now's the chance." She hummed as she picked up her own spoon, and she pressed the end gently into the crust of the apple crisp in front of her. "Also... if you're not going to see your teachers anymore, we can go around after we eat while we're here to say goodbye to them. What lessons are you taking again?"

Midoriya took another bite of the dessert in front of him. "I take piano and sign language lessons on the weekends, and gymnastic and martial arts during the school week."

Kayama hummed. "That's quite a bit of walking. You up for it?"

Midoriya hesitated before nodding. "Yeah, I think I can do it. I can always call Chikara-sensei too, if that helps."

Kayama smiled. "You guys really are close, huh? What's his daughter's name, Aika?"

Midoriya nodded. "Aika."
Before they could say anymore, two cups of water were placed in front of them. Midoriya barely managed to utter a thank you before the woman disappeared back into the cafe. He supposed that she was getting busy, if the groups of people entering the building had anything to go by.

"I have one more thing to talk to you about," Kayama said after a moment of silence. Midoriya felt tingles shoot up his arms at the sudden tone her voice had, the seriousness contrasting heavily with their previous, lighthearted conversation.

"Yeah?" he asked, already dreading what she wanted to talk about. Would she say that after this they couldn't talk anymore like they had been? Or that they couldn't hang out the way they did when he was staying at hom- her apartment? He could understand that. They were teacher and student, not guardian and child. He was surprised, though. He thought she'd bring it up sooner.

Sure, the two weeks he spent with her weren't exactly serious and restricted to professionalism, but he had hoped that they were closer than just "hey I'm here to make you feel temporarily better and put a roof over your head because I have an obligation to." Which was still enough for him, he couldn't ask for more, but he enjoyed that time together. He'd feel really bad if she was acting for his sake. She hadn't been, had she? Oh, he really hoped not.

Kayama sighed. "About your battle with Todoroki today..." Huh? "I understand that you were shooting for some goal. What that goal was is beyond me, and I won't push you if it comes down to it." Kayama pressed her hands together as she avoided having eye contact with him. "And I know that you're at U.A. to become a hero, and you'll be in fights where you get hurt. That's just about inevitable. However—" She took a deep breath. "—pushing yourself like that when you're just in the beginning of training... is insane. And I want you to know that, if it comes down to it, you're worth more than some simple objective." Midoriya's breath hitched. She reached for his hands, and she took them in her own. They were larger than his, and her skin was soft against his. "And please... never hurt yourself like that unless it's for something truly worth a life."

Midoriya stared at their clasped hands. Out of everything that he had been expecting, this was not one of them. "I..." he started weakly. "I'll keep that in mind."

Kayama smiled at him. "Thank you." She then released her grip on his hands and clapped hers together loudly. "Now, let's finish eating, and then we can be on our way."

Midoriya smiled back at her, though her words were still ringing loudly in his ears. They joined with Dabi's, and it made his head hurt. They joined with Dabi's, and it made his head hurt. He wasn't ready for either of what they said, and it was painful to hear. Even so, it was better than anything that he could have expected. He was sure that she'd tell him to go back to status quo, but this was nicer.

Definitely so.

They left the cafe with linked arms. The owner said goodbye one last time, calling that she was (once again) ecstatic to meet Midoriya's mother.

Neither bothered to correct her.

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Seventeen-year-old Daizō stared at the cells with a sigh. Beside him, both Maiko and Dabi—or Touya, depending on the time of day—stood. Of course, Maiko was called Asagiri in public, and Dabi was called Ghost. (Or Glitch. No one could ever really decide on which one, though Daizō preferred Ghost simply because Glitch sounded off.)
At the moment, all three of them were in the society of time's base, or a film of reality in the timeline that could be accessed by all time travelers. (Getting there was called Fading, where you simply focused into pressing yourself into your time-related quirk, and could find yourself at the platform. It was kind of like logging into a game.

There were too many theories that lasted about a thousand words in simple description describing the basics of how this worked, and how come the platform seemed to flow at an entirely different kind of time and evolution. It was more like the society of time was a line that was perpendicular to that of the timeline, since every time traveler no matter what time period they were in could go to the same place and grow the society, and its progress in improvements appeared no matter what time period you were in.

Or, in Daizō's simpler explanation that helped his mind wrap around it: the society of time was exactly the same in the twenty-third century as it was in the ninety-ninth century. And if the society of time improved or evolved, than it improved across the board, not in one area of time.

How did this work? Good question.

But the author decided that instead of making an entire essay describing about how this theory worked, they believed that Christmas meant giving their wonderful readers a break. So, they deleted the essay and is giving you this intermission to say: Please. Just take it as it fucking is. It helps you as much as it helps me, because the only reason I'd even give you that essay is to increase the validity of what the hell I'm saying and it's boring as hell. So just take the important parts and fucking run with it. And to any of you who would be mad, ninety-five percent of it would add nothing to the plot. So leave me the fuck alone, and merry fucking Christmas. Or, if you don't celebrate it, happy holidays. Because in this house, we don't care about what you celebrate, as long as you have a great fucking time. (I promise you I'm not usually a pottymouth, if never.)

Honestly, it hurt Daizō's brain. But it was better to not fucking think about it because they were lucky the platform even existed in the first place. As Maiko said, leave it to the experts with time and just keep to what won't give you an existential crisis.

Hint, it's noteworthy to note that everyone usually only appeared at the society of time's platform once, simply because they had no reason to otherwise. In their first visit, time travelers got enough technology to last them a lifetime; it put them in contact with other time travelers, and the platform was merely another contact if shit hit the fan. Except for ninety percent of the council members that ran the place.

(Well, looking back, that was an understatement. Author here, it's more like Daizō is struggling to deny the fact that pretty much all of them but him lived on the platform. But shush, we don't want to hurt the baby's feelings.)

They never left because of many reasons that had been included in my essay that I deleted. And more personal reasons that I'm going to purposely fail to mention, hint hint wink wink can I be any more obvious. Look, I'm sorry, I'm punch drunk and I'm giving you plot bunny presents leave me alone. I'm trying to prepare you for the worst to come the next few chapters. You're welcome. Okay I'm done trolling we're going back to the story now no more interruptions I promise you guys.

It was the most effective way to keep ruling. But that was okay. That was literally all you needed to know. The amount of theories out there hurt his brain and it was not worth arguing over it.

But anyway. Back to the topic at hand.

"Is that all of them?" Asagiri asked someone to their left.
She was a woman with light blue hair piled onto her head, and she was tapping away at the holographic screen in front of her. She nodded curtly. "All two hundred and eighteen. Held in cells with our highest degree of security. If they manage to get out and enter off-limit zones, their braces will shock them into unconsciousness, or at least paralyze them long enough until help arrives." She gestured to the cells that lined the sides of the large hallway, carved into the walls with a translucent barrier constructed against the walls and openings. Above them, the lights were sharp and almost overpowering as they hung from the incredibly high ceilings.

The walls were a polished white, while the barriers took a pink purple color that hurt Daizō's eyes. Though he supposed it could be worse, and so he ignored it as he gazed at the inhabitants that took up said cells.

Ghost spoke up. "Are we sure that they won't use their quirks to get out, or at least devise a plan?"

"Doubt that'll happen," Daizō said suddenly. "Their braces serve as quirk suppressants, do they not?" He gestured to the small metal band that were tied to each of the prisoner's left leg and right wrist. Probably to make sure that if one was taken off, the other was there for safekeeping.

"Indeed," the blue-haired woman said. "And the barriers of their cells can stand up to eighteen tons of pressure and extreme temperatures."

Asagiri snorted. "Nice, but we're not looking at a bunch of random people on the street. We're talking hundreds of time travelers with the ability to create paradoxes at the snap of their fingers. I don't give a shit about temperatures."

The woman's eyes turned frosty, though before she could reply, Daizō held a hand on Asagiri's shoulder. "Now now, let's be nice. I'm sure that there are quite a few time travelers and manipulators out there who can do more than just change the timeline a little bit. Let's keep an open mind. And anyways, there's no telling how many of these are actual time travelers and how many were warped back by someone else's quirk."

The woman sniffed. "Yes. Perhaps, miss Asagiri, you should take some lessons from your friend."

Asagiri rolled her eyes and snorted. "Stop trying to gain the favor of Daizō by your feeble attempts to impress him. It's not working." She made a rude gesture at the woman. "And, by the way, he isn't my friend, he's my nephew, dipshit. And you are not dating material, so get the fuck out of our faces."

Ghost burst out into cackles as Daizō glared at the two of them disapprovingly. "Why am I the adult in the situation? I'm only seventeen," he said exasperatedly. He shook his head as he looked at the woman apologetically. "Jokes aside, I'm being serious. Do we have any actual idea why they would even attempt a massive-scale attack like this? Nothing comes to mind for me." He frowned. "And why? Everyone knows that we're meant to be tight-lipped about our business. No one else is supposed to know about time travelers, except the occasional few due to circumstances out of our control. But this? This is insane. Why reveal the secret to so many people?" He pressed his fingers against the polished surface of the wall, gazing in on the two cells in front of him. "And why launch such a risky attack? What would they even gain from it?"
Honestly, he almost had a heart attack seeing the amount of universal strings being broken. The amount of Echoes there were... who knew how many Waves were created when the Echoes collided. Maybe it wasn't as bad as he thought, though. Maybe it was okay and he didn't have to worry about the world going kaboom. And none of the prisoners had actually seemed to harm their sensitive time period, so that was good. But still, to risk that chance of destroying the reality... all for this?

The blue-haired woman didn't say anything for a second. She merely cleared her throat and pressed her fingers against the rim of her glasses. The light was harsh against the lenses, and Daizō had to glance away for a second. "If we knew the answer, we would find a way to fix the problem. It seems to me like they're just selfish people."

Daizō frowned. That seemed... odd. He wasn't sure that he appreciated the way she treated them like they were one-dimensional puppets, but he brushed it off with a shrug. (Or, he did his best to. It would not be great to get on this woman's bad side, especially since she had such an influential control over this sector where the prisoners were. Even so, his voice was of disbelief when he spoke up again.) "I guess so."

Asagiri tapped his shoulder. "Come on, we should get back to our bud... we don't want to leave him unguarded for too long."

"Right, right, sorry," Daizō said. "One more question, though."

The woman raised her eyebrow. "What is it?"

Daizō didn't flinch at her impatient tone. "The leader of the sixth squad from our department—Time Travel Regulation, for clarification—told us that one of the prisoners had been reported missing the entire time until the last minute. They have no idea where she went during that time. Is there any possible way to interrogate her and see why?"

The woman looked away. "We're already looking into that, Mr. Kimoto. Please respect our work."

Daizō frowned. "Right. Of course." He cleared his throat, trying to dispel the awkwardness that permeated the air. "Thank you for letting us stop by. I deeply appreciate it."

The woman sniffed. "Of course. Come by again, if you want."

Sarcasm. Huh.

Now that was starting to raise several alarm bells. Daizō's eyebrows raised at her statement, though her put on one of his false smiles and looked at her straight in the eye. "But of course. You didn't think I would miss the meeting tomorrow, now would you?"

The woman flinched. She peered up at him with her dark magenta eyes, and Daizō could see the sting in there. "Who told you that?"

Daizō couldn't help but feel slightly offended. So yes, his voice was cold when he spoke again. "I'm part of the council, ma'am. It's part of my job to be here. If I may ask, why has no one told me of this news?" He couldn't help but glare at her when she was unamused. "You're officials of this society, meant to make sure the timeline stays safe. Why you're acting like petty children and keeping me out of the loop is beside me. Whose assistant are you of, Morrison's?" He narrowed her eyes at her expression. "Tell him that I'm coming tomorrow, and his lame attempts to thwart me are annoying. And I have absolutely no idea why they're being so pathetic to keep me out. A voice is a voice, and suppressing one is against our conduct and a violation of the agreement we made when we started
"I'll be seeing you tomorrow. Please don't disappoint me again."

He was glad to be leaving. The faint pounding on the cells from the prisoners were driving him insane. And the woman, too. He couldn't believe her. It seemed as if all the people who made up the councilors were beginning to treat him like he was second rate rubbish. And why they were starting to shut him out was going over his head.

He just didn't... understand. What on earth were they hiding from him? And every time they met up, it seemed like he had to press on full-force before he was treated seriously. Before he was given a chance to even speak.

Honestly, when they started this, he knew he wasn't going to play a big role. He was really done with participating heavily in any sort of time-related fight. It brought up too many unhappy memories, drudged up too many things. He was happy to live his life in the twenty-third century, with his friends and family. But this... this was infuriating. It seemed that the voices of the common people were growing quieter and quieter every new meeting, and it drove him insane. It seemed like the council were acting on their ideas alone, and it broke so many agreements and contracts that they had before.

"Are you okay?" Asagiri asked.

"Yeah, that girl really pissed you off," Ghost commented.

Daizō took in a deep breath. "I'm fine," he said stiffly. "Come on, we need to get back to my past- to Midoriya."

Asagiri didn't seem convinced, but she nodded. Ghost didn't have any outward reaction, though he followed the two anyway.

Daizō sighed. One thing that had been made extremely obvious was the fact that this hadn't just been an attack on his past self, though it was obvious from Ghost's retelling that they wanted to get rid of him. Most likely, though, it wasn't to get rid of him personally, but so that he—as a figurehead of the society—was eliminated.

Which scared him. It scared him terribly. This was an obvious direct attack to the society of time.

But why?

Or, rather... how did they get so much support?

=====  

Midoriya felt overwhelmed at the amount of noise that seemed to echo around the room. His classmates whizzed around, carrying large boxes up to their rooms and laughing and screaming and hugging. Everyone was wearing casual clothing—it was the weekend, after all—but it was still incredibly weird to see at first.

Midoriya had his own box of goodies and a suitcase from Kayama's old closet at home. He had gotten a few more things from his older apartment as well, but overall, his room was going to be very lackluster.

Midoriya flinched when a hand suddenly appeared in his face, waving in what was probably
excitement. "Izuku, you're here!"

Ah. Uraraka.

"Ochako," he greeted. "Nice to see you."

She smiled brightly at him. "Nice to see you too!" And then, without warning, she pressed the tips of her fingers against the box in his hands and his suitcase. He yelped as the weight against him disappeared, and she laughed at his reaction as she picked the two up. "I'm going to take this to your bedroom. Tokoyami should explain the game we're getting ready for."

"Game?" Midoriya mumbled, but Uraraka didn't explain a thing as she bounced away. He guessed she really was excited about the dorm thing.

Tokoyami took one look at him before sighing. "Uraraka, I presume? Ashido and her suggested that we begin the endeavor of decorating our rooms all at the same time, as a sort of contest to see who would finish first."

"Oh, that makes... kinda sense," Midoriya mumbled.

"—but I'm serious, who the heck asked U.A. to bring an entire fricken piano here?" Kaminari asked as he clapped a hand on the top. Beside him, Jirou hissed.

"Don't mistreat it, mister. Who knows how expensive that was? If you broke that, you'd be paying it off for years," Jirou said with her hands on her hips. As a fellow instrument lover, she was very peeved.

"I don't know," Kirishima said as he scratched the side of his cheek. "Maybe Kaminari's right. I mean, if no one claims to play it, maybe we can deconstruct it and put it somewhere else. That way, we can put something else here instead."

Ashido jumped up and down. "Maybe we can fit another chair or two here! Wouldn't that be cool —"

A hand suddenly appeared on Ashido's and Kirishima's shoulders. Kaminari winced at the dark aura that he felt behind him.

"Don't lay a finger on my piano, or else you'll regret it."

Kaminari stammered as he turned around. "Y-Yaomomo? This is yours?"

"I made it," Yaoyorozu said through clenched teeth. "With my own bare hands. So don't touch it."

Kirishima waved his hands in front of his face. "Right, right, gotcha! Don't touch the piano! It stays off-limits!"

Midoriya couldn't help but sigh in relief as he listened to the conversation from where he was standing. Tokoyami gave him an odd look, but he seemingly brushed it off.

"Okay!" Uraraka called. "I think we're all here!"

Hagakure waved her arms around, obvious by the sleeves of her shirt. "So we should start now!"

Midoriya blinked. *Already? Jeez, I thought we'd do something first, like greet one another first—* Apparently not his most brilliant idea. He blinked once, and everyone started moving. He blinked
twice, and then everyone was running up the staircase. He blinked again, and he was alone in the common room with nothing but his piano.

He didn't even know where his room was.

He sighed as he ran a hand down his face. It was okay, he could just play the guessing game, right? Right.

Turns out, it wasn't that bad. His door was open, and it was unoccupied except for the bed from home and the large box that held his desk from his old apartment and a slightly smaller one that held his nightstand. There were also two more that he totally forgot about, and he had no idea what was inside. His belongings were placed right outside his door, and so he grabbed his suitcase and the other smaller box inside his room. With a nudge from his foot, his door closed before clicking shut.

Midoriya sighed as he set them down at the foot of his bed. The hardest part would be assembling the desk, but his dresser was already done for him. Which was nice, no doubt. It would save him time.

It took a while to put it together, but when he did, he put it against the wall that hadn't already been taken up by his bed and dresser. He put all of his old notebooks in the drawers, making sure that they were in numerical order. He placed a pack of pencils on the surface, and then his laptop beside it. He plugged his charger in shortly after, and let the end of the cord rest against its counterpart. His laptop was already fully charged anyway, so it wasn't required, but he'd rather get it over with already.

He made his bed after, before remembering that he had all of his academic books in his backpack and he really ought to take them out before his zippers exploded open from strain. He struggled to unzip them, and he huffed at the weight in his arms as he picked them up. Oh, he would be so happy when he could drop them off by his locker.

Okay, so he had his piano music, which he should probably put with his piano, his pictures, and...

Ah. Right. The bouquet that Kayama had given him as a welcome home gift. He glanced down at the flowers, fidgeting slightly with their petals. A few had been bent when he put them in the box despite his best efforts to separate them from everything else. Maybe it had happened when Uraraka had carried it up? Who knew. But it could have been worse, and the flowers didn't actually seem too damaged. So that was a good thing.

He sighed as he picked up the glass vase from inside, which had been wrapped neatly by Kayama with bubble wrap. Humming to himself quietly, he tore the wrap off and placed the vase on the desk. It was nice, and the light reflected off the tinted glass nicely. He tapped his lower lip before picking the vase back up again. He headed outside his dorm room, ignoring the loud noises and muffled yelps from the rooms around him as he headed back down to the kitchen. Which just so happened to be enormous, by the way, and the part of himself that grew to enjoy cooking after so many years of it crooned in happiness.

He heard that Satou was an incredible connoisseur of food, and his entire family was made up of good cooks and bakers. While Satou himself admitted to enjoying baking more than he liked to cook, he still said that cooking was one of his favorite pastimes. Maybe the two could team up together sometime.

He found his way to the sink as he made sure to keep an extremely tight grip on the vase. There was no way that he was going to drop it and break it just because of his butter fingers. Absolutely not.

Midoriya sighed as he placed the lip of the vase underneath the faucet. He turned the handle to the
faucet, and he watched as water spilled into the vase. He waited until there were several inches of water inside before he turned the faucet off. As he readjusted his grip, he noted the cool temperature through the glass. Did it really matter how cold or hot it was? He shrugged to himself before heading back up the stairs.

He placed the vase back on his desk, reminding himself to put it on his nightstand when he actually unpacked it, and then gently picked up the bouquet. Untying the string that was wrapped around the plastic, he peeled the layer off of the flowers before placing the bundle into the vase. He squinted at it for a moment before adjusting their positions, fluffing up some of the flowers in an attempt to cover some of the holes that appeared from the wide opening they sprouted from.

Did it actually work? Well, that was up to interpretation.

Midoriya looked around at the other boxes in his room. He knew that the smallish square one was his nightstand, but he had no idea what the tall or flat rectangular boxes were for. He sighed again. It was okay. He'd just find out about it later, right?

=====

It was a very, very large bookcase that he had totally forgotten about in his old apartment. There were a few faint scratches and bumps on the sides, but it had come out beautifully and without much damage, which was pretty amazing. He put it on the opposite wall of his desk, and had filled it up with some of the books he brought with him.

He would probably find some time to go out and find more stuff to put up, but this was mostly just bringing in the necessities until they would permanently move in after their internships. (The only reason he knew about it was because of Kayama, who probably told him more than she should.) This didn't mean that students couldn't stay at the dorms starting from today—several had decided that they would, like him and Todoroki—but most wanted to stay with their families for as long as they could before they were required to take permanent residence.

Which was why he was definitely surprised when he was the first to be done. Maybe it was because he didn't have many decorations or stuff to spice up his room. He had his dresser, which was filled with his old clothes (and some newer ones that Kayama couldn't resist buying), while his jackets took home in the tiny closet off to the side. There was the nightstand with his alarm clock that had the most annoying ringtone in existence. He had his vase of flowers—some with white petals, others with pink, some with yellow or orange or lilac—also at the edge of his nightstand (hey, he actually remembered), away from the clock so he wouldn't accidentally hit it trying to turn off his alarm in the morning.

There was also the fact that Hiroji decided to give him a gift, and in the flat box in his room were two suspended bars that were supposed to hang from the ceiling. With a quick call, the man said that he couldn't find any place to put it, and he knew it'd just be sitting somewhere in the attic, wearing dust until he could find someone to give it to.

(Midoriya smelled bull crap, but he didn't say anything about that, even if the thing looked brand new.)

But while that was a lot to bring in at one time, it apparently wasn't anything compared to everyone else, because he was alone when he got to the common room. Which wasn't a bad thing, really, he didn't mind. But just how much did everyone bring then? Did they decorate their entire rooms?

That sounded entirely horrifying. Midoriya didn't even have enough stuff to fill all of the furniture he brought with him. His bookcase had only one bookshelf with things on it, and it was barely halfway
Honestly, he was feeling a little lackluster.

He shook his head as he adjusted the piano books in his hands, filled with all sorts of sheets of music. He slipped into the flat bench that sat in front of the piano, and he flipped through the pages as he tried to find the one he had been working on before... before the USJ attack. By the time he arrived back home, Kayama was already forced to take him under her care, and the piano hadn't come with him. So this was the first time he was seeing it in... two weeks?

He pressed his fingers against the keys. It was a little odd, and he was no doubt rusty, but he crossed his fingers that he could get back into the groove with a little warmup.

Sighing as he reached for one of his smaller books, he looked for a simpler song to get himself back into the groove. He found one that caught his eye, and he placed it standing up in front of him. Almost four seconds into the song, he slipped and missed a key, but he ignored it. Another eight seconds in, and his fourth finger pressed too far outward, and it hit two keys instead of one. The note that resounded was off, and he internally winced.

Midoriya suddenly remembered halfway through the song why it caught his eye. He remembered it because he hated it so much. It had to have the most random jumps in it, and if he wasn't quick enough, it sounded broken and stilted. But if he went too quickly, it sounded incredibly rushed, and there was just about no way to make it sound good.

And then he had to stretch his hand into a whole octave too, and then jump around in the same position like that...

"Simple for mid-high intermediates" his behind. He was not convinced whatsoever.

Overall, the song itself wasn't that bad. While playing it was a nightmare and a half, the music was very interesting, though it wasn't his favorite. And there was no way to play it with perfection. Absolutely no way. So he ignored the fact that he missed about four keys and congratulated himself because he wasn't that out of practice, even though he was a little off kilter.

He was sure that if anyone were to see him at the moment, they would see him with a sour expression, however. God, how he hated playing that stupid song.

He went back to the sheets of music that he and his piano teacher had been focusing on beforehand, skimming the song titles until he found the one he was looking for. He flexed his fingers, which were a little sore, before he rested his fingers over the first keys.

... He messed up. About three times, mind you, in the first ten seconds.

... Fuck.

He ran a hand over his face, trying to not let him get frustrated. That was always when he played at his worst, and he was better than getting impatient over a few bad plays. Even if the urge was so overwhelming at the moment.

"Man, I'm really out of practice," he mumbled before taking in a deep breath. He'd just try again until he got it right. Yeah?

And he messed up twice more, though it was further into the song, about twenty seconds in. But
goddammit, he was seeing it to the end, and so he tried again.

And you know those times when you have that magical run where everything goes exactly how you wanted it to? It was kind of like that. But ten times better, because this was a song he hadn't even perfected before the attack, so it was just about ten times the amazement.

As the music dipped for a second, he felt his left hand cramp up slightly. He did his best to push through it, ignoring the pain as his left middle finger struggled to press down on the keys. The music rose up high again and stayed like that for a while, surfing between slightly lower and higher notes before dipping back down again. And then there was a repetition of keys, circling the same tune, with only the slightest differences in how the repetition ended—high and low notes alternating consecutively.

Honestly, it sounded incredibly weird to explain in his head as his fingers flew over the different keys.

The pitch dipped one last time for a moment, rising slightly once before going even deeper. Midoriya almost slipped on a key when her moved higher up the keyboard, the notes rapidly growing higher before it finally leveled off. He played the constantly repeating set of notes one last time before ending it... on a high note.

Ha. Ha. That was so fudging funny. And ow his hand really really hurt he shouldn't have played it when it was so cramped and now he couldn't feel his left hand that was just perfect—

"Hey, you were really good!"

Midoriya felt himself freeze as he looked over his shoulder. Hagakure was standing there, her hands clasped behind her back. He glanced behind her to see that there were more people there, and that included Jirou, who was looking at him in awe, and Yaoyorozu, who sent him a smile.

"H-how long have you been there for?" he squeaked out, his voice cracking in too many areas.

"Well, I've been here for a while," Jirou said as she twirled her jack around her ear. Beside her, Koda made a hand gesture that Midoriya recognized as 'Me too!'

Iida adjusted his glasses. "I was the first to arrive back after you, along with Sero and Shouji. You had just finished the first song, and we moving onto the next."

Sero popped up from his spot on the couch. "Dude, you should totally play requests, I've got about a million but I've never been able to hear it from anyone since no one can play—"

Jirou spoke over him. "You're really good at the piano though. Most people I know can only play simpler songs. When did you start practicing?"

Suddenly, hands were on his shoulders. "And why didn't you tell us!?" Oh, that was Kaminari. "Now you an Kyouka-chan— " "That's Jirou to you, idiot. " —can play us a bunch of music! Oh, we should make a band!"

Jirou raised a brow. "Almost all bands can play the drums, Kaminari. And I'm not that great at it."

Kaminari suddenly deflated. "Aww, man. That would have been so cool..."

Out of the corner of his eye, Midoriya noticed that Bakugo twitched. It was only for a split second, but it was enough for him.
"Oh, you know what we should do?" Ashido said. "We should judge our rooms now that we're done with them!"

Midoriya blinked. He was about to object when Uraraka stood up, smiling brightly. "Sure, why not! I think it'll be fun!"

"Wait—" he started, but apparently no one wanted to listen to him. The next second, he found himself in front of his room again, watching everyone with a blank face as they stared at his very lackluster room.

"It's so... simple," Ashido said.

Midoriya shrugged. "I don't have much stuff to spruce it up. So this is what it's like until I have more."

Koda gestured something to him, and Jirou almost instantly translated it. Midoriya supposed that they were incredibly good friends, and so she managed to pick up on some gestures. "He says that he likes the flowers..." Her eyes glazed the room until she found them, and her eyes brightened. "Hey, they are pretty cute."

"Didn't take you for a flower person, Midoriya," Sero said as he nudged his side.

"Yeah, isn't that a little bit... I dunno. Girly?" Kaminari said, rubbing the back of his head.

Midoriya shrugged, unbothered by the gendered stereotype and slight accusation sent his way. "I think too many people take them for granted."

Ashido peered further into the room, looking around. "I mean, your taste in books seems old-fashioned, and there's not a lot of color in here." She froze as she looked at the frames that he hung on his wall above his desk. They were small, though they all took up different sizes.

"Eh!?" she cried, her eyes growing wide. "Are these... pictures of us!?"

Tokoyami narrowed his eyes at them. "As endearing as it might be, I hope you realize the chaos you've done to their already insufferable egos. Who knows what size they could even be compared to now."

Todoroki, who had been quite during the whole ordeal, ran a few of his fingers lightly against one of the frames. His eyes were gentle, not as stormy as they had been before. It was almost as if they had been cleared, slightly. "You even included me," he murmured.

Midoriya... had no idea how to respond to that. So, instead, he grabbed Ashido by the arm and
dragged her toward the entrance of his bedroom. "Now, let's go, I don't want to be here anymore," he called loudly, ignoring the ever-remaining flush to his cheeks.

Goddammit. He was so easy to embarrass nowadays.

=====

"Well then," Iida started as he clapped his hands, "it was a pleasure today. I can't wait to eventually move in with you guys for good, at least until our time here at U.A. is over."

Ojiro smiled up at him, a hint of shyness tugging at his lips. "Thank you, Iida. The same goes for me."

"And me too!" Hagakure called. There were a bunch more voices after that, but Midoriya didn't pay them much mind. He waved to everyone that left the dorms so they could go back home. A few of them had empty suitcases in their hands, probably because they hadn't moved all of their stuff yet and wanted to use them for the second time. They would probably pack things like clothes, chargers, toiletries, and electronics the night before they permanently moved in.

Midoriya sighed again as a quiet fell over the dorm room. Todoroki, Bakugo, and him were the only ones that remained.

After a while, Todoroki murmured that he was going up to his room—which had been converted completely into a Japanese-styled bedroom. It had shocked Midoriya completely, who hadn't expected anyone to get anything like that done.

And now it was just Midoriya and Bakugo, who was brooding silently. After a while, Midoriya got up to make himself some tea that Kayama had dropped off for him. U.A. also left behind some food that he could quickly whip up for himself and anyone else who stayed behind in the refrigerator, which had been stocked to the brim.

Making tea was a simple practice that he had been doing for forever, and he did the movements in a half-aware state as he let his thoughts wander slightly. As he waited for the water to boil, however, he found that there was a pair of eyes on him, which was disconcerting. He tried to ignore it for another second, but found himself just repeatedly tapping the end of his foot against the floor as the seconds ticked by.

After a moment of hesitation, he cleared his throat. Raising his voice to make sure he was heard even though he had his back turned to Bakugo, who was leaning against the wall he said, "I hope you don't mind humoring me, but I'm curious. Is there a reason you sent an explosion at Uraraka in the Floor Is Lava event at the sports festival? It seemed a little out of character for you, even if she caused you to lose one of your quirk chances—"

"I wasn't aiming for her."

Midoriya clamped his mouth shut. Oh. Well, that made more sense... Bakugo wouldn't waste two of his three chances on one person, unless they really warranted it. And Uraraka hadn't done that much —

"I was aiming for you."

Midoriya froze. An unmovable lump in his throat formed as he tried to speak up. His attempts to keep his voice friendly were lacking at best, and his voice cracked several times. "Aiming for me? That's... Is there a reason you did?"
From the corner of his eye, Midoriya saw Bakugo frown. He swallowed thickly as the blonde pushed himself off the wall he was leaning on and walked closer to him.

"Don't play dumb with me," Bakugo hissed.

"Dumb?" Midoriya tried, ignoring the pounding in his ears and the way his stomach twisted into knots. "I-I don't know what you're—" He cut himself off when a hand clapped down on his shoulder. Immediately, he could feel the heat from his palms, and a small burst of smoke seeped into the air from the contact. Midoriya tried to ignore the way the heat burned his skin through his clothes, they way Bakugo's eyes burned a deep red, the way the heat reminded him of—

He felt his breath hitch.

Bakugo was glaring at him full force as his grip tightened painfully on his shoulder. "That wasn't some freak accident. It was a challenge."

"A-ah challenge?" Midoriya asked. "I-I didn't—how was I supposed to know... Why are you even mad at me?"

"There you go, playing dumb again."

Midorya was entirely confused. "What- what am I playing dumb about—?" He flinched as a sudden burning heat overcame his shoulder, courtesy of the hand that Bakugo had on him.

"You think I wouldn't remember!" he roared. "All those times I heard screaming!!?"

Midoriya stared up at him with wide eyes. "S-screaming—" He froze. It suddenly clicked.

"All those times I saw you, sitting at the window for hours, never allowed to step a foot outside—all those times I woke up in the middle of the night to hear your stupid fucking sobbing—you realize that our bedrooms were right next to each other for fucking years, don't you!?"

Midoriya felt like he was holding his breath, like he couldn't find it in himself to breathe.

"What about all the fucking times I heard pleading when I walked too closely by your house!?!"

He felt a deep feeling of dread overcome him.

"How many, Todoroki!? How many people have to die!?"

"How many, Midoriya!? How many of those screams were yours!?"

Midoriya felt everything fade away as he stared into Bakugo's red eyes. Words at the tip of his tongue dissolved, disappearing too far out of reach to find again.

Bakugo's grip tightened even further. "What do you take me for, a goddamn idiot?" he hissed quietly. "While you're looking down on me, pretending I don't even exist in your fucking life, I've been working my ass off to become a hero in order to stop that shit. And the fact that you thought you could just ignore me, the fact that you could just treat me like I'm some idiot or side character..."

He released his grip on Midoriya. He tsked as he looked away, a shadow falling over his eyes.

"Whatever. I don't give a shit anymore." He turned his back to Midoriya, who was trembling. "People like you disgust me. Looks like you never needed my damn help anyway."

Help?
Midoriya's eyes widened even further.

*He... came here...*

Midoriya stared at his back as Bakugo walked away, head down and shoulders tense.

*To help me?*

And then, without thinking, Midoriya reached out to grab Bakugo by the shoulder. He didn't know what he would say, what excuse or apology would fall from his lips, what covering up he would have to do afterward—

The tips of his fingers just barely grazed the fabric of Bakugo's jacket.

He missed.

======

Midoriya was left behind, hand reaching out toward Bakugo, who never bothered to look back.

======

Todoroki tried to remain as quiet as possible as he slid down to the floor, curling into a small ball. His eyes were wide as he stared at the wall opposite him.

"*How many of those screams were yours!?*"

Todoroki had never been good with his words. And now, all semblance of vocabulary had dried and shriveled up in his throat. Despite hearing Midoriya's quiet crying, he couldn't bring himself to move and say anything to comfort him.

He felt sick.

(He never should have listened in on that conversation.)

======

Aizawa explained to the class the next day that they were going on their internships, and that people had already sent in their offers.

Todoroki had gotten the highest amount, Bakugo coming in second place. Midoriya had gotten a few offers as well, though not nearly as much as the other two had.

"*If you didn't get an offer, don't worry. There's places that accept interns year-round. You'll be picking from that list.*"

He then proceeded to say that they would be coming up with code names, in which Midnight burst through the door and said she'd be helping out. She also explained that they had to make the right choice, because there was always a chance that the name you picked would stick with you all the way into your career. She gave a knowing glance to their teacher, and Todoroki realized that she was talking about the name Eraserhead.

He could understand that.

Todoroki tried to ignore the obvious cloud of unhappiness that surrounded Midoriya as people came up to present their names. There were ridiculous names, like Aoyama's "I Cannot Stop Twinkling!"
(shortened to Can't Stop Twinkling)... that was really the only ridiculous name that Todoroki could point out. He wasn't really good with them, which was probably why he was going to use his first name. Asui picked out "Fropppy," which seemed to make everyone else relieved. Todoroki could admit, the name was nice.

Everyone went up one by one. Eventually, he presented his own choice. He knew that a few weren't exactly thrilled with it, but that was beside the point. He was perfectly fine with taking his first name. Iida followed his example, which was curious, but Todoroki didn't pay it any mind. He had heard what had happened to his older brother, and the boy was clearly going through a tough time.

Iida would figure it out though. He knew he would. It was just a matter of time. And anyways, Todoroki wasn't sure that anything more could go wrong.

(He was wrong. Todoroki would learn that everything could go wrong. It didn't help that Midoriya showed him just how bad it could get.)

Todoroki watched as he counted how many people were already done. Kayama then turned to the remaining two, which happened to be Bakugo and Midoriya. Kayama's eyes seemed to flash with worry when she noticed Midoriya's posture. She managed to hide it reasonably well, though he was sure that he wasn't the only one who noticed.

"Midoriya, are you ready to come up next?"

He seemed a bit hesitant as he stared at his board. He bit his lower lip as he uncapped his marker. It took him a second to come to a decision, apparently, but he wrote something on the whiteboard and stood up. He had bags under his eyes and was clearly exhausted, but his eyes held a glimmer of... some kind of determination as he turned the board around.

Todoroki blinked. That was... an interesting choice. Not that there was anything wrong with it, he just... didn't understand it, really.

"It was a nickname that I had when I was a kid," Midoriya explained. His voice was scratchy with lack of use.

And it suddenly clicked for Todoroki. A nickname that he enjoyed as a kid. Before... before all of the stuff Bakugo had talked about before, yesterday.

Kirishima raised a brow. "I mean, if that's what you want, go for it! I think that's a nice name for you."

Midoriya smiled lightly. Midnight stared at him for a while before she finally grinned and nodded. "But of course."

Todoroki chewed over the one word for a while. At lunchtime, after they had been handed their list of internship offers, Todoroki asked Midoriya about it for the first time.

"So... your hero name is Echo."

Midoriya looked him directly in the eye. "Yes. It is."

He didn't push him further.

=====

"Are you going to intern with your father?" Midoriya asked as they walked toward Heights
Todoroki nodded after a moment of hesitation. "Yes, I am."

Midoriya was quiet for a moment before he sighed. "I think I'm going to, too."

Todoroki glanced at him in surprise. "I didn't realize he sent you a request."

Midoriya frowned. "I'm not sure why he did either. It was probably because of the heat side of my
quirk. And anyway, our battle was pretty intense... he was probably wondering what all the
competition was about."

Todoroki hummed before nodding. "I can understand that."

Silence prevailed for a moment. He couldn't find it in himself to look Midoriya in the eye. It hurt too
much to.

"I can make dinner for us, if you want," Midoriya suddenly offered. "I'm feeling katsudon tonight,
but I'll make anything you want me to."

"Katsudon sounds fine," Todoroki said. He cleared his throat as the building they were heading
toward came into view. "Though we should make soba sometime too."

Midoriya smiled up a him. Todoroki was relieved that the darkness clinging to his eyes seemed to
lighten up considerably. "Well, Kayama showed me this really fun game called Uno, and I know it's
just a card game, but you have to understand, for a game so simple and meant to last only five
minutes, we've played a game that's lasted hours—

======

Todoroki pulled a blanket over the shoulders of Midoriya, who had fallen asleep before he could lay
down his last card. Midoriya was right, the games could last hours, and Todoroki felt a little bad that
he had kept him up into the wee hours of the night. The boy had eventually fallen asleep on the
counter, arms tucked underneath his chin.

Sighing, he adjusted the blanket one last time before turning around. He was about to head to his
room, only to find that Bakugo was standing behind him with an unreadable expression on his face.
Todoroki felt his happiness immediately drain out of him as his eyes took up a frosty glare.

"Bakugo," he said coldly.

"Half-and-Half bastard."

"You think you're cute," Todoroki replied.

"I'm not trying to be."

"And let me guess, you don't mean to be an asshole, huh?" Todoroki scoffed as he shouldered past
him. "Well, you failed in that endeavor. Hope you have at least some remorse to feel bad about what
you said."

Bakugo growled. "Remorse? You don't know him like I do."

An image of Midoriya struggling to open a box of noodles as he stirred a steaming pot flashed in his
mind. There was Midoriya, dumping out the water from his vase of flowers and pouring fresh water
into the glass. There were the times that he fidgeted with the flowers and their petals and leaves to
make them stand up higher, or look more healthy or wider...Then there was the hair pulling at their game of Uno, at being forced to pick up four cards when he had only one card left...

Todoroki felt anger strike through him.

"No," he hissed, "I don't think you know him as much as you think you do."

He didn't bother listening to him any longer as he turned back on his heel, stalking up to his bedroom.

Honestly, the nerve the boy had to yell at someone like that who had gone through that kind of trauma—to blame his pain on them just because they hadn’t recognized their neighbor... Honestly, it made him sick. Did he not understand what selflessness was? Did he not care for other people beyond "I have to be better than you"?

Todoroki huffed as he curled back into bed, pulling the sheets high up to his shoulder. He was really starting to like Bakugo less and less.

=====

"Ah," Midoriya said as he saw Todoroki the next morning, his cheeks already flushing, "I'm so sorry for last night. But thanks for bringing me up to my bedroom! I'm sure I would have gotten a crick in my neck otherwise, you know?" Midoriya was rubbing the back of his head awkwardly.

Todoroki glanced to Bakugo, who was eating a bowl of cereal in the kitchen. He made no outward reaction to what Midoriya had to say.

He frowned. "Yeah..." he eventually settled on. He scrutinized Bakugo's back, trying to make sense of the mess in front of him. He glanced back at Midoriya, who had noticed his wayward attention. Without thinking, he reached out and flicked his forehead gently. "Sure. And thanks for the game last night, it was really fun."

Midoriya smiled brightly. "It was my pleasure."

And Todoroki believed it.

(And so did Bakugo.)

Chapter End Notes

*sees that bloom in winter updated*

*read said update*

*looks back at my own fanfiction*

wow. this really sucks. like, it really, really sucks.

but i'll be serious, i'm so sorry if i've made anyone mad or unhappy with recent updates. i'm really really sorry, i know this is bad and i just feel awful about it.

also, I get it, bakugo is really ooc please don't call me out on it, it's two am and I am just
trying to give you a goddamn present

but anyway, just like I promised: here's your discord server.
I just wanted to thank each and every one of you for being so supportive last chapter. I hope that this makes up for it, though it might seem a little rushed, so I'm sorry about that. But here's to a chapter long overdue, and I'm super sorry about the quality.

Shinsou: III
Kaminari: IIIII
Sero: IIII
Mineta: II
Iida: I
Bakugo: II

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bakugo watched as rain pelted ruthlessly against the windows. Lightning flashed ominously, casting harsh light against the side of his face as dark shadows flickered in the room. The low rumbling of thunder was like a dark growl of some otherworldly beast, hidden in the dark misty clouds that seemed to stretch on for eternity.

At the moment, he was doing his best to ignore it as he finished typing up an essay that Aizawa had jumped on them. It was their last real homework assignment or some shit like that before they left to do their internships. Bakugo was pretty sure he just wanted to give them something to fuss over for his amusement. He seemed to like watching them squirm under his gaze, not that Bakugo was often bothered by it.

Todoroki was up in his bedroom—thank god, the bastard was nosy as hell and wouldn't stop glaring at him—and Midoriya was probably in his. Bakugo couldn't find it in himself to care.

The old hag had called him yesterday, and she said something along the lines of "You sound upset," which was bullshit. Upset would mean that he actually gave a damn about Midoriya. Did he? No. So he was pissed, not upset. Like hell he was going to cry baby tears.

It wasn't like he should even be pissed. Yeah, Midoriya's mum had come over every so often when she wasn't feeling happy in her home. At least, before she left permanently. And yes, Bakugo had grown to like Inko, especially since his own mother seemed to grow fond of her. When he was finally old enough to understand what the hell was happening, he had felt bad for Midoriya as a result. It was mostly because Inko had always talked about how sweet Midoriya was, and how much Bakugo would like him if they ever met. But clearly, his worry was unfounded, since Midoriya didn't even seem to be bothered by any of the stuff that he had gone through.

So why was he still pissed? He had challenged Midoriya earlier, he hadn't reciprocated it, so he should just move on. He was just another thing in the way of him becoming a hero, something he should ignore and shove aside.

Except, as a kid, when he realized that he had been unable to help Midoriya, he felt like it was a direct attack to his drive to be a hero. He was going to be number one, and to think he had been stupid enough to fail at being the hero someone needed... fuck, it was like a slap to the face. And
then he suddenly disappeared, and he was left behind.

So Bakugo had sworn to himself that he'd do better, be better, and he wouldn't fail again like that. He would be the number one hero—if only make up for his stupid mistakes.

And then Midoriya waltzed back into his life, all smiles and nervous laughs, and it pissed him off. All the things he aimed to do better was shattered right in fucking front of him. Who needed his help anyways? Not to mention the bastard pretended he didn't even exist, as if all those years he'd spent were for nothing.

And then the shitty nerd was going around, trying to help people like that Half-and-Half Bastard, and not only was it annoying, it was everything he didn't do. It irritated him beyond measure.

Bakugo was going to continue his internal rant when, suddenly, the lights sputtered. He glanced upward, and his scowl deepened when the bright fluorescent lights flickered again. He was about to stand up when the room was suddenly cast into darkness. A sharp flash of lightning briefly lit up the room before a loud boom rocked Bakugo to his core.

Shit. The power fucking went out.

Bakugo cussed loudly. He waited impatiently for the backup generator to work its magic before he remembered that it wasn't working properly for some reason, something. Aizawa had warned them this morning about it, and he told them to be prepared if the power cut out.

Bakugo hadn't expected it to actually happen. Figures.

He sighed as he shut down his old laptop and placed it beside him. The ceiling would be the recipient of his glare then, at least until he found it in himself to go back to his room. At this rate, it was just better to get some rest for the upcoming days rather than do anything else. He was already caught up on homework anyways, finishing his essay tomorrow wouldn't hurt him.

Swinging his body around so he was laying on the couch, he grabbed the blanket that was folded on the arm and pulled it over himself. He would go on a run to pass the time since the power was out, but it was obviously not going to happen with the rain pouring outside. As if he was actually going to get mud and water everywhere when he came back. And soaked clothes were annoying. The only thing worse than that were wet shoes and socks.

The storm was calming to him, in a way. Bakugo always liked storms. Thunder and lightning always interested him, though he would never admit that to Kaminari. He would get it in his head that his quirk was interesting to him, which, no, it wasn't. The boy would never fuck off, not that he ever really did.

Bakugo was just about to fall asleep, his mind starting to wander into dreamland when he heard light footsteps from the staircase. Almost immediately his eyes snapped open as he turned his head to glare at the newcomer. It was probably Midoriya, getting some fresh water for his plants or some shit.

And he was right. The idiot was scuttling down the stairs, except he wasn't carrying a vase. Or anything to put water in, actually. Instead, he was gripping what looked to be a stress ball in his left hand while his right hand held a journal and pencil. Bakugo noted that his left hand seemed to be frozen, and his knuckles were white from gripping the ball so tightly.

Midoriya noticed him not a second later, his eyes widening fractionally before he glanced away. He was clearly uncomfortable as he hesitated, and he stood there for a moment without any clear idea where he was going to sit.
Bakugo rolled his eyes. "I'm not going to fucking kill you, dumbass," he snarled. "You can fucking sit down." Not that Bakugo particularly wanted him to, but that was beside the point.

Midoriya seemed to grimace as he sat down in one of the armchairs, and he avoided making eye contact with the blonde. It was both simultaneously relieving and annoying, and he didn't know why.

Bakugo tried to close his eyes and ignore Midoriya again, but Midoriya was fidgeting constantly, even as he opened up his journal and began to write some shit down. When he heard Midoriya whimper after a particularly bad lightning strike, he couldn't help but sit up and glower at the boy.

"What the hell is up with you?" he spat.

Midoriya flinched, his eyes wide, and Bakugo faltered as he saw the fear in his eyes. Midoriya looked away again, but Bakugo could see the rings underneath his eyes and pinkness that surrounded it. He was pale, and his skin was slightly shiny from sweat—nervousness, perhaps, or panic. The ball in his left hand was squeezed tightly again, and Bakugo could see the way his hand trembled as it swayed back and forth.

"I-I... just don't like storms," Midoriya mumbled. He seemed embarrassed, though the usual pink flush that accompanied it disappeared with the pallor of his skin.

Bakugo felt his irritation spike. "Of fucking course you don't." He dropped back so he was lying horizontally again. After a moment, his chest constricted ever so slightly. He couldn't help but let out a snarl as his stomach did the same. He hesitated for a second before he spoke again, and his voice was just a hint softer than before. "How come?"

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed that something akin to panic flashed in those green eyes he always despised. Midoriya was quiet for a second before he finally spoke up, though his words were hesitant—almost as if he didn't believe them himself. He was probably lying.

"I... got lost when I went hiking once," he said. His fingers gripped the stress ball tightly. "It was on a mountain. No one could find me. A huge storm passed by unexpectedly, and I was caught in the middle of it for a while." He squirmed slightly as ran his fingers over the leather front of his notebook. It looked worn. "I've been scared ever since."

Bakugo's frown deepened. He considered asking what "a while" meant, but decided that if Midoriya was going to lie about part of the story, there was no way he was going to get more of the truth out. Though it pissed him off, seeing how hard Midoriya tried to lie to him... Though Bakugo wouldn't admit that he couldn't tell how much of it was a lie and how much was a truth, the "being stuck on a mountain during a storm" seemed like a core of the story. So he was going to stick with that, which led to many different trails of thought and dark additions that made him nauseous.

But instead of saying that, he sneered. "Your fault for being stupid enough to get lost."

Midoriya flinched, but he nodded. "Yeah," he murmured. "Yeah. I... guess I was being pretty stupid."

Bakugo tsked. "You don't have to repeat what I just said." He turned over on his head so he wasn't facing Midoriya anymore, effectively ending their conversation. The other boy remained silent, just like he wanted.

Even though Bakugo wanted nothing more than to sleep, he found that the uncomfortable sensation in his chest refused to let him. The rain pelting against the windows filled the silence, accompanied
by the occasional boom of thunder. There was also the faint sounds of the scratching of Midoriya's pencil across paper, but it was faint enough that Bakugo struggled to hear it.

A long time passed, and the storm refused to let up. Bakugo was sure that at least half an hour had gone by, an hour maximum if it wasn't. He couldn't tell, nor did he particularly care. Sleep continued to evade him, however, and so he was left to angrily think.

A bright flash of lightning caused Bakugo to open his eyes when the light could be seen through his lids, and he looked over the back of the couch with a little bit of curiosity. A terrifyingly close boom of thunder followed almost directly after, sending the hairs at the back of his neck upright. He heard Midoriya let out a whine, and as he looked back, Midoriya was chewing on one of his nails.

Yeah, a small voice in the back of his head whispered. All fine and dandy and happy, right? He doesn't need any of your help. Not that you'd offer it.

Bakugo clenched his jaw tightly and cursed a thousand times in his head. He growled as he pulled his earbuds out of his pocket, untangling them as he reached for his phone. With a few yanks, the cord was free of all knots. Bakugo plugged the earphones into his phone before aggressively opening his music playlists. Finding the one he was looking for, he clicked on it and paused the first song as he stood up.

Midoriya looked up to him curiously, his eyes wide and pitiful. Bakugo rolled his eyes and shoved the headphones over to the boy, who blinked at him in confusion.

"Put them in your ears, idiot," he snarled. Midoriya hesitated before taking his earphones and doing as he asked. Without warning, Bakugo turned up the volume so the music was louder than the storm outside and pressed play. Midoriya flinched at first as the music came through, probably because it was louder than he was expecting. Bakugo didn't apologize, even though he turned the volume down two clicks.

The playlist he picked was made up of calming, relaxing music—hopefully, it would be enough for Midoriya to stop whimpering like a pathetic lapdog. He then turned around and picked up the blanket, and Midoriya was caught off guard when Bakugo threw it on top of him.

"To block out the fucking lightning," he yelled, making sure he was loud enough over the music. Midoriya blinked up at him a few times before he eventually nodded, and he wrapped the thick piece of cloth around himself.

Bakugo rolled his eyes for the umpteenth time as he plopped back down onto the couch. Resting his arms behind his head, he stared up at the ceiling.

No, he didn't care about Midoriya. Not after everything he'd done to him.

Not one bit.

(When Bakugo looked over after a short nap, he found Midoriya sleeping soundly in the armchair. He pursed his lips, cursed softly under his breath, and then took the journal still in his lap into his hands. He went to go set it on the table, but he paused.

Curiosity won him over when he opened the journal. He didn't understand a thing inside, and no matter how many pages he flipped through, his confusion never ended.

Bakugo abruptly stopped on two of the pages. His eyes widened as he looked at drawing that spanned both of them. It was obvious that it was either really well thought-out or Midoriya just had a knack for placement, because it was well done. There was what seemed to be a smaller, younger
version of Midoriya, who was standing beside a boy in a wheelchair. They were both looking up at
the night sky, and the other boy was pointing upward.

Midoriya was smiling lightly. They both were. He was also holding onto a small little cup, which
had a single daisy inside. The other boy had wrapped his hand—not the one that was pointing—
around Midoriya's other wrist. The boy had dark brown hair and blue eyes and a sharp chin. His skin
was slightly darker than Midoriya's was.

It was obviously a happy scene. Or it was meant to be, except for the fact that Midoriya's skin had a
slight glow to it where the unknown boy was touching him.

Except for the fact that, in the shadows of the background, several silhouettes seemed visible.

It made Bakugo's skin crawl.)

=====

dead, endeavor,

dead, endeavor,

dead, welcome to our flames,

dead, welcome,

dead, welcome,

dead, welcome.

dead, have a seat,

dead, make sure you eat,

dead, so you're all stuffed

dead, before we cook you.

dead, burn you.

dead, kill you.

=====

Midoriya felt as if he were in a haze. He couldn't see anything, could barely hear and feel—but the
detachedness of it all made it hard to figure anything out.

He felt a puff of breath hit his ear. Someone was leaned toward him as they whispered to him coyly,
their voice familiar in all the wrong ways.

"Come on... aren't you going to even put up a little bit of struggle?"

There was a tightening sensation around his throat, even more so than before. He didn't know why.
Small pockets of pain circled his body—why was he even hurt?

There was a yell, a cry of his name.
Iida?

Another yell as a second breath hit the side of his face.

Todoroki?

"—iya, listen to us, please!"

There were hands on his shoulders, and the owner of the breaths hitting his face laughed. The puffs of air suddenly turned hot, almost too warm for comfort. Fingers dug into the skin on his back and front.

"—quirk over usage. He couldn't respond to you even if he wanted."

He felt his head loll forward as the small amount of support he was given disappeared. His legs buckled. He couldn't tell if he hit the ground or not. He still felt like he was floating, somewhere.

"No!" Wait... he knew that voice... "I won't let you take him!"

"Then take him back." Another laugh. "If you can."

Midoriya felt a hint of static reach his ears. There was a cold feeling circling around his back.

It reminded him of Kurogiri's quirk.

"No!" someone shrieked. "STOP!"

Midoriya woke up in cold sweat. The blanket was wrapped tightly around him, and it seemed to almost constrict him. The sounds of the rain and thunder had disappeared, and the music playing from Bakugo's phone had stopped. He was curled in the armchair he had been in when he fell asleep.

Another stress dream.

Just another stress dream.

It was just another stress dream.

======

Midoriya wasn't hungry.

He tried to eat, he really did. But the nightmares were starting to get worse, and Iida's mood hadn't improved over the past few days. Uraraka, Asui, Yaoyorozu, and Tokoyami were the only ones keeping up the conversation, and sometimes it fell flat. Todoroki sometimes chimed in when he felt like it, but he often didn't.

Midoriya had gotten the sleeping pills from Recovery Girl, just like Aizawa had asked him to all those weeks ago. He had been using them, but they hadn't seemed to affect his actual dreams all that much.

Of course, it wasn't that noticeable in his school uniform that he was getting slightly thinner, but he definitely did. It was hard to look at himself in the mirror and see the progress he had made disappear with the snap of life's fingers. It made him feel...

Sad.
It was such a simple, stupid word. But how else would he describe it? Sometimes, just a little 'sad'
seemed to fit so much better than 'depressed' or 'solemn' or 'despairful.' He wasn't any of those
things. Just a little sad.

Kayama had definitely noticed, though. They hugged often and regularly, and after she hugged him
once, she asked him if he was eating enough. He lied and said yes, that he was just doing some extra
workouts. She seemed suspicious, but she didn't say anything more.

Midoriya sighed as he picked at his food again. He did his best to eat, but... it made him incredibly
nauseous to do so.

"Did you not like your lunch?" Yaoyorozu asked him. She had a small frown on her face.

Midoriya shrugged. "I'm not hungry is all," he said quietly.

"I'll eat it," Todoroki suggested immediately.

Uraraka laughed. "I'll eat anything you don't want!"

Yaoyorozu sighed. "I would say something about it being unhygienic, but honestly, I can't turn
down food."

Midoriya slid his tray forward. "First come first serve, I guess," he murmured.

He watched as his food was slowly picked apart. Lunch crawled by slowly with nothing to do.
Thankfully, he was saved by Aoyama, who appeared at their table. He winked at Midoriya as he
smiled.

"Bonjour, mes amies, I was wondering if you would allow us to sit with you guys? Koda is a great
friend, but my excellency does not include sign language!"

Standing awkwardly beside the blonde was none other than the shy boy, and Midoriya sent him a
soft smile.

"Sure, that's fine by me. I'm sure everyone else agrees."

Asui nodded. "The more, the merrier."

It was a little odd, having just under half the class in one area, but no one seemed to mind. Aoyama
helped fill in some of the silences from before, and Midoriya practiced the little bit of French he had
learned. The boy had smiled at him, told him that his accent was atrocious, and laughed after.

"That's okay though, my friend, we learn with time! And I, your humble teacher, can help you get
better!" He stuck a pose, and Uraraka burst into giggles.

Koda and Midoriya talked quite a bit too. It was nice, being able to talk with his hands and not his
voice. It seemed so simple. Plus, Koda really was sweet. He talked about his pets at home, and then
he offered to bring some of his bunnies when he moved into the dorms after internships. Midoriya
happily said yes—he had always wanted to hold a bunny.

While it wasn't much, it made lunch just a little bit brighter.

And that was good enough for Midoriya.

====
Todoroki heard the trains before he saw them. The sounds of metal scraping against metal as the wheels locked filled his ears, and the train whizzed past, its windows gleaming in the overhead lights. The handle of his briefcase was cool in his hand, if only because he traded it from his right hand to his left. It was relatively heavy, almost a little bit more than it normally was. Todoroki had a feeling that there was more inside than usual just from the weight difference.

The artificial light above him flickered once, but the bulb was still shining brightly.

Todoroki listened half-heartedly as Aizawa spoke to them—something about not wearing their costumes in public or something like that. Midoriya was quivering beside him, clearly nervous as several of them got ready to board their trains.

Suddenly, Midoriya turned and bounded off. Todoroki followed him at a slightly slower pace as the boy reached Iida, whose train was about to leave.

Iida. Right.

Todoroki felt a frown pull at his lips as he saw the plastic smile he sent Midoriya. It was strained, and there was a pain in his eyes. Todoroki crossed his fingers that he would be able to recover some over his internships. And hopefully, it would be able to take his mind off his brother for a bit.

Midoriya said a few words to Iida, who nodded. His smile grew larger, but the mask was there. It stayed firm. Midoriya seemed to notice that too, and his shoulders sank as he looked at Iida's eyes. Without warning, he collapsed into Iida's arms and brought him into a tight hug. Iida looked uncomfortable and surprised as Midoriya leaned up to whisper something in his ear.

Todoroki wasn't sure what he said. But whatever it was, it broke through that mask for a split second. Iida's eyes widened as Midoriya pulled back, his arms falling awkwardly at his sides. He waved goodbye to him and then Uraraka, and Todoroki nodded toward the two of them. Midoriya was soon by his side again, and the two walked shoulder to shoulder toward their own train.

Todoroki glanced toward Midoriya, who was pondering something. His eyes had a faraway look to them that he usually gained whenever he was thinking hard about something. Eventually, his curiosity beat him, and he gently nudged Midoriya's shoulder.

"What did you say to Iida?"

Midoriya's eyes came back into focus. He bit his lower lip. "... Nothing special."

Todoroki didn't respond to that, even though he knew he should've. Instead, he let the subject drop as the two of them fell into a comfortable silence. The two of them took their seats, and most of the ride was spent without a word.

"You didn't have to go to my father's internship with me," he blurted out halfway through their trip. Midoriya opened an eye from where he was napping to look at him. He smiled lightly as he let his fingers rest on Todoroki's arm, a comforting gesture that never failed to break down those walls he always put up subconsciously.

"I wanted to, though," he said quietly.

Todoroki looked down at Midoriya's fingers, which provided just enough contact to ground him. "Okay," he said after. Okay.

Midoriya's smile seemed to widen for a second. He looked relieved.
Todoroki glanced out the window for a moment. He saw hundreds of buildings, some glass and others made of stone, before they disappeared back into a tunnel. The darkness curved all around them. Todoroki reached his right hand out, and he ran the pad of his index finger across the glass of the window. Small ice crystals exploded in a compilation of shapes. Midoriya watched in fascination as he drew small patterns onto the glass.

Todoroki allowed himself those seconds of peace.

=====

flaming garbage: Shouto, get ready to head to Hosu when you arrive. The Hero Killer has been seen around there, and we're going to track him down.

Shouto: Sure.

Todoroki showed Midoriya his screen. The boy frowned before nodding. But then he suddenly snorted.

"Flaming garbage, huh?" he asked quietly.

Todoroki smiled. "Yeah... Thought it'd fit."

=====

"I must say, All for One, I had been expecting more from you."

"Hm... And, dear say, what had you been expecting?"

"Someone with eyes. Someone who could see all the things they've done. I see more of a corpse than a man."

"How amusing. But I hadn't called you here to exchange banter... I'm sure you know why I need you."

"Hmph. Oh, I know. And what makes you think I'll help you?"

"Call it my intuition—"

"Hng!"

"— and I want you there, with Shigaraki when he launches his attack on Hosu city."

"... And you think your doctor holding a gun to my head will make me say yes?"

"Oh, come on now. Don't underestimate me. I know why you'd accept my offer."

"And why's that?"

"Because he'll be there."

"... How do you know this? Even with someone as powerful as you, you shouldn't have that information."

"I have my resources. Midoriya Izuku and Todoroki Shouto are interning with Endeavor, who will be heading to Hosu with them shortly after they arrive. He wants to track down the Hero Killer."
Midoriya and Todoroki stepped outside of the train, taking in a deep breath as they left the stuffy compartment they were in. Midoriya stretched his arms high above his head as he hopped from one foot to the other. His feet had fallen asleep on the ride, and it was a rather uncomfortable feeling.

Midoriya followed after Todoroki as the two walked through the streets towards Endeavor's agency. They got a few looks for their uniforms, which was both disconcerting but oddly familiar. Midoriya had gotten used to being looked at or recognized from the Sports Festival.

Midoriya knew when he had reached the building that the agency was located at. It was impressive and larger than most he'd seen. Sidekicks poured in and out of the building, though most were ducking their heads or swearing as they shoved their hands deep into their pockets. It didn't seem as cheerful or as energizing as other agencies might seem, like Ingeni—

Like Iida's older brother's had been.

"Come on," Todoroki said, breaking Midoriya from his stare. "We should come inside. We don't want to be late."

Midoriya nodded, his throat suddenly growing dry. He hadn't met Endeavor yet, and he really didn't want to. He knew how intimidating the man could be, and he was not looking forward to the pressure from his gaze.

Internally, he wondered how Todoroki even managed to bear through it.

The two of them walked through the front doors. Almost immediately, several pairs of eyes were focused on them. Midoriya had the urge to hide behind Todoroki, but he pushed away his discomfort and held his head high... ish. While facades would never be his thing, he thanked the lord he could put one on now as he ignored the whispers that followed him. Or maybe they were following Todoroki, seeing how he was the son of agency's head man.

They finally found some reprieve when they got to the staircase, and they climbed them up quickly. No one else was there, however, and so they were sent into a sudden silence where the mumbling of the people on the first floor couldn't be heard.

Todoroki's shoulders were tense as they got closer and closer towards what was presumably Endeavor's room. Though Midoriya couldn't tell, Todoroki seemed to know where he was going—or he was just a really good actor.

When Midoriya was sure that they couldn't possibly turn another corner, Todoroki abruptly stopped. He almost bumped into the taller boy's back, but he managed to freeze right before he did.

"We're here," Todoroki said tonelessly. Midoriya peered over his shoulder.

"Already, huh..." He swallowed the lump in his throat and wiped his sweaty palms along the front of his jacket.

Todoroki looked at him carefully before he turned around and opened the door to Endeavor's office.
Almost immediately, Midoriya could feel the heat that rushed out of the room through the crack of
the door. It was then opened wider, and Todoroki stepped through. Midoriya followed shortly
behind, not wanting to awkwardly stand by himself outside.

Almost immediately, Endeavor noticed the two of them. He stepped away from his desk to meet the
two of them in the middle.

"Get ready to leave here in fifteen minutes. We're going to Hosu," he ordered. "We'll train in an
agency there, but most of our work will be dedicated to either stopping crimes on the street or
hunting down the Hero Killer. Have everything you need." He stepped aside from them and outside
of his office, where he exchanged words with a man outside. He mentioned something about alerting
the agency there that they were coming before he disappeared down the hall.

Midoriya let out a sigh of relief. "That wasn't... too bad," he offered.

Todoroki was still tense, but he shot him a smile. "Yeah. You're right."

Midoriya cleared his throat as he set his suitcase and briefcase on the floor. "I really have to use the
bathroom, so... do you know where it might be?" he squeaked out, an embarrassed flush hinting at
his cheeks.

Todoroki exhaled sharply in amusement before he pointed behind him. Down the hall, two rights,
and then a left."

Midoriya sighed in relief. "Thank you so much..." He coughed into his fist. "I'll be right back."

=====

"We have breaking news! As of two hours ago, serial killer Kasumi Ryota, under the alias Horror's
Dove, has escaped. As of now, we have no clues to where his whereabouts might be, but the police
are currently working their hardest to put him back under arrest. Everyone, keep your eyes peeled
for this man—he's even been able to stand up to All Might himself. He was one of the co-leaders
from one of the most terrifying organizations known to this day, led by Ignition.

"Whatever we do, we cannot allow this man to continue working on the streets. He is very, very
dangero—!"

The TV was shut off, cutting the news reporter's statement in half. Horror's Dove grinned as he
glanced to the side toward his comrade, a giant German woman with cherry red lipstick and nails. He
had pale blue hair pulled into a low ponytail and navy blue irises, though what would have been the
whites of his eyes was a light gray. A holster sat at his belt, carrying a familiar gun of his that
matched him perfectly. He pulled on a purple mask, reminiscent of the one he had four years ago.

He turned on his heel as he made his way toward the entrance, and he flung open the doors. The
light was almost blinding as it filtered into the dusty room. Behind him, the woman snickered. Her
heels clicked against the floor as she walked up to him.

"It's show time."

=====

Ghost and Asagiri were crouched on one side of the alleyway as they watched Endeavor, Midoriya,
and Todoroki leave the former's agency. Sitting across from them was Daizō, who looked faintly
nervous.
"You okay?" Asagiri asked as she held her blonde bangs from her face.

Daizō glanced at her before sighing. "Meeting's today," he said.

Ghost snorted. "Don't worry about it. And just punch anyone who thinks they can go against you."

Daizō frowned. "That wouldn't get me very far."

Asagiri sighed. "What he means is that you'll be fine. Don't worry about any of this. You've been working hard with these people for two years now, and there's no way they can't listen to you."

Daizō felt his stomach twist into knots. "That's not what I'm worried about," he muttered to himself. He sighed as he stood up from his crouch. "Whatever. I'm going to Fade now; I'll be back as soon as I can. Make sure to keep on protecting him."


Daizō sent him a smile before he focused on forcing his power inwards. Before long, his vision of the world in front of him swirled and came out of focus. He blinked once and found that the ground and his surroundings were different; everything was brighter, more... white.

The platform for their society of time was always brighter than it normally would be. It was both a blessing and a curse.

It didn't take long for him to make it down to the room where they held most of their meetings, though it took a lot more walking than he'd wished for. Several times he had to squeeze past other people in narrow hallways, and he always apologized for getting even remotely close to their boundaries. As time travelers, cultures changed, and some people thought it disrespectful to touch strangers in public, or even get within their bubble of space. Daizō had learned that the hard way after getting a slap across the face.

It also took quite a few twisting and turning, which he found annoying. Several times he had requested that the meeting room be held somewhere closer to the main teleportation receptor, where those who Faded would appear. But they had vehemently disagreed, saying that they'd rather be somewhere private. Daizō was just annoyed that getting to the prison cells was quicker than getting to the meeting room.

When he finally made it, there were two guards standing on either side of the doorways. One of them was carrying a bracelet, and Daizō sighed as he recognized it. It was a quirk canceller, meant to prevent any of those who made up the council from going back in time during the debate. It helped show everyone's truest colors and kept any of them from revising their debates if they failed to make a convincing argument.

He didn't mind it, per se. It was just... a weird feeling. It also left him feeling incredibly exposed and uncomfortable—while he excelled in hand-to-hand combat, and he also had a few weapons hidden on his body, anyone could easily kill him if they burst into the meeting room guns blazing. And maybe that was just his anxiety speaking, but it was a nerve-wracking experience on top of the meetings themselves.

He held his arm out for the woman to wrap the bracelet around his wrist. It was cold and heavy, almost borderline uncomfortable as the metal dug into his skin. Almost immediately, he felt a feeling of deprivation come over him, but he ignored it. Instead, he nodded respectfully before slipping inside the room.

Curiously enough, he was the last one there, even though he was...
Daizō glanced at his watch.

... twenty-five minutes early.

Looking up toward the members of the council sitting at the half-circle table, he raised a brow. Some of them were red in the face as if they had just been angered greatly, while others were out of breath. Had they been arguing? That didn't make sense, had he gotten the wrong time for the meeting? Had they changed it last-minute?

At his entrance, one of the members (who had been standing on his feet, his hand balled into a fist in the air) cleared his throat. His face had suddenly grown ashen white. "Kimoto. I hadn't expected you here so early."

Daizō wasn't smiling. "Neither had I expected all of you to be," he replied as nicely as he could. "Did I miss something?"

One of the others, a woman with bright green skin, sighed dramatically. "No. We were just having an adult conversation." Without you, she didn't say.

"Right." He knew his voice came out strained, but there wasn't much he could do to stop it. He had been getting progressively worse at hiding his emotions the more he spent time with Sero and Hagakure. He made his way over to his chair, which was on the far left of the rounded table.

The man sitting next to him frowned. "I suppose we'll start this meeting early, then?"

"It's not like we have anything better to do," another voice called out.

Daizō had long since learned not to try to match a voice to a face, but rather soak in what everyone was saying. There were too many of them there to recognize, though he did remember quite a few outspoken ones.

"First things first: all of those who went back in time illegally have been captured. No hidden traces of anyone else were found," one man started. It was Morrison. "We've interrogated all of them. Around forty percent of them said that they didn't have a reason, that they were just joining because a friend or acquaintance had convinced them to. Thirty percent weren't time travelers at all, and they had only been dragged along because they had a relationship with someone who was."

Daizō frowned at those numbers as he rested his chin on his tent of fingers. His elbows were resting heavily on the wooden table in front of him. They weren't very convincing to him, but maybe that was just his bias talking.

Morrison continued, oblivious to Daizō's inner turmoil. "Eighteen percent had an actual reason to fight or had a personal vendetta against the society of time. Twelve percent were past offenders who wanted nothing but to enjoy the thrill of the fight."

Daizō was about to interrupt and ask about the woman who hadn't been seen until after the fight was over with. She had handed herself over, giggling as his friend had put cuffs around her wrist. However, someone beat him to the punch—a woman named Ray, if his memory served correctly, spoke up.

"What about Ahane?" she asked softly. "We never figured out where she went."

Morrison sighed. "No, we haven't."

"Bring her in, then," a gruff-looking man said. "If interrogation didn't work, then intimidation with
all of us here might."

"I don't know," a young man said airily. He glanced toward Daizō, which was fairly uncomfortable to sit through without reacting whatsoever. "She might say things that can come across as insensitive to some."

"Don't be a snotty-nosed brat," a new man said. His voice was crisp and clear. "It would be in our best interest to bring her before us before deciding her fate. She seemed to have a personal grudge against us, after all. It would be wise to understand her before locking her away forever."

"Manda is right," Ray said quietly. "It may be our only chance of finding out what she wants—and where she disappeared to for those three hours."

Morrison sighed. "Raise a hand for those who are in favor of bringing her in."

Daizō didn't hesitate when he raised his arm up high. Ray did as well, and then quite a few more. A few seemed to pause before they did as well, and they all glanced at him wearily.

It was really starting to get on his nerves. He wasn't liking the sudden appearance of this pattern.

Morrison clenched his jaw tightly. "And all in favor who wish for her to remain in her cell?" He raised his own arm, as did quite a few others—but the lack of them was obvious, even to Daizō.

Morrison hummed. "Seems as if we're at a bit of a draw—"

"Bullshit," Daizō said immediately.

Morrison looked over to him, and his eyes hardened. "Kimoto, it would be in your best interest to remain silent and respectful."

"What, do you think we're stupid?" he spat. "We can go on opposite sides of the room depending on our choice of answer if you really want to act so childish. Or you can cut the bullcrap and accept what was thrown in your face."

As expected, Morrison's face turned a deep red. He took in a deep breath as he struggled to remain calm, but Daizō could see the anger radiating off of him in waves.

"You know, Morrison," the airheaded boy from before said, "I actually have to agree with Kimoto for once. Pretty low blow."

_Something's wrong_, Daizō finally realized. _Morrison might be underhanded, but he's not usually so obvious. And it seems like..._

The block of tension that made the room unbearable and hard to break through only grew heavier. Daizō glanced between everyone's faces, and he felt his stomach drop to his feet. Some looked hopeful, while others looked like everything was falling apart in front of them. There didn't seem to be an in-between.

... _they're divided?_

Morrison was quiet for a moment, merely staring down the wall. It wasn't hard, seeing how he was in the very middle of the crescent. Finally, he cleared his throat and regained a hold of himself. Pressing the small button located on his wristband, he brought the bracelet up to his face to speak. "Guards, please bring Ahane down to the meeting room, from cell one-eight-seven."
Silence fell over them. The tension only seemed to increase tenfold with the quiet atmosphere. Daizō felt slightly threatened with the amount of anger and spite was rolling off in waves of several people—especially since it was aimed at him. The amount of friction going on in this meeting was beyond anything else he'd seen. If this devolved into a fight...

No. They had their wristbands on, which meant that none of them could use their quirks.

Right?

There was something whirling in his stomach, though—a fleeting thought, a fear that these people sitting across and beside him weren't telling the truth. He felt his *faerie whisperer* tug at him, attempting to tell him something past the quirk cancellation, and it was so, so tempting to tug his bracelet off.

He was scared. No, he was *more* than scared.

Apathy slowly crawled up his features as he stared down the side of Morrison's face. No, he wouldn't allow himself to be so easily swayed. Fear was the one emotion that would lead him to his demise—he couldn't let it control him, even if it was overpowering.

He shook his head lightly. Fear? These were his allies. They weren't going to hurt him. Sure, they weren't nice sometimes, or rarely, but they had an entire hidden society to run. They had to act quickly and surely, even if it meant being rude.

And anyway, they weren't even close to being his enemies. They had done nothing wrong to him or anyone else. No, they weren't enemies at all. His enemies hurt and killed people, which was definitely worse than having a few different opinions. No, they weren't going to hurt him.

He felt his anxiety spike. It was definitely because he felt defenseless without his quirks and his overactive imagination, not because of anyone else. Of course, he had been getting better with his anxiety and speaking with other people, especially after he interacted with his classmates more often, but he still sometimes struggled...

Especially when he felt cornered.

Somewhat reassured, he found his heart's rapid beating calm slightly as the doors opened once more. Three guards stepped through, two holding onto each of Ahane's arms. A third one followed from behind, gun drawn.

The two guards at her front let go of her as she was thrown in front of them. She was grinning as the two guards took her shackled arms. With a few adjustments on the settings, they wirelessly linked the bands around her wrists to the huge black receivers pressed against either end of the half-circle desk. Almost immediately after they let go of her arms, bright red lines of almost indestructible waves attached themselves to the bands around her wrists and ankles.

It was sickening to Daizō. Even if she was smiling that wide smile of hers, the fact that she was bowed in front of them, chained to the ground like an animal...

Bile rose in Daizō's throat. He swallowed to keep it down.

"Ahane," Ray said first. "Do you know why you're here?"

The woman let out a small giggle as she looked up at them. Her deranged eyes, lime green with hints of gray, widened with glee. "You want to know where I disappeared to, don'tcha?" she said easily, her smile still as bright as ever. There was a slight flush to her cheeks as if she was pleased with...
everything that was unraveling in front of her.

"Exactly," Manda spoke up. "So I hope you aren't going to resist. It will do nothing but hurt you further."

Ahane ducked her head as her shoulders began to shake with her small amounts of laughter. Daizō felt his stomach clench as she painfully reminded him of Toga. "What I was doing?" A shadow fell over her eyes as her greasy hair curled around her face. "What was I doing?"

Daizō could feel the tremor that went through every one of them as she burst out into laughter. It sickened him to his core.

Her head shot upward as her laughs echoed throughout the room. "Come on now, council," she began, "surely you can do better than that." She hiccuped once as her boisterous laughter calmed into small giggles. She gasped for breath as she paused. When she spoke again, her words were breathy and light. "I'm just trying to make a better world for all of us. Why can't you see that?"

Morrison's brows furrowed. "Make a better world? What the hell are you talking about?"

Daizō was just as confused. What kind of better world? Why would she even talk about one... And how did she plan on making it a better one?

Ahane tilted her head to the side as she looked up to Morrison. Her smile suddenly turned venomous. "Wouldn't you like to know, Morrison?" she said sweetly. "You think you're so cute, sitting up there in your high chair..." Another giggle made its way past her lips. "You know exactly what you've done."

Daizō felt confusion build up in his chest. He didn't understand at all what she was talking about—had the woman from a few days ago, Morrison's assistant, been correct? Were they really all deranged and just doing it for the sake of it?

"I'm only going to ask you one last time, Ahane." Morrison stood up, pushing his chair back. "Why did you do this?"

Her smile slipped from her face. She suddenly turned solemn, and it made the hair on Daizō's arms stand on end.

"Ehhh," she said, her tone tinged with anger. "Why don't you tell me, huh? Why the hell do I have to answer questions that you already know the answer to?" She spread her arms out wide. "You sicken me. All of you. You act all innocent, knowing damn well what you've done." She snorted. "You're only going to ask me one last time? Fine. Kill me."

Daizō felt his frown deepen. Was she so deluded that she believed what she was saying? And what the hell was she even trying to convince them? Daizō knew that he hadn't done anything to harm anyone, and he would know if one of the council members did. Everyone on the board was aiming for the better good, and the only way he wouldn't know about what they did was if—

His eyes widened. Stomach turning to ice, he glanced at the rest of the council members.

The only way he wouldn't know about it...

Ahane snorted. "Kill me, why don't you? Just like you did to everyone else who went against you! After all, anyone who doesn't agree with you just deserve to die, huh!?" Her lips tilted into a smirk before it collapsed, too angry to even try. She began to raise her voice, loud enough that everyone in the room could easily hear her without a problem. "Unless you want to experiment with me. Is that
what you want?” Her voice began to seep hate, and she began pulling at her restraints. "Is it not bad
enough that you preach little to no interference with the timeline, and yet you've been experimenting
so you can bless time travelers with the same power of the Ghost!?”

Daizō felt his mouth grow dry.

Morrison frowned. "Stop spouting lies—"

"Lies!?” Ahane shrieked. She yanked at her restraints again. "Lies!? You want to talk about lies,
Morrison!?” She was foaming at the mouth now, and her wrists began to bleed with the bands
rubbing against her skin. "What about your promise to me!" she yelled. "What about that contract I
signed, with your damn name on it!” Tears pooled in her eyes. "What about your promise to me,
that if I joined the time society, you would leave my brother out of it!?”

The airheaded boy chuckled under his breath. He twirled around in his chair.

Ahane was panting now, her chest heaving with her deep breaths, but her eyes were full of rage and
despair. "You promised me, jackass! AND THEN YOU TOOK MY BABY BROTHER AWAY AND
EXPERIMENTED ON HIM LIKE AN ANIMAL, YOU FUCKING SON OF A BITCH!"

Morrison stared down at her coldly as the guards from before rushed up to her. The receivers on
either side of the desk were starting to groan from the strain, and so they grabbed her forcefully by
the arms. One of them attempted to push her to the ground, but she knocked them with her elbow,
forceful enough to make them trip over their own feet and hit the floor.

"You want to talk promises, huh!?" she yelled up at him, even as she struggled against the guards.
"Well here's my fucking promise," she growled. "You're going down, like you're meant to. And I
found the best person to bring you to your knees."

Morrison sighed before gesturing to the guards. "That's quite enough drama. Take her away—"

A soft voice interrupted him. "Experimentation?"

Morrison stiffened before glancing toward Daizō. His eyes, clouded over with cold rage, widened
slightly.

"What does she mean by experimentation?” Daizō asked quietly. Silence fell over the room as his
gaze jumped from face to face. Some looked guilty, others were entirely apathetic, while two or four
actually had the audacity to look annoyed. Daizō's grip on the arms of his chair tightened.

Morrison sighed as he rubbed the bridge of his nose. "Please don't worry about it, Kimoto. It's
nothing—"

"Nothing?” Daizō repeated incredulously. In a haze, he found himself standing, fists shaking as his
voice hardened. "You call experimenting on people nothing?"

The woman with green skin sighed. "Kimoto, this doesn't concern you."

"Excuse me, what the fuck?” Daizō blurted out, his tone frosty. The man beside him reeled back,
and he could see the paleness of his face. "You thought you could get away with hurting people,
with killing them? Is that what's happening to anyone who criticizes you!?”

"Kimoto—" Ray started.

"No!” he snapped. "What the fuck is wrong with you people!? Why the hell do you even think that
this is okay!? We agreed that we wouldn't change the timeline at all for the sake of making sure we wouldn't grow corrupt with power, and now you're experimenting to get Ghost's powers!? Now you're experimenting on our own people!"

Morrison stared at him coldly for a moment before sighing again. "Agreements change, Kimoto." Daizō felt his chest seize in fear when he heard heavy footsteps behind him. "And unfortunately, I don't need you anymore."

Morrison exhaled sharply as he reached for the bracelet around his wrist. Without much struggle, he unlocked the band—which should have been impossible, since the guards were supposed to have master control over its—

Master control.

Daizō glanced toward the guards below, who were struggling to hold down Ahane. He felt his blood grow cold.

The guards? The guards too?

He felt himself stumble backward.

Just how many people knew about this before I did?

"You didn't know?" came the horrified whisper. Daizō glanced down to see Ahane, her eyes wide with panic. "You..." Her voice cracked. "—didn't know?" She suddenly stopped struggling against the guards holding her back as she fell to her knees. Her hands found themselves by her head, and she gripped her scalp tightly. "No," she whispered, "no, no, no, what have I done—"

Morrison held the band up in the air, eyeing it carefully before he finally crushed it in his fist. He opened his hand, letting the shattered remains fall to the ground. "Guards," he said, "take Kimoto down to one of the cells. He's getting in our way."

"Don't worry about it."

"You've been working hard with these people for two years now, and there's no way they can't listen to you."

"No," he mumbled under his breath. And then, louder: "You do this, and they'll kill you." Asagiri's smile and Ghost's soft laughter came to mind. He thought about all his acquaintances in the time travel regulation department. He thought about everyone who had mysteriously lost a fellow time traveler, whether it be friend, family, or foe.

"They'll kill you!" he spat. "When they find out, they'll kill every single one of you!"

Daizō felt his throat clench as a large hand wrapped around his shoulder. His emotions boiled in his heart, in his throat, and so, without any mercy whatsoever, he grabbed the guard by the back of his neck and slammed his face into the desk in front of him. The man he had been sitting beside leaped up in shock, and he cowered behind the broad-shouldered woman he was next to.

Almost immediately after the man hit the ground, his band lit up with a warning sign as it glowed red. His vision turned white with the amount of pain running through his body. Throat burning as a scream ripped its way through his throat, he tripped on his own feet as the sparks of electricity swarmed him. He felt himself tip backward, and a second pair of arms wrapped around his torso, keeping him from hitting the ground. He tried to squirm out of the tight grip, but there were shackles suddenly wrapped around his wrists and forearms, useless behind his back, and the metal was
digging into his skin. It hurt, it hurt, it was just like that time he was taken by Shigaraki, it was just like that—

Morrison clicked his tongue in annoyance, though Ray watched with wide eyes and a face full of guilt. But she didn't stop the guard from pulling him away, from heading to the prison cells.

Feet dragging against the floor, he let out a panicked sound of pain as he struggled futilely against the man behind him. He had a strength enhancement quirk, and yet Daizō had nothing to work with but his bare hands and feet. He slammed his head backward, and the man yelped in surprise. Another guard with powerful muscles appeared by his side, and she helped restrain him. She gripped his arm tightly enough that he was sure he was going to lose the feeling in it.

Ahane was still muttering as he passed her. "—the only good one, I've killed the only one not corrupt—"

Anger boiling in his chest, heart pounding, he dug his heels in one last time as the guards threw the door open. "No!" he yelled. "I'm not going anywhere until you answer my questions!"

Morrison sighed. "You're too young to understand, Kimoto," he said quietly as he clasped his hands behind his back. "Maybe we could have seen eye-to-eye, if only you weren't so young. Seventeen-year-olds are too inexperienced for topics like this."

Daizō gritted his teeth as he felt a wave of fury overcome him.

"You'll die in hell!" he screeched, just as they shoved him through the doorway. Ray flinched.

"YOU'LL DIE IN HELL, YOU SICK BASTARDS!"

===== 

Ahane had tried to appeal to All for One by saying that she was upset that the society of time wasn't using their power available to them.

It had been a lie. A lie to try to convince All for One that he was what she wanted.

And he was what she wanted. But she wanted him to rule, not because of the lack of power the council showed, but because they had always been corrupt. Because she needed to avenge all the people they'd killed.

Kimoto was the first step, she thought. With him gone, the council would fall apart.

But she was wrong. She was wrong.

Kimoto had been the last thing, the last obstacle, in the council's way.

And she just gave them a way to break through him.

===== 

Midoriya and Todoroki had never been more awkward, but it was hard to be anything otherwise when riding with the number two hero.

Luckily, the ride was over, so there wasn't much more suffering to do, but there was no doubt that the tension was obvious. Neither of the Todorokis seemed to be that affected by it, though, so he just tried to downplay his obvious nerves as they arrived at the place they were going to stay at.
It turned out that he and Todoroki would be sharing a room, which wasn't really bad, or anything. It made Midoriya slightly uncomfortable to think about it, but Todoroki had already seen his scar and natural eye color. So there wasn't much more to show him, other than the scars that he had on his body... but Todoroki probably had his fair share of them over the years.

They finally dropped off their bags in the room. Midoriya sighed happily as he stretched his back, his spine popping pleasantly.

"Do you have your hero outfit?" Todoroki asked quietly as he pulled out his own briefcase.

"Hm?" Midoriya asked as he turned to face him. "Oh. Yeah, I have it with me."

Todoroki laid his case on the floor. He flipped the latches before opening it. "Well, Endeavor wants us in the training room in ten minutes. We're going to be doing a lot of in-field training for the rest of the week, mainly tracking down the Hero Killer..." Todoroki reached for something in his case. "— but for tonight, he wants to see where the two of us are in our training. If he thinks we're not good enough, he'll be focused more on honing fighting skills into us rather than going out into the public."

Midoriya nodded. "So don't mess up," he concluded quietly. He reached for his own briefcase, and his eyebrows raised when he opened the lid. Sitting on top of his new suit was a small note, and he picked it up without much thought.

**Hey splits-in-midair (or should I call you Echo now?),**

**Hiya! I made a few adjustments to your suit. Hope you don't mind too much.**

Also, you told me that you don't really like fighting with large firepower and like to focus more on smaller range attacks rather than large ones. I also heard a few complaints that you kept on getting really close to losing your source of metal for your quirk to work.

So, I decided to continue with your "superhero theme" and get some inspiration from that. I hope this helps a little bit!

— Hatsume Mei

(P.S. Just tell me if you need any adjustments!! I'm here for you, and everything you could want is at my disposal! ;D)

Midoriya bit his lower lip as an array of thoughts went through his head. He didn't mind being called Echo, really. It was a familiar nickname, though it made his stomach leap into his throat a few times.

The reason he chose the name in the first place was because... well, Dabi and Kayama had told him that he was worth more than an objective, or was worth as much as the class. But years of the same objective being drilled into him was impossible to shrug off—he wished he was like Todoroki in that way. The best he could do was try to accept and reconcile with that voice that was part of his past... and hopefully make it into a name that he could relate to in his life now, with Class 1-A. And that was the best he could come up with.

He placed the note to the side and pulled out his suit. The vest was folded underneath it, and while that was mainly the same, his actual suit was very different in color and design. It was a darker green, which matched his hair color, and the belt was shaped differently.

He laid both of the vest and the suit out, the belt soon following, when he found what Hatsume had been talking about.
Todoroki was looking over his shoulder, and he hummed thoughtfully. "Metal bands?"

Midoriya picked up the thick material, circling them in his hands. They seemed so familiar...

"Wonder Woman," he suddenly breathed out. "That's where she got the idea from." There were matching sets for his wrists and ankles. Though the metal was thick, most likely to prevent it from breaking easily, they were incredibly lightweight.

"Smart," Todoroki commented. "Now you don't have to worry about your quirk's flaws."

Midoriya nodded. "Yeah. I can't believe I've never thought about it before..." He frowned. "But I'm going to have to get used to fighting while incorporating a style that fits with this."

Todoroki shrugged. "I'm sure you'll be able to figure it out." He pulled at his tie, letting it come loose enough so he could untangle it.

Midoriya stared at him as he turned away. Broad shoulders facing him, Todoroki let his tie drop as he began to unbutton his shirt.

Oh.

Midoriya cleared his throat lightly as he looked away. Right. Changing. Respecting people's privacy. Not staring. Yep. That was a thing he could apparently do.

He pulled at his own tie, letting it hit the floor before slipping his blazer off. He couldn't help but sigh in relief some—it was boiling hot outside, and he couldn't take much more heat.

"Is there a specific bed you want?" he asked through the lump in his throat, and he cringed when he heard his voice crack. There were three beds in the room—one right by the front of the door, one nearest to the window (which he had been standing in front of) and one in the far corner.

Todoroki grunted. "Take the bed in front of you, and I'll take the one over here."

Judging by where his voice was, he meant the bed in the very far corner. Midoriya could see why. Being right by the door to the hallway, where plenty of people walked past, could only be nerve-wracking...

He grabbed his blazer and placed it on the end of the bed. Fumbling with the buttons on his collared shirt, he tried to ignore the rustling somewhere behind him. He didn't really like showing his skin to his classmates, even though they had to change all the time due to heroics classes. But they were nice enough to avert their gazes since it was obvious he was anxious about the whole ordeal.

But it was just him and Todoroki this time, and it felt awkward without the sounds of laughing and teasing, along with the occasional chatter.

By the time he had finally gotten his suit on, he heard the click! of Todoroki's belt as he snapped it in place. He had stretched his arm to zip up the back of it, only to be annoyed when he found that it dipped lower than it had in the previous version of the suit.

"Here," Todoroki said, "I'll get it."

Midoriya felt panic rise up in his gut as Todoroki's fingers latched around the zipper. Oh god, the scars on his back were worse than pretty much any other place of his body—unless they were counting the neck, but that didn't count. He really hoped Todoroki wouldn't notice, oh, but of course he would notice something like that, and he was going to point it out and there was nothing he could
possibly do and it'd get super awkward—

"There," Todoroki said. "Hope that's better."

Midoriya let out a sigh of relief that he hadn't known he'd been holding. Todoroki hadn't said anything. That was... nice. "Thanks," he mumbled, not looking him directly in the eye. He reached for the vest next, and he pulled it over his head. It was lighter than it had been last time, and thinner too—which he was incredibly thankful for. He wasn't sure he had sweat as much in one sitting as he had at USJ when he was fighting in his suit.

His red combat boots and belt came next, which were quick additions before they went out the door. Todoroki lead the way as they walked down the hallways.

"Just as a warning," he murmured back, "my father is very harsh when it comes to training regimens. So... if you need a break, just tell me. I'll do my best to get him off your back long enough."

Midoriya wanted to reply the same way. He wanted to say that Todoroki could rely on him just like that if he needed to.

But he saw the desperation in Todoroki's eyes, and his mouth clamped shut. He felt fear roll his stomach into tight knots.

"Okay," he whispered back.

Todoroki nodded, his eyes foggy with thought. When they arrived at the training room's entryway, Todoroki turned back to him.

"Just..." His hands raised as he struggled to find a place to put them. "Be aware that we're in a public place. So if you're badly injured, just scream. He'll be forced to act like he cares and get immediate medical help."

Midoriya placed a hand on his forearm. "I'm going to be fine, Todoroki. Worry about yourself."

Todoroki didn't have any outward reaction, but he nodded for the sake of nodding. After a moment of hesitation, he opened the door, and he slipped in quietly.

Midoriya, feeling his throat dry, followed after him.

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Daizō stared up at the ceiling of his cell.

And then, a small whisper.

"I'm so sorry."

Daizō glanced over. It was a young boy, no older than sixteen. His eyes were watering.

"I didn't... I didn't know you were a good guy," he finally settled on. His voice was slightly muffled behind the barrier. His face scrunched up as he sniffled. "I thought you were just as bad as the rest."

Daizō stared at him for a long time. And then he sighed, leaned his head back against the wall, and counted the number of shapes he could make out on the ceiling.

"It's fine," he finally settled on.
The boy continued to cry. "You'll never be able to get out of here, though."

Daizō hummed.

He wasn't so sure about that.

=====

Sitting heavily in his shoe was a small blade.

=====

Cool fingers gently pressed against the bruises around his arms. Midoriya sighed in relief as a numbing feeling lessened the slight pain he was going through.

Midoriya had figured out that Todoroki's warnings about screaming for help were most likely for just safety precaution, in case the man's temper flared too high. Overall, Endeavor was actually well-controlled.

Did that mean that he was left unscathed after his training? No. He was probably black and blue. But permanently injured? Nope. Nowhere near that phase.

Sure, he was hurting a lot in a few areas, but the pain wasn't that bad, and he was mostly overwhelmed by exhaustion. Endeavor had been careful not to hit him in any overly sensitive areas as well, which meant that he would probably be fine moving around and fighting the next few days against relentless villains.

"I'm sorry," Todoroki said again for the thirtieth time in the past hour. "You shouldn't have gotten hurt." He adjusted his hold against his forearm, and another wave of refreshing coolness went through his muscles. Midoriya felt himself melt under Todoroki's careful work—he wasn't sure he'd ever been so happy with frost covering his wounds. But they numbed the pain a little, and that was all he could ask for.

"It's fine, Todoroki," Midoriya reassured as he rubbed his upper shoulder carefully. He made sure not to displace Todoroki's hands. "He didn't hurt me that bad." He also had avoided his past injury, mainly his stomach area—he hadn't been exactly subtle about it, but Midoriya had noticed it, and he had been thankful for it.

Of course, Midoriya was still angry with him, especially since he was doing all these terrible things to his son... things that were easily unforgivable. But Endeavor also could have done a million things worse to him and Todoroki tonight. He didn't. And for that, he was thankful.

Todoroki didn't seem too convinced that he was fine, and it made Midoriya feel guilty; the other boy was clearly suffering over something, and yet he couldn't find a way to resolve it off the top of his head. He found that words were currently failing him at the moment, more than in any other way had before.

Midoriya shifted slightly, and he flinched when his shirt rubbed a bruise on his back the wrong way. The two of them had already washed up and gotten dressed into their sleep attire, shedding their hero clothing for the next day. Todoroki was sitting beside him, carefully numbing the bruises so he wouldn't be in so much pain.

Todoroki noticed him flinching, and he paused in his work.

"He hit your back," he said quietly.
Midoriya felt his insides squirm. "It's not that bad, really," he said hurriedly. "You should really focus on your own injuries now—"

"I don't care about your scars, Midoriya," Todoroki interjected. Midoriya's mouth clamped shut as Todoroki glanced up toward him. "I've seen them before. It's fine."

Midoriya glanced away. "Oh. Okay."

There was a moment of awkward silence. Todoroki seemed to struggle to gather his words before he finally spoke again. "It's okay if you're not comfortable with them, but I'm not going to judge. I just want to help relieve the pain."

Midoriya hesitated. He pressed the pads of his fingers against each other as he fidgeted slightly. "It's—I mean, I don't mind per se, it's just... I don't know, I just—"

"Are you ashamed of them?" Todoroki asked bluntly.

Midoriya opened his mouth to object, but he felt something stir in his stomach. "I..." He brought his legs up to his chest, and he rested his chin on his knees. "Maybe? I haven't really thought about it."

Todoroki hummed before shrugging. "If you don't want to, I won't force you. But they're just blemishes in your skin. There's nothing shameful about them."

Midoriya hesitated. "You won't mind them?"

Todoroki paused before gesturing to his face. "As if I'm one to talk."

Midoriya blinked before snorting. "Right, right." He felt his small smile falter as he turned around. Rolling his shoulders, he reached his hands back to grab onto the hem of his shirt. He paused before pulling the loose fabric upward.

To Todoroki's credit, he didn't even seem to hesitate before he let his right hand drift over the shallow purple marks on his back. Midoriya shuddered at the chill, but he let out a sigh of relief when the pain in his shoulders was eased.

Wrapping his arms around his legs, he leaned his head forward. He felt the exhaustion from before start to grow heavier.

He heard Todoroki make a small sound that could be compared to a snort. "Tired?"

"Yeah," Midoriya said. He flinched as Todoroki's hand let out a burst of frigid air, much colder than he had been expecting.

"Sorry," Todoroki said. His fingers lightly grazed another part of his middle back, slowly relieving some of the pain.

"It's fine," Midoriya mumbled. As he was starting to drift off, he felt the cold fingers leave his skin. Before he sit up straighter, however, something warm traced a part of his upper shoulder. He stiffened. "Todoroki?"

The warm fingers dropped away from his back. "Sorry." Midoriya heard the creaking of the bed as Todoroki slipped off the mattress. "You had a pretty nasty scar there."

Midoriya frowned as he reached for the space of skin Todoroki had been touching. Almost immediately, he recognized the feeling of bumpy skin in a spiderweb of lines under his fingertips.
The scar was relatively small, though it looked beyond gruesome. It was as if someone had cracked his skin, or as if someone had smashed their fist into a window.

Sighing, he pulled his shirt back down. "Yeah, it's kind of odd looking," he agreed quietly.

Todoroki was quiet for a moment as he focused on icing his swollen hand, which had been stepped on. "Did you get it from your family?"

Midoriya blinked. "Huh?"

Todoroki hesitated. "Did you get some of your scars from your family?" Midoriya just continued to stare at him, and he glanced away. He pressed his fingers tighter into his palm. "Don't answer that if you don't want to."

Midoriya just continued to stare at him, eyes wide. A hidden emotion flashed in his eyes, and he frowned before pulling his covers around him. "It was just an accident."

"Like the scar on your neck?" Todoroki countered without thinking. Almost immediately, he regretted blurting it out. Midoriya hunched his shoulders and turned away from Todoroki.

"It's nothing," Midoriya said stiffly. "Please drop it."

Todoroki felt a lump form in his throat. "I— I'm sorry, I didn't mean to—" He felt shame crawl up his chest. Of course he would go and say something stupid like that, just like his father would. "Nevermind."

Midoriya didn't respond, leaving them in thick, uncomfortable silence.

======

A huge wave of heat washed over him. Midoriya hissed as his injuries, still sore from before, burned in pain.

"Shouto, Midoriya, get out of here!"

Midoriya's head snapped up toward the owner of the voice, and he found Endeavor with his flames roaring high over his body. Todoroki stood tense beside him as they ignored the panicked civilians running past them.

"Wait, but what about the nomus—" Midoriya started, but he was cut off as a loud explosion rocked the building beside them.

Todoroki's hand gripped his bicep tightly. "Come on, we're just getting in the way."

Midoriya bit his lip. "But we're meant to— to help people, not just run away because we feel like it —!"

"Don't question my decisions, Midoriya," Endeavor hissed. "Help with evacuation if you want, but you cannot initiate any fights unless you want to get killed."

Midoriya hesitated from speaking up again as Todoroki's grip on his arm tightened. "Let's go."

Biting his lower lip, he felt his stomach twist again before he nodded. "All right." Todoroki nodded back at him as he turned around, already going into a sprint. Midoriya followed closely on his heels, not wanting to lose him as well.
The day after Midoriya and Todoroki arrived at Endeavor's agency (and trained with him to see the height of their abilities, which casually reminded Midoriya that he was not as strong as he needed to be), they had gone out into Hosu city. They were trying to track down the pattern for where the Hero Killer would strike next—Midoriya had kept his tongue held, even though he wanted to point out that the serial killer often targeted heroes in isolated areas.

Throughout the day, the three of them had taken on minor villains and thugs attempting robbery and muggings. While Endeavor's focus had been solely on the Hero Killer, he also let them help in such situations. It was good practice for Midoriya, who was getting a handle on his new technique with his wrist braces. While it was nowhere near perfection, his progress was better than he had been expecting.

When dusk had begun to fall, all hell broke loose. Nomus, around three or four in all, began attacking the city. The news was broadcasted all over the city, warning people to stay away from certain sectors. Hundreds of civilians were forced to evacuate as huge fires swept up from the ground.

It was chaos.

Midoriya clenched his jaw as he saw a woman stuck underneath some rubble. She was coughing into her elbow as she reached out toward them, and ash covered her from head to toe. An image of Uraraka from the entrance exams flooded his mind, but he brushed the picture away as he slid in front of her.

"Todoroki, help me get this off of her," he said as he grabbed the bottom of the rubble sticking outward. The woman sighed in relief as Todoroki paused and came by his side. It took a lot of grunting and pain as the two heaved the heavy object upward, muscles straining as the woman crawled out from underneath it. Her leg was bent weirdly, and he had to pull her up with her arm around his shoulders.

"I got you," he promised, though he felt a sinking feeling enter his gut.

"Come on," Todoroki said, "we need to keep moving. The last thing we want is for the nomus to catch up to us."

"Right." Midoriya adjusted the woman's arm around his neck so he could give her more support. She cried out in pain, but she lifted her leg up as to not put weight on it while they moved forward. Todoroki put out small fires with his ice as they passed, directing civilians in the right direction they needed to take.

As Midoriya passed by a store with news media coverage of the attack plastered all over the TVs behind the front glass, he felt his blood turn to ice.

"—and they're dangerous people. Whatever you do, do not head toward the Hosu city attack right now, no matter what kind of attacks you've been able to witness in the past right in front of you. This is not the same thing, and I don't care if you have a powerful quirk, that does not make you invincible. We have already recorded that there are around eight attackers at the moment—three of which resemble the villain All Might faced off with in the USJ attack. The other five are unknown variables and are not approachable. They will kill you on site. So to those who think they're strong enough, get ready to put your life on the line, because—"

Midoriya felt his organs twist in his chest. Todoroki followed his gaze and frowned. "Five unaccounted attackers."
Midoriya tasted acid in his mouth as he picked up his paused pace. "Do you think that they're part of the League of Villains?"

"Wouldn't doubt it," Todoroki replied as they turned a corner in the street. "Shigaraki might be a man-child, but giving up on revenge seems too out of character for him."

Midoriya flinched as another onslaught of memories overcame him. "No kidding," he muttered to himself. The woman still leaning heavily on him glanced at him curiously with pain-filled eyes.

They turned another corner, and Midoriya couldn't help but let out a happy noise as he saw an ambulance and first aid crew bustling around the street. The woman was also happy, and she almost collapsed in relief as they hobbled over to them.

They were several meters away from the medics before they noticed them. The man who first caught their eye devolved into muttering as he grabbed the woman from his arms.

"It's okay, ma'am, you're going to do just fine, we're going to heal you up, okay?" he said firmly. None of the panic that he was probably feeling seeped into his voice and Midoriya couldn't help but admire that. "Let's get you into the ambulance." He huffed as he fully took on her weight. "We'll get you out of harm's way as soon as we possibly can." He turned away from the two heroes-in-training, but not before nodding respectfully. Midoriya nodded back, but Todoroki's focus was elsewhere.

The medics closed the back of the ambulance. "We're full," he called to the driver as he jogged over to the passenger seat. "Let's drop them off by the hospital."

Midoriya watched as the truck started to move down the street. Some of the medics that were being left behind in order to provide medical help to any that they found began to spread out through the streets. "Stay out of the way of the heroes!" the oldest man said. "Head towards the busiest streets!"

Todoroki tapped his shoulder as they disappeared, already out of view. "Midoriya, we need to get out of here. The nomus are heading this way, and—"

Had Midoriya heard his next words, he probably would have agreed.

*we're laughing, laughing, laughing,
come get us,
come get us,
get up,
get up,
get up todoroki,
we've got work to do!
welcome to our game,
come play with us,
come play with us,
you'll see what life really means!*
Except, the world around them suddenly shook like an earthquake was reigning hell on them. The street beneath them cracked in several places as the buildings beside them started to crumble. Glass shattered. Screams broke out around them.

"Get down!"

One of the skyscrapers shuddered as it began to collapse. And there it was, the loud shriek of a nomu, and then there was a loud bang of an explosion.

And Midoriya felt pain, and heat, and darkness.

=====

When he woke up, his back ached.

When he woke up, he was in the ICU.

When he woke up, he was missing chunks of skin in his left shoulder, and bandages covered every part of his skin from his back to his left side.

When he woke up, he learned that he lost the index finger of his left hand.

When he woke up, he found out that Todoroki took the brunt of the blast.

When he woke up, he turned on the news.

"Two heroes-in-training were severely injured this most recent weekend in the Hosu attack. If that doesn't make this worse, we found that the Hero Killer: Stain has struck again, killing hero Native and fellow hero-in-training, Iida Tenya—"

=====

Midoriya screamed in anguish.

=====

Aizawa burst into the room, and his breath hitched in his throat as he caught the gaze of his student. He froze, unable to bring himself to move.

"A-Aizawa-sensei," Midoriya choked out. There were dried tear tracks on his cheeks, and he was hiccuping. His arms had been wrapped in huge casts, and thick padding was wrapped around his chest and back. He was sitting up, though he was swaying from having to hold himself up.

Aizawa couldn't look him in the eye as he stumbled forward. "Midoriya—" His voice was strained. "—are you all right?"

Midoriya's breathing was quick and sharp as tears pooled in the corner of his eyes. When Aizawa reached his bedside, Midoriya leaped up and wrapped his arms around his neck. Aizawa placed a hand against his student's trembling shoulder as he leaned forward.

"He's dead," Midoriya whimpered, and his voice was full of pain. Aizawa was sure that it wasn't just because of his injuries. "He's dead, Aizawa-sensei, he's dead—"

Aizawa felt a lump form in his throat as he ran a hand through his student's hair. Some had been singed off from the fire. "Hey, you're going to be okay, it's okay—"
He knew he was lying. *Nothing* about this situation was okay.

He wrapped his arms around his student, being mindful of his injuries as he enveloped him in a hug. He may not be good at comforting people...

Midoriya whimpered into his arms, breaking down into full-on sobbing and unintelligible speaking. ... but if *Midoriya* of all people was desperate for contact, then he was going to damn try.

======

"You're lying," Todoroki hissed from his seat in his wheelchair. He already felt pathetic, useless, unable to help Midoriya from getting attacked again, but this couldn't be true—

Endeavor didn't say anything for a moment. His fire had been burned out, and he was no longer in his hero costume.

He was just Enji, now.

"Son—" he tried again.

"Don't call me your son," Todoroki spat. His voice was hoarse. "I never was, and never will be. You lost that chance years ago." His fingers gripped the arms of his chair until his knuckles turned white. "And any hope that remained should have died with my classmate."

Enji didn't say anything for a long, long time. He looked at Todoroki, who was more bandages than skin at that point, and felt the heart in his chest ache. He took in a deep breath, regaining that small glint of steel as he turned on his heel. "Fine, Shouto," he replied coldly. "If that is what you prefer."

He slammed the door shut behind him.

======

**Translation:**

*I've... been thinking about trying to go back. To go back and just head for Iida; but Endeavor would surely notice, and he would stop me. And if I tried to head toward Iida when it was just me and Todoroki, then that would surely cause more complications. Todoroki would want to bring the woman we found to the nearest medical attention, which would only lead him to getting injured like he had...*

And I really, really don't want to force that onto him.

*But what other choice do I have?*

======

Midoriya stared at the ceiling of his hospital room, journal in his lap. In his hand was a pen, but it was shaking from the exertion of writing with it. His handwriting on the pages was a mess.

He thought over his plan again. Iida or Todoroki? Would he have to risk Todoroki's life for Iida's? No, he cared about both of them, he couldn't let any of them die on his hands...

His face formed into a scowl as his grip on his pen tightened. "No," he spat. "No."
There were seventeen students standing in the rain. Most of them had umbrellas of their own, but some did not. They were all wearing dark clothing as they bowed their heads. Some of them were crying.

There were two students sitting in the rain, each in a wheelchair, too weak to support themselves yet. Kayama stood behind Midoriya, hands gently rested on his shoulders as a sign of comfort. Except it really wasn't comforting at all to him, and it just felt like an extra weight that couldn't be shaken away.

There were fourteen students standing in the rain, two sitting, and one teacher.

There were eight students standing in the rain, two sitting, and one teacher.

There were two students sitting in the rain, and one teacher.

And then there were two students sitting in the rain.

Todoroki watched as the clouds passed by. The pounding rain fell into a drizzle until it passed entirely. He felt his chest clench tightly, the feeling of loss freshly branded into him. It was like losing his mother all over again, except this time, he knew that there was no chance he was alive.

Iida's family had paid their respects the day before, wanting to be alone for the ceremony. Tensei obviously couldn't be there. He was still recovering. Perhaps it was for the best that he didn't come, though. The young man was so upset already, and no one knew how much more he could put up with. Tensei had even tried to break himself out of the hospital when he heard, and even though he didn't get much farther than outside his room with his wheelchair, it was still something.

He opened his mouth, ready to speak even though his throat felt like sandpaper. "I should've known better," he said for the first time in about a week and a half. He bowed his head, voice coming out as a strangled whisper. "I should have known better." His shoulders shuddered, and then he hiccuped. Todoroki brought his hands up, burying them into his hair even as pain coursed through his arms. "You weren't happy when your brother got attacked, I saw that. But I didn't think—I didn't think..."

Beside him, Midoriya looked on with a stoic gaze. His eyes were bloodshot, and he had been crying for most of the day. It was the first time he looked as vulnerable as he did with his emotions so clearly expressed. Now, though, he looked as if he was struggling to even look like he cared. There were deep, haunting bags underneath his eyes, and his gaze was blank, numb.

Perhaps he couldn't find any more emotion to spill. It had been the opposite for Todoroki, who had quietly held his emotions back until it became too much and overflowed.

"I'm sorry," he eventually decided on. The words were heavy on his tongue, too big for his mouth to hold, too thick for him to swallow. "I'm sorry I couldn't save you." His eyes watered again, and he hated it, hated it. He had promised himself years ago that he wouldn't cry again—but, when it came down to it, Iida's death was more meaningful than any promise he'd made.

It hurt especially because he had never truly known Iida as well as he should have. Instead, he had ignored his classmates, so driven to be better than any of them, to prove his father wrong...

He listened as the birds chirped. He listened to the crunch of the crisp leaves as they were stepped on. He listened to the rustling of the flowers and bushes as they swayed in the wind.

Todoroki glanced over to Midoriya, whose eyes were red and puffy. His eyes still weren't showing
any emotion, though his lips were pulled into a deeper frown. His hands were shaking in his lap, especially his left—Todoroki flinched when he remembered the amount of pain and injuries they went through. They could barely move their arms, and it hurt to sit by Iida's grave without any resting. Todoroki's body wanted nothing more than to lie down, though his heart refused it.

In order to pay their respects, they had to argue with Aizawa and All Might. It took days to convince them to let them come, and even then, Aizawa had been thoroughly disapproving. Kayama had come close to forbidding Midoriya from coming—she was his guardian, apparently, though Todoroki hadn't been sure exactly when the development occurred. Perhaps they too found out about Midoriya's history with his family, which helped the burning in his chest that he was suffering as well.

Todoroki felt his heart wilt as he heard Kayama's footsteps coming closer. They were running out of time to say their goodbyes for the day. It would be difficult to convince their teachers to let them come back until they were on their own two feet. Which would take too long—most likely, they would be forced to stay in the hospital for another four or five weeks for physical therapy.

Todoroki suddenly felt lost. After physical therapy, then what? Say goodbye to Iida forever? And then back to U.A. it was. His father would never accept him giving his dream up. Could he just go right back to training to be a hero? How could any of their class move on from something like this, in fear that they'd be killed before they even started?

They sat there quietly, listening for a few seconds to Kayama's footsteps before Midoriya cleared his throat. It was his first time speaking in four days, and his voice was scratchy and grating. Todoroki wiped his eyes frantically with the back of his hand, trying to ignore the site in front of him so he could respond to the person beside him.

"Todoroki?" he whispered. An array of split-second emotions crossed his face before settling into that same stoic expression, except there was something there in his eyes. A spark. "Can I ask you something?"

Todoroki looked to him slowly. He didn't understand the sudden question directed toward him and why Midoriya looked so desperate. Perhaps he was in denial? It would make sense, Midoriya had been pretty close with Iida, but to look as if there was hope, as if something could go right...

Todoroki felt his heart squeeze in his chest. He didn't want to hear any more. He wanted to hold his hands over his ears and scream. "What?"

Midoriya hesitated. And then he raised his bandaged, shaking, malformed hand toward Todoroki.

"Do you trust me?"

Todoroki's lips were pressed into a thin line. He felt his feelings rear up in his chest, partly annoyed that he was in the middle of grieving and Midoriya wanted to talk about trust. What had trust done for him? "Why are you asking this? Why do you even care?" he asked quietly.

"Please." Todoroki's emotions flared up again. "Please, Todoroki."

Kayama's footsteps were coming closer. "Boys, have you said what you wanted to say today?" she asked gently, though she was loud enough to hear.

Midoriya still hadn't said anything to Iida. Todoroki felt a bitter taste rise in the back of his throat. He frowned. "Midoriya—"

"Please, Todoroki," Midoriya whispered. "Please, just take my hand."
Todoroki's eyes widened as that anger in his chest dampened slightly. There it was, that desperation that he held so tightly on to. Midoriya's eyes were flowing with tears again, and his expression was scrunched up with pain.

"Boys," Kayama's voice echoed as she got closer to view. "Boys, can you please talk to me? Are you okay?"

Todoroki looked between his two green eyes, hesitating momentarily. Midoriya looked deeply upset, almost like a switch had been flipped, and he was trembling. "Midoriya? What's going on?"

"P-please, Todoroki," Midoriya whimpered as he spread his fingers out from his outstretched hand. He was shaking like a leaf in a hurricane.

Todoroki swallowed past the lump in his throat. He glanced back toward Iida's grave, toward the flowers placed in front of the tombstone. I'm sorry, Iida. I hope you can forgive me for helping my friend. I just... can't let this happen to anyone else.

And then, ignoring the pain in his shoulder, he reached up and took Midoriya's hands. "I trust you," he said quietly. "And it's going to be okay."

Midoriya exhaled shakily before sending Todoroki a quivering smile. "Thank you," he murmured.

Todoroki felt a wave of nausea suddenly overcome him as his stomach tied itself into knots. It felt like someone was gripping either side of his stomach and twisting it, around and around and around. Vision swimming as he felt his body lock into place as if he was frozen from the inside out, he felt the acid in his throat grow overpowering.

What the hell was happening?

From the corner of his eye, he saw a blob of color—was that Kayama?

And then everything he could see blend together into a dark black.
He gasped as his eyes flung open.

He heard the trains before he saw them. The sounds of metal scraping against metal as the wheels locked filled his ears, and the train whizzed past, its windows gleaming in the overhead lights. The handle of his briefcase was cool in his hand, if only because he traded it from his right hand to his left. It was relatively heavy, almost a little bit more than it normally was.

The artificial light above him flickered once, but the bulb still shined brightly.

"Please..." Todoroki whipped around to face Midoriya. His shoulders were curved inward, and he seemed overly exposed. He had that familiar haunting gaze, though he looked fragile, like he was terrified that Todoroki would break him the minute he connected the dots. His hands were clenching and unclenching at his sides, and Todoroki zeroed in on his undamaged hand, all five fingers present and attached.

"Please help me."

=====

endeavor,

welcome to our flames,

watch as we breathe the heat,

watch as we take what belongs to us,

watch as we kill your son's hope,
i hope you're ready to burn.

Chapter End Notes

Heya guys, I've read this fic lately and it doesn't really have that much support even though it's really good. Not sure if it's your cup of tea, but it's one of the few fanfictions I actually enjoyed concerning its basic plot. I don't want to reveal anything, but if you want to check it out, it's a suggestion from me.

But anyway... can't wait for the chapters coming up. What about you? But thank you so much for all of your support!

To Struggle
Midoriya felt static piling in his ears as he trembled.

This idea was not only incredibly dangerous, but it was also not very well thought-out. But he had run out of ideas too soon about how to solve this, and he needed someone to understand—someone who could realize the severity of the situations at hand and why he did what he did.

But to bring someone back with him?

Midoriya tried to swallow, only to find that the lump in his throat was too big and it only served to make his nerves worse. He felt his left hand's fingers twitch as he tried to get them out of their frozen state. He was getting a mixed reaction as he stared at Todoroki's shoes.

He had known the dangers of bringing someone back in time with him. He knew it was possible—sure, he hadn't ever actually tried it before, but his time manipulation quirk was nothing but versatile. It may have taken him a few seconds to figure it out, but overall it was much easier than he had expected it to be.

But now there was the hard part.

*Like actually talking with Todoroki about what just happened.*

Midoriya felt his shoulders tremble slightly as he clutched the handle of his briefcase tightly in his grip. The sounds of the doors to the trains behind them opening simultaneously could be heard, but it was muffled in Midoriya's ears. Biting his lower lip, he felt his voice tear itself out of his throat.

"I'm sorry," he croaked. He felt his eyes water—it seemed like they were incredibly overreactive those past few weeks. "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry—"
A heavy hand landed on his shoulder, and Midoriya flinched as he looked up. Todoroki's dual-colored eyes stared back at him, wide and uncertain. His breathing was shallow as he looked him up and down. "You're— you're okay," he choked out, and with a start, he looked down at himself. "We— I don't—" He raised his other hand in front of him, marveling at the unscarred skin.

He then flinched, an uncountable number of emotions flashing through his eyes before he glanced to the side. He paled. "Iida," he whispered, and Midoriya followed his gaze to see Iida's back as his suitcase rolled behind him.

Midoriya's lower lip trembled as his eyes stung. He had wanted to say goodbye to Iida if only one last time in case things went wrong, but he had to explain himself, give Todoroki an answer.

Todoroki continued to stare at Iida for a second while Midoriya stared at the side of his face, the growing pit of dread in his stomach making him too uncomfortable to look for long. He felt guilt knaw at his chest as he saw the heartbroken look in Todoroki's eyes.

Midoriya opened his mouth, ready to apologize again when Todoroki's grip on his shoulder loosened suddenly. Todoroki still looked slightly overwhelmed, but the shocked look in his eyes had faded slightly.

"You..." he started weakly. "You have to say goodbye to Iida, right?" His expression turned serious. "You should go before we're late to get on our ride."

Midoriya stared at Todoroki, jaw slacked. "You... I—"

"It's fine," Todoroki interrupted, his voice laced with that small bit of apathy he always carried with him. "We can talk later. And when we're not so in the open." He squeezed Midoriya's shoulder lightly before letting his hand drop to his side. Without waiting for him, he picked up the briefcase he had set on the floor and turned on his heel toward Iida. "Heroes have to be prepared for anything and react accordingly. And anyways—" He turned to face toward Midoriya, who scuttled to catch up to him. "—there are more important things to do, I think."

Midoriya couldn't help but stare at Todoroki in awe for a moment. For him to act so calmly after something like that had been thrown in his face...

He bit his lower lip as he nodded. "Yeah—" His gaze flitted over to Iida. "—I think you're right."

======

Iida felt his breath hitch as Midoriya's arms, which were wrapped around him, tightened slightly. He leaned forward and—in a soft, desperate whisper—he said, "I want you to know that you're like a brother to me too. So please be careful. I wouldn't want the same thing that happened to your brother to happen to you."

Iida felt his gut twist uncomfortably as Midoriya stepped away from him. For a moment, he felt like reaching out, at regaining that comfortable warmth, but he stopped himself last second. He glanced to Todoroki, who bowed his head.

"Be safe, Iida," he said. "And we'll always be there to help you if you need it."

Iida pursed his lips as Midoriya looked up at him pleadingly. His grip tightened on the bar of his suitcase. "Thank you," he forced out, slightly confused by the way Midoriya seemed to wilt. He wasn't sure exactly where this sudden desperation was coming from. "I'll keep it in mind."

Todoroki nodded. "All right. But just know that we'll be there when you need us."
Iida smiled before he turned away. It dropped soon after; he was unable to keep it up with the whirlwind of emotions bubbling in his gut. He glanced back one last time to see Midoriya with his shoulders hunched. Todoroki bumped shoulders with him gently, and Midoriya shot him a weak smile.

It made him feel unexplainably guilty.

=====

Todoroki didn't bother looking at his phone as it buzzed in his pocket. Instead, he pressed his right fingers against the window next to him and began tracing patterns with a hint of thin ice that followed it. Once again, Midoriya watched, enraptured. This time, however, he leaned heavily against Todoroki's side.

Todoroki glanced down toward him as he felt a shudder wrack through the body glued to his side. "Midoriya?" he murmured quietly. "Are you okay?"

Midoriya nodded, though he looked glum. "I'm sorry," he whispered for the umpteenth time. Todoroki sighed lightly.

"I told you, you're fine. I'll be honest, I'm a bit confused about what's going on, but..." He glanced toward the window again. "I know that you'll explain it when we get to the agency. And..." His eyes grew clouded over as his brows furrowed. "You've given me a chance that I thought wasn't possible. I couldn't ask anything more from you."

Midoriya nodded, but he still looked deeply upset. Todoroki didn't have any way to sufficiently comfort him, so he continued to draw patterns on the glass. But his strokes were awkward, and he felt too tense to make the area of the glass last. And so halfway through the trip, he had run out of room. Midoriya fidgeted awkwardly.

Todoroki was quiet for a moment, letting the stillness hang between them. On the other side of the train, a baby was crying, and it made Todoroki cringe as their lack of conversation stretched on and on. Midoriya was growing more and more distressed if his shivering had anything to go by. Grasping onto the first subject of conversation that came to mind, he placed his right hand along Midoriya's left forearm before speaking.

"You don't have to tell me how this is possible," he murmured, "but we should at least figure out how we're going to fix this." Eyeing the groups of people around him, he cleared his throat as he flailed slightly. Eventually, he settled on a cover-up in case anyone was listening in—Endeavor taught him long ago to and he allowed himself to speak louder. "We could have done much better with our exercise. All Might wasn't clear where exactly we did though since he was running out of time. Do you have any idea?"

Midoriya was quiet for a moment as the information sunk in. It took a moment before it clicked, and he shifted uncomfortably when it did. "I think," he started quietly, "we should have left the hero earlier." He spoke slowly, almost like he hadn't quite solved the problem either. "I think it was good that we saved the woman, though. But we should have been quicker to get her to the ambulances."

"Maybe if we got her there more quickly, the ambulances would have left sooner. And the rest of the backup medics, too."

Todoroki hummed. "But then we got attacked and put out of commission."

Midoriya nodded into the sleeve of Todoroki's blazer. "So we should leave early, and then get her medical attention sooner. That way the medics are out of the firing range."
Todoroki looked away. "And then track down our teammate?"

Midoriya tensed beside him. "Yeah," he said, his voice strained. "He was probably in one of the alleyways."

"How will we fight off the villains there?" It was an uncomfortable thought, Todoroki would admit. He didn't doubt that he and Midoriya could do it, but fighting the Hero Killer himself...

Midoriya seemed to hesitate before he spoke up again. "I think that you're better for long range attacks," he said quietly. "So I can get up close and personal."

Todoroki frowned. "You're still learning how to fight in close quarters with your quirk, though."

"I guess it's the best time to learn then, huh?" Midoriya sunk deeper into his chair. "And anyway, if it comes down to it, I can try to use a full-on attack like I did during our fight at the sports festival."

Todoroki didn't seem to be very happy about it, but he agreed. "I understand."

Midoriya sighed as he curled up further into his chair. He looked miserable, almost like he hadn't slept in days. Todoroki wouldn't be surprised if he hadn't—with Iida's death, he had spent most of his nights staring at the ceiling in self-pity.

But, he supposed, while he had been mourning over Iida's death, Midoriya was more likely juggling grief, pain, and his obvious anxiety—Todoroki didn't know just how many people were aware of this power he had, but it had to be very few if he was so nervous about revealing it. Overall, Midoriya couldn't be feeling great, let alone being alright.

It was a slightly painful thought. Todoroki had noticed that Midoriya wasn't doing too well before their internships either—his refusal to eat and sunken eyes were not relieving in any way.

"Are you okay?" Todoroki finally ventured. He wasn't good at comforting, but with everything going on around them, there was no way that Midoriya was feeling fine. He certainly wasn't—he was still shaken up, hearing the words he's dead, he's dead ringing in his ears.

But Midoriya just turned and smiled. His eyes crinkled in the corners, hiding the way tears formed there. "I'm fine," he choked out. "You shouldn't have to worry about me."

Todoroki swallowed thickly. "Okay."

It hurt to say it.

He didn't know how he'd missed it before—that look in his eyes, the raw pain on his face... It sickened Todoroki, made him wonder how he let it get worse with time. Because now that it was pointed out, it was so obvious.

But he didn't know how to help. And so he hunched his shoulders and looked away, trying to ignore the frustration building in his chest.

=====

Asagiri paced back and forth down the alleyway.

"He's not back," she growled.

Ghost watched her with bored blue eyes as he leaned his back against the window. He was sitting on a ledge, one leg dangling while the other was curled up by his chest. "Be patient. You know how
long they drag those meetings out."

Asagiri shook her head. "Still, something's not right."

Ghost hummed quietly. "You seem sure of yourself."

"Call it a sixth sense." Asagiri clenched her hands into fists. "Something's definitely wrong."

Ghost tilted his head. "A sixth sense? Like a mother's sense?"

Asagiri's shoulders tensed. She scoffed. "I'm no mother."

Ghost moved his loose leg back and forth as he glanced down the alleyway. "Are you sure about that? You seem to act like it around Daizō—" An object whizzed through the air, aiming directly for the side of his face. Ghost flicked his fingers up, freezing it in place, still staring at the entrance of the alley. After a moment, he glanced toward Asagiri's direction, lazily gesturing to the glinting knife thrown at him. "You could have killed me with that."

"Good," Asagiri said brusquely.

Ghost huffed. "Seems as if someone's short, hm? You're usually the type to take a joke."

"That wasn't a joke," Asagiri snarled as she leaned heavily against the brick beside her, her back facing Ghost.

He sighed as he slipped down from his perch. Ignoring the knife still floating in the air, its movement paused, he walked toward her. "You're right, it wasn't. But I don't see why you so adamantly refuse the idea."

"He's my sister's son," she said quietly. "Not mine."

Ghost paused in his steps. "Okay," he agreed. "And your sister wasn't all there in the head, either."

Asagiri glanced back, eyebrow raised. "And you think I am?"

"I never said you were," Ghost replied. "I still think you've got some work to do. But you're not evil." He clicked his tongue as he stepped in front of her, and he leaned against the same wall. His mask was taken from his face, and the scars that he gained over his lifetime were on full display. "Or, you're not as evil as you used to be." He tilted his head. "Though, one could argue you never were in the first place."

Asagiri looked between his two eyes, her lips pulled into a frown. "I don't get where this is all coming from."

Ghost shrugged. "Maiko, you're many, many things. But empathetic is not one of them." He sighed. "Daizō will need you, eventually. And so when you say that you're worried about him, and yet you refuse to provide that care, that divide will break you."

Maiko sighed as she pressed her forehead against the cool brick. "You don't know me as well as you think you do."

Ghost snorted. "Oh, but don't I?" He looked up toward the darkening sky. "You may be good at acting, but I've known you since you were in diapers, kid. Take it from the eight-hundred-year-old
man. I know people better than they'd ever know themselves."

Asagiri was quiet. "Thanks," she said softly after a moment.

"Mhm. Just make it last while you can. You're, what, thirty?"

"Twenty-eight," she corrected. "Daizō left when I was twenty-six, and I missed seven years of his life when I traveled back late... And we've been reunited for another two years. So he's seventeen while I'm twenty-eight."

Ghost whistled. "Dang. An eleven years age difference?" His nose scrunched up. "Wait, does that mean your sister had Daizō when she was eighteen? Shit, I feel so old now."

Asagiri snorted. "If I feel old already, I can't even imagine how you're feeling."

Ghost opened his mouth, ready to reply when Asagiri flinched. Her eyes hardened, and she suddenly tore her sleeve up her arm, revealing a device strapped around her wrist. Her eyes widened.

"Shit," she cursed breathlessly.

Ghost immediately was put on high alert, and he shoved his mask back on his face. "What's the matter?"

Asagiri winced. "Daizō has a chip in his leg, just beneath the surface of his skin. If he presses hard enough on it, the chip will pick up the pressure. If it picks up a message in Morse code, it'll automatically send it to me."

Ghost sidled up next to her. "Just in case?"

"Just in case," Asagiri whispered. She fell silent.

"Well?" Ghost demanded. "What does it say?"

Asagiri waited until the screen of her watch turned off. She glanced toward him, a fire blazing in her irises. "They locked him up, Ghost. They're keeping him prisoner."

Ghost fell silent. The knife, still floating in the air, unpaused and went hilt-deep into the glass window, miraculously not going through.

Asagiri watched as Ghost slid to the floor.

=====  

Hiroji quietly hummed to himself as he chopped up the vegetables in front of him. Aika was sitting in the living room, watching some kind of TV show.

Technically, Hiroji was supposed to be working today, but Aika was just having one of those days. Hiroji knew better than to leave her alone for a whole day when she was feeling the way she was, and so he had called in sick. So here he was, cooking soup, glancing over to his daughter every so often to make sure that she was still watching the television screen.

Her eyes were slightly glazed over, and she seemed vaguely distracted—almost like she wasn't really hearing the episode playing even though it was so loud that it hurt his eardrums, and he had quite a bit of distance between them.

He sighed as he scraped the vegetables from his cutting board into the pot. They had run out of ice
cream hours ago, thanks to the several large servings Aika had gotten since this morning. He would have to go out and get more, but he was nervous. He didn't like leaving her alone, not when she was this vulnerable, not when she was so tortured by herself...

Perhaps it was just his experience from being in the police. But either way, he had heard too many stories, had seen too many innocent people do awful things to themselves—

"Dad?" Aika whispered. Hiroji had to strain his ears to hear her over the action-packed scene from the show she was watching. "Can I get quirk suppressants?"

**Awful things to themselves because of their quirks.**

Hiroji exhaled longly as he made his way to her side. Carefully, he sat beside her, watching as the main character on the screen punched black gloop. His fingers found their way into her hair, and he ran them through the strands gently, letting her lean against him. "I'll see what I can do for you," he promised.

They had gotten quirk suppressants for her before, but they made her terribly sick if she used them constantly—which was what she was aiming for. On top of that, if her medication wore off, her quirk would come back fiercer than ever before. Aika had decided years ago that she would drop the medication after one last straw, which was when she noticed the cost of it.

Now, Hiroji wasn't poor or anything. In fact, he was quite stable, and he was very well off for retirement. At this point, his job with gymnastics was just for the enjoyment of it all, though it did help him stay in shape, and he still was active enough so he'd (hopefully) live a long life—or a life where he wasn't confined to a chair and bed. But the medication was expensive, and he was considering taking up a second job at the time. When Aika found out, she cut herself off immediately.

The first couple of weeks after that were hard. Because her quirk was all out of whack, she was constantly suffering the effects of it. Sometimes, the pain was so bad that she couldn't bring herself to get out of bed. But after that, her quirk had settled down. There were the occasional bumps in the road, but she was getting better. And Hiroji was proud of her.

But there they were again, suffering over the same thing.

Hiroji wrapped an arm around her. "What's going on right now?" he asked gently.

Aika flinched underneath his touch. She rubbed at her eyes, which were watering up with tears. "Fire," she croaked. "And Izuku. And they're talking about his quirk."

=====

*aika, aika,*

*why do you want to take us away?*

*we're just trying to help you,*

*please, we want to stay!*

*we're your quirk, and no one else's,*

*so why are you trying to keep us at bay?*
Seventeen-year-old Daizō sighed as the guards walked past his cell again. One of them paused, smirked at him, and banged her fist against the translucent purple shield that separated the two of them.

"How are you feeling now, mutt?" she teased, her tongue glowing as small wisps of something dripped from her mouth.

Daizō didn't let the taunting faze him as he glowered coldly at her. A boy a few inches shorter than her peered at him, and his steps toward the glass were slow. "I don't think he talks."

Daizō felt the urge to growl at them grow significantly, but he swallowed his pride and just continued to stare at them. It wasn't like he could really do much speaking, anyway—unlike the other prisoners, who were free to roam in their cells, he had been chained to the wall furthest the entrance by his wrists and ankles. And, much like Bakugo had been after his win at the first Sports Festival, he had a huge mask wrapped around his lower jaw to keep him from talking. Apparently, he had too much vocal interaction with the prisoners around him, and so they took the "necessary" precaution.

It made Daizō want to spit on them. It was clearly obvious that they just wanted a reason to shove him into the dirt.

The female guard laughed. "Oh, I can't wait for when they decide to use him for experimentation."

The male guard sighed as the spots on his skin shook. "What, just so they end up killing him? You know that all their subjects die within the first hours."

"That's the point," the female with the glowing tongue said. Daizō felt his muscles tense as he pulled on his chains, frustration building in him. His arms strained with the tension, but he ignored it. A growing, bubbling anger simmered in his stomach as he stared the woman down. She didn't seem to notice. "Not like any of us cares, anyway. He's just going to rot here, might as well put some use to that body of his. We're gonna run out of people anyway, you know? We may have been able to pick up scraps, but—"

The chains snapped. He flung forward, fist slamming into the shield. The woman shrieked as she jumped back, and the other guard fell onto his backside as the shield shuddered.

There was a moment of silence, only broken by the man's heavy panting and the woman's panicked
gasps. Eventually, she broke out into breathless, wavering laughter. "Oh god, did you see that?" She rested her hands on her thighs. "With a little provocation, the lion snaps."

The male guard shoved himself to his feet, staring down at Daizō with obvious fear in his eyes. He reached for the radio at his belt, but Daizō beat him to the chase. He ripped the mask down from his mouth, letting it rest around his neck as the straps grazed his collarbones, and glowered at him. "Go on—tell them that they need to replace the chains," he said softly but coldly. The knuckles on the fist he punched with smarted with pain, but he ignored it as he placed his palm flat on the shield—the only thing separating the two of them. "I won't stop you. But good look getting them on me."

The woman's face paled, even as her wavering smile remained intact. Now that he was standing, it was obvious how much taller he was than the two of them. "Come on, let's go," she said as she rested a hand on his shoulder. "It's not like he could get through the shield, anyway."

Daizō knew she was right. He couldn't break through the shield. He wasn't powerful enough to do so.

But that didn't stop the guards from scuttling away fearfully.

=====

Three hours later, seven guards approached his cell, newer versions of the recent chains in hand. They were more durable, more powerful, and he probably couldn't break out of them, even with his quirks.

Two and a half hours later, two guards left with their consciousnesses intact. The other five were dragged and carried away pitifully.

And only one of the five chains made it onto Daizō's body.

=====

The next time the same pair of guards walked by, they only hesitated for a moment before moving on.

It was a relief—Daizō didn't want them to see him pressing repeatedly into the skin in his kneecap. Chained up, he sent. And then he crossed his fingers and hoped Asagiri would hear him.

(She did. Ghost could barely keep her from spitting fire.)

=====

Midoriya was dreading the moment that he and Todoroki were left alone after their fight with Endeavor.

He knew it was coming, and coming fast. But no matter how many times he tried to prepare himself, his confidence went and took a leap and flattened itself. And then his anxiety would spike, and then he would spend his time doing nothing but trying to calm his pathetic self down, and then he would go back to the roots of the problem, and then he'd try and steel himself, fail, panic, and then loop it all over again, and again, and again—

They were getting dressed into their suits when Todoroki made a move. Just like last time, Midoriya was reaching for the zipper in the back, and Todoroki pulled it up. Except this time, when Midoriya turned to face him, he didn't move away. "Midoriya—"
"Please move," he whispered, avoiding Todoroki's gaze. "We need to meet up with your father so he'll let us go with him on patrol tomorrow."

Todoroki didn't move, much to Midoriya's chagrin. Midoriya's breath shuddered as Todoroki's broad chest and shoulders continued to block his view of the door. He stared down at his feet, letting the silence crawl by. He shuffled his feet awkwardly. After a moment of hesitation, he tried to move past Todoroki, but the boy merely moved in front of him. Midoriya felt his breath catch in his throat.

Of all times that Todoroki wanted to do this... why now? He wasn't ready to talk about anything. He just wanted to go and get their fight over with and go back to sleep. He was so tired, and his body was aching, and everything just hurt all over.

"—riya?"

Midoriya blinked as he glanced up at Todoroki. His lips were pulled into a frown, though he had a worried glint in his eye.

"I've been trying to talk to you for the past minute or so. Are you okay?" Todoroki asked. He seemed really concerned now.

"You were?" Midoriya said. He rubbed the back of his neck. "I... didn't hear," he finished lamely.

Todoroki placed a warm palm to his forehead. "You don't seem to be sick," he muttered. "Are you sure you couldn't hear me?"

Midoriya's brows furrowed as he ducked his head, ashamed. Worry gnawed at his gut as he rubbed at his cheek nervously. Perhaps it was the same thing that had happened to him in the cavalry battle during the sports festival? But no, those weird voices didn't tell him anything like before...

Was it another effect of that... quirk? It was a quirk, wasn't it? It could be the only explanation. He'd suffered from the dreams that usually came with accepting one, and there was no other way to definitively explain what was happening to him. But where he even got those quirks was an entirely different conversation to have.

Midoriya cleared his throat. "Yeah," he mumbled. "I didn't hear a word of what you said."

Todoroki sighed. "Well, as I was saying..." He suddenly looked uncomfortable. "You don't—you don't have to tell me, you know. I've been thinking over it, and..." He trailed off, unable to finish his sentence.

Midoriya felt guilt rise into his chest at the sudden whiplash of emotions being laid out in front of him. "Wouldn't that hurt your feelings, though? I mean, you told me—" His eyes trailed to the scar on his face. "—all about your life. That would be unfair to you."

"Yes," Todoroki said. "But it's upsetting to you too, isn't it? What hero am I if I force you in a situation you aren't comfortable with for my own benefit?"

Midoriya looked away again, chewing on his lower lip. "I'll... think about it." And then, he hastily added, "Thank you."

Todoroki nodded stiffly. "Sure." He stepped back again, giving Midoriya some space. "Let's go before my father gets angry."

Midoriya nodded quickly again, following after Todoroki with his shoulders still hunched. Mind whirring as they grew closer to the training room for the second time, he felt the urge to grab onto
Todoroki and stay close to him. But he repressed it and gave them a bit of space, eyeing the people walking past them.

They arrived at the same door as they had before, and Todoroki opened it to reveal Endeavor's intimidating frame. And Midoriya didn't know why, but those flames flickered for a second, and *come on Izuku, don't you love me?* was whispered in his ear. He had half a mind to turn around and walk out right then and there.

Todoroki wouldn't blame him for it, probably.

Midoriya only half-listened to Endeavor as he repeated what he said before.

"If you do well against me," he started, "I'll let the two of you join me in my patrol tomorrow. If you can't keep up, you'll be practicing with some of my subordinates—" Todoroki stiffened from beside him. "—until you can. I'm not going to put you in dangerous situations if you don't have the firepower or skill to back it up. You'll just get in the way and I don't feel like doing any paperwork because you got injured."

Kaminari's voice appeared in the back of his head, mumbling "Oof."

*Thanks, brain. I really am appreciating the memes right now.*

Endeavor adjusted the wrist strap of his glove before lowering down into a stance. "Midoriya," he ordered. He flinched at his name being called by such a coarse and harsh voice, but he mirrored his stance. "You first."

=====

Gran Torino scoffed at him through the call. Yagi flinched. "Are you ever going to decide on a successor, Toshinori? At this rate, you won't be able to keep up One for All for much longer..."

"It's not like I don't have any ideas, Gran Torino," Yagi tried. "I just haven't decided for sure."

Gran Torino sighed. Yagi was sure that he was rolling his eyes. "Sure, whatever. And are you actually going to act on any of those ideas?"

Yagi felt awkward as he glanced at the pile of papers in front of him. "Well, I did have one person in mind..."

"But?"

Yagi sighed. "Well, for one thing, I still don't know much about them. And, secondly..." He hesitated, knowing that he was about to get his ear chewed off. "They already knew about One for All before I told them. And they said that they didn't want it."

"They knew about One for All?" Gran Torino murmured. "How is that even possible?"

"They think it's part of their quirk. A mutation or something," Yagi echoed, trying to remember what he had been told before. "They can sometimes interact from people of the past or future when they're asleep depending on certain circumstances." He wasn't sure he was quite on the mark when it came to that, but it was close—or, at least, close enough to get the picture.

Gran Torino was quiet for a moment. "And you believe them?"

Yagi didn't miss the tense. If Gran Torino suspected that something deeper was going on, and he
didn't trust Yagi's judgment, his "believe" would be past tense. However, he was directly asking Yagi if he was sure—it made Yagi proud that Gran Torino could actually trust his decision-making.

"Yes," Yagi confirmed, "I believe them."

Gran Torino clicked his tongue. "Either way, keep your eyes peeled, boy. I don't need you getting hurt or injured because you decided to trust someone else with your secret." He sighed heavily. "And actually try to find out more about him, will you? This whole "quirk mutation" thing seems like a bit of a stretch."

"I will," Yagi promised.

"Good. Now then, what the heck am I supposed to do with this brat? He has no combat experience, and I have no idea what I'm supposed to be teaching him."

Yagi sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose. "Ask Aizawa, I don't know."

"You want me to ask this brat's father how I should train him? Are you stupid? Ask him yourself."

Yagi glanced over to the aforementioned man. He was curled into a small ball in his yellow sleeping bag as Yamada yelled something random above him, waving chicken dog toys in the air. Yagi cleared his throat as he focused back on the phone call.

"I... might have to get back to you on that."

=====

Asagiri sat on the edge of the roof of the building, watching the front of the agency carefully. The wind was picking up, and she crossed her arms over her chest as the pinpricks of cold hit her cheeks. Her bangs whipped in the air, alighted by the lampposts erected just in front of her. She ignored the painful feeling in her gut.

"Ghost."

Ghost, who was sitting at the opposite end of the roof, grunted. "What."

"This loop's hit the fan, hasn't it?"

Ghost turned, eyebrow raised. "What do you mean?"

Asagiri exhaled sharply. "Think about it. The Society of Time platform is the same across the entire board for the timeline. So what happens when the version of Daizō that we're protecting goes to the platform? It'll be entirely different than when our version of Daizō went."

Ghost huffed out in laughter. "Well no shit." He sighed as he leaped off his perch and walked toward her. "That's why the platform is supposed to remain as simple and consistent as possible—so it can hopefully never change enough to cause big ripples in the timeline." He leaned against the concrete wall that reached his upper thigh and splayed himself on it dramatically. "No loop is ever the same as the rest. It's impossible. Are they similar? Sure. But never the same."

Asagiri's face flushed in anger. "I thought you guys said that this work was going to be easy."

Ghost groaned. "Oh, shut up. I thought it was going to be too. This is the first time I've seen the loop messed up so bad. In fact, this is probably the worst the loop is ever gonna get."

His lips quirked downward as he pushed the hood over his head, letting his dark locks splay out and twist in the
wind. "But don't worry about crap. We only have three things to do: wipe the platform clean of all the baddies, save our Daizō, and make sure that our story is recorded down in the books—that way, when the next loop happens and it replaces this one, our history will at least be remembered."

Asagiri glowered at him. "There are at least twenty different things that go along with those first two objectives."

"Oh shush," Ghost said. "Don't look at it like that, or else we'll never have the strength to do this. It's only three."

Asagiri huffed in indignation, but the rough lines of her face smoothed out. "So this really isn't going to happen in the next loop?" she said hopefully. "But then we'll be rewritten too."

"Of course," Ghost said. "Every loop rewrites the last. Because of that damn platform, there's never a definite future, never will be, even if they come close to being identical. But I'll be damned if we don't come close." He sighed in an over-the-top manner. "But seriously, I knew the second those idiots from the twenty-eighth century came along that this was going to go to hell."

Asagiri shook her head. "Whatever the case, that's in the past now. We have to worry more about how we're going to get rid of those idiot council members."

Ghost hummed. "Well, I could just block off all entry and exit to that layer and then wipe it from existence."

Asagiri smacked his arm. "Like heck you're going to do that! Terrible or no, that platform has saved us multiple times. We have to salvage it. Plus, there's a bunch of innocent people there!"

Ghost stared at her for a long moment before groaning and turning on his side, back facing toward her. "I hate it when you're right."

"You must hate me a lot, then."

"You better get that confidence under control woman, preferably before it comes back to bite your behind." Ghost rolled his eyes at her scowl.

"You can convince me when you have an idea of how we're supposed to beat the council into their rightful place and get this loop back from the pits of hell," Asagiri retorted.

Ghost looked up at her with a scrutinizing gaze. "Well, I mean, I've had an idea for the past hour or so... but you're not gonna like it."

Asagiri tsked. "Honestly, at this point, I couldn't care less what the plan is. I'm not picky. We've just gotta figure something out, and quick. We can't let Daizō stay there any longer than he has to."

Ghost still looked hesitant as he stared at her.

"What," Asagiri demanded. "It can't be that bad."

"Well..."

"Come on Ghost, I'm sure it's fine. Just tell me already."

Ghost cringed, though he schooled his features into nonchalance. "See... one of us is going to be stuck here, 'cause we have to watch over the kid." He jerked his head over to the building behind him. "So, I was thinking, you know, why not ask for help?"
Asagiri raised a brow. "Who in their right mind would want to help—" Her eyes widened as her brain started to catch up with her mouth. "—us..."

"Yeah. I was thinking about asking her for help."

"No."

Ghost straightened. "Come on, Asagiri, you know that she'd help."

"Absolutely not," Asagiri spat. "We are not going to get that demon to help us. Are you crazy? She'd kill us in a moment."

"Hey," Ghost cried slightly, a tinge of faux hurt coating his words. "I'm one of the most powerful beings in the universe here, give me some credit. And you're one of the fiercest people in the society of time, even if they do hate your guts. I say we'd have a fair shot."

Asagiri shook her head stubbornly. "Absolutely not. I don't care, we're not going to contact her. And are you kidding me? She'd crush you without breaking a sweat. Like hell we're going to call her."

Ghost groaned melodramatically. "Come on, Asagiri! She's our best bet at getting through this. And you know she'd help get Daizō out of there."

"I don't care."

"Asagiri."

"No."

"... Please, Asagiri?"

"No."

"Maiko, pleaseeeeee?"

"Are you insane!? For the last time, we're not going to contact her! She's a madman!"

"But Asagiri... she's just a little girl. She's not even thirteen yet."

"You're not one to talk. You burned down Endeavor's agency when you were twelve, too."

"I was a very emotional tween. Excuse my anger issues. And anyway, I'm a good guy now, aren't I?"

Asagiri sighed in annoyance. "Define good." At Ghost's whine, she growled under her breath. "You're even more of a child now than you were back then."

Ghost stared down at her with wide eyes, hands clasped together in front of his face silently.

"Ghost, you're not cute. You're over eight hundred years old. None of your puppy eyes are gonna work on me."

...

"You're not convincing."

...
"No."

"God— que se vaya a cagar!" Asagiri threw her arms up into the air. "You know what, why should I care. Do whatever the heck you want." She stormed past him, angrily huffing underneath her breath. Ghost sighed out in relief.

"Oh, that's great. Because I contacted her hours ago, so she should be arriving any minute now."

"You did what—!?"

=====

It was more or less the same experience. Though Midoriya would admit, their sparring was very enlightening. Sure, it wasn't his favorite, far from it, but it was nice to see where he was and how he needed to improve. He had actually done better this time than the last, partly because Endeavor was so critical and had a thousand things to point out about his flaws; but it also was due to the fact that he had a better understanding of the way Endeavor fought.

His fighting style was, not surprisingly, mostly made up of pure firepower and huge brunt attacks. His agility was admittedly less than spectacular, but he had fast reaction times—it was no wonder that no one could lay a finger on him.

But even so, and even though he did better than before, Endeavor was still a hero with years of experience and fights under his belt. Every time Midoriya thought that he could make a hit on him, Endeavor would turn up the heat (pun not intended) and throw him back into the ground.

So yes, it was more or less the exact same treatment. And so Midoriya was going to look forward to that icing that Todoroki provided last time.

The two were walking down the hall again, sore as could be and limping when one of their injuries smarted. They had just turned the corner when Midoriya felt a cold chill wash over him. It was a slow feeling, digging into his skin and burrowing deep.

And then the silence hit for the second time.

And it was much more noticeable than the first.

He couldn't hear his own breathing, and the low murmur of the people around them exchanging conversation was cut short. Todoroki's even steps that echoed through the hallway were empty, and it made the hairs on Midoriya's arms and neck stand up.

He stumbled once as his vision swam, but he didn't let it show as he tried to keep pace with Todoroki—but it was harder than it looked, and the hallway around him tilted more than once.

What's... what's going on? What's happening?

His hands were shaking as he held them up in front of him.

What's wrong with me?

Todoroki paused in front of him. His mouth moved, but Midoriya couldn't make out what he was saying through blurry vision.

He whispered and stumbled over Todoroki's name. His vocal cords thrummed with the vibrations,
but no sound reached his ears. He felt himself sway forward, and then there were arms wrapped around his torso. Body falling limp as he was pressed against Todoroki’s side, he felt himself devolve into shivers as the taller boy gripped onto him tightly.

He said *oh god* in a shaky voice, but it hurt when he couldn't hear it. *Oh my god,* he said again, and then he mumbled it again, and again. He gripped the front of Todoroki’s costume, knuckles white from terror as the boy started to pull him toward their room.

Something's wrong, he said to Todoroki. Something's wrong. Something's absolutely wrong.

And the silence remained, suffocating and blinding and numbing.

-----

Todoroki's cool fingertips numbing the pain from his bruises was the only thing that was grounding Midoriya as he struggled to breathe. Todoroki's other hand, warm and gently pressed against his side, would occasionally move in small circles along the small of Midoriya's back. Due to the fact that all words failed to reach him, Todoroki had been forced to keep him calm with contact.

It was a strange and terrifying experience.

Midoriya counted his breaths as Todoroki gently pressed his right thumb into his upper left shoulder, easing the pain that had been causing him to twitch. He had no idea what was going on, and Todoroki barely seemed to grasp what was going on as well.

Todoroki adjusted his hands again, and Midoriya couldn't help but bless whatever lords he had in his favor that he had a friend like him. Even though Todoroki wasn't one to usually initiate any kind of physical contact, he had jumped right in to help him. It warmed his heart, and if he wasn't too busy trying to keep himself calm, he might actually enjoy it.

And then, with a pop in his eardrums, the world around his tilted against, and the hammering of his heartbeat drumming loudly made him gasp. Immediately, he reached back for one of Todoroki's hands, and he squeezed it tightly.

"Midoriya?" Todoroki asked worriedly. His voice was smaller than usual.

Midoriya was still trying to regain his breath as he nodded his head. "I can hear now," he said, trying to reassure himself between gasps. "I can hear now."

Todoroki sighed in relief as he moved his hands away from Midoriya's back. Midoriya turned around so they were side-by-side, and he let his legs dangle off the side of the bed.

"Does that... happen often?" Todoroki asked, worry plain on his features.

Midoriya shook his head as he hid his face in his hands. "No, that's never... never happened to me before."

Todoroki was silent and still beside him as Midoriya's breaths evened out. After he was sure that Midoriya was going to be okay, he started the ice his own injuries, though he kept on glancing toward Midoriya in worry.

"Was it an effect of a quirk?" Todoroki finally asked.

Midoriya stiffened as he glanced toward Todoroki. He wiped at his eyes. "What?" he croaked.
"A side effect from a quirk," Todoroki repeated. "When you brought us back, that had to be a quirk, right? Is this a side effect of it?"

Midoriya shuddered as he pressed the heels of his palms into his eyes. He took in several deep breaths as he tried not to become nauseous.

Todoroki had said that he didn't have to know about how Midoriya got there, but that was before this happened. And here Todoroki was, asking for answers... but could he respond to his questions?

He felt his breath catch in his throat as a sudden wave of stress and pain overcame him. Ignoring how his eyes watered as he let his hands fall to his lap, he rocked back and forth as his throat tightened. He counted his breaths again, thankful that he could hear the soft sounds that came with inhaling and exhaling.

His mouth felt like sandpaper as he licked his lips and spoke. "Yeah. It's... it's a quirk." He gripped the pants of his costume—they hadn't gotten out of them and showered immediately like last time. Not with his body deciding to fail on him. "That's how I got us here, but that... hearing deprivation's never happened."

Todoroki frowned. "Do you usually bring anyone else back with you?"

Midoriya tried to ignore how his lips trembled as he shook his head. He didn't understand why the sudden pile of emotions started to act up against him now of all times, especially when he needed to be calm and collected—

He choked out a sob, and he quickly slapped a hand over it to muffle the sound. But it was already too late, and Todoroki placed a comforting warm hand on his shoulder as the corner of his eyes pooled with tears.

"Ignore that for now," Todoroki ordered. "Just get cleaned up. We can talk about it another time."

Midoriya nodded as he pressed his knuckles to his lips, trying to push back against the watering of his eyes. Todoroki helped pull him up off his bed, and he shooed him into the bathroom.

"I'll redo the icing on your injuries properly after you're out of the shower," he said just before he closed the door, right hand raised in the air for some kind of clarification.

Midoriya watched numbly as the door was shut, and he awkwardly clenched onto the towel in his hands. After a moment of hesitation, hearing Todoroki step away from the door, he wiped at his eyes again and turned toward the small shower stall. He reached forward and turned the knobs so the water was hot (perhaps hotter than the normal person would like) and shimmied himself out of his costume. The small thumping sounds the clothes made as they hit the floor were relieving, if only because he could hear them. By the time that he managed to shed his several layers, the water had warmed up enough for him to step in. Steam rose from the crashing water, fogging up the sliding glass doors that lined the outside of the shower stall.

He mindlessly worked himself through his routine that he had been following for years, and he ignored the stinging in his eyes in favor of letting the hot water beat against his back. He could already tell that when he stepped out of the shower his skin would be red, but he couldn't bring himself to turn the heat down.

The tiles on the floor and wall were very interesting to him in the moment, it seemed. They were exactly the same boring color, shape, and size, except for the group in the corner. A small vein—a crack—went through them. They were unique enough to draw his attention toward them, but it
wasn't long before the detail was burned into his mind and he had to look away.

Even with the shower over, his hands were still shaking, and his stomach twisted uncomfortably. He didn't like this. No, he didn't like it one bit.

It took him a minute before he gained the courage to shuffle back into their shared bedroom, costume in hand. Todoroki glanced at him before he moved past him, taking his place in the bathroom. Midoriya waited until he could hear the sounds of the shower running again before he slipped into his sleepwear, and he curled up beneath the covers of his bed after throwing his costume off to the side.

He squeezed his eyes shut as he listened to the sheets rustling as he shifted slightly. He gripped the end of the pillow tightly as he counted all the different sounds that reached him.

*The shower running.*

*People walking down the hall.*

*Knocking on the doors opposite theirs.*

*Humming in the ventilation shafts above them.*

*Whistling of the wind.*

*Rustling of the sakura's branches outside.*

*Joyous chatter from passersby.*

*Creaking floorboards from above.*

*Soft breaths against his pillow.*

*The thrumming of his heartbeat.*

He startled as the shower suddenly cut off. He waited with held breath for Todoroki to come out. It didn't take long, and the door creaked open as Todoroki's light footsteps softly padded over to his own bed. Midoriya kept his eyes closed as the other boy got dressed, hoping to keep some kind of privacy for him. More sounds of rustling reached Midoriya's ears, and he waited patiently for Todoroki to reach out to him first.

Todoroki, thankfully, was obvious about it. He paused by his bed before sitting at the edge awkwardly. The mattress dipped slightly with the added weight.

"Are you still awake?" Todoroki asked softly.

Midoriya's eyes fluttered open. He twisted back over so he was facing Todoroki. "Yeah," he said, his voice small. It was obvious to Todoroki that he was incredibly unenthused as he slipped out of the covers and sat beside him.

Todoroki held his right hand out, palm up in an offering gesture. Midoriya took a second before nodding, and the dual-haired male gently wrapped his hand around Midoriya's wrist. Midoriya watched as he began to ice his bruises again, though he spent much less time on each before moving onto the next. Midoriya watched him with a somber look.

"It was forced onto me," he blurted out quietly. Todoroki froze, but he quickly went back to his work.
He hummed lightly as he brushed a thumb against Midoriya's forearm. "What was?"

"The quirk." Midoriya glanced down at his hand, making sure that he couldn't see Todoroki's face as he spoke. He felt the shaking overcome him again, and he bit his lower lip as he struggled to keep himself still. Panic ebbed in his gut, and his throat clenched again. He didn't know why—it was stupid, really. He was fine. "The one that brought us here, I mean."

Todoroki was quiet for a moment. "I didn't know that was possible," he admitted. "But... what is it?"

"My quirk?"

"Yes."

Midoriya swallowed thickly as he stared at his hands glumly. Todoroki seemed to notice his hesitation because he grunted and said not a moment later, "You still don't need to say anything, you know."

"I-I know," Midoriya replied quickly. His hands trembled in his lap, and he gripped his left hand tightly with his right to try and stop it. "But i-it's simple, you know? I-it doesn't matter—" He wiped his nose as his nose began to run. "It's s-so stupid, I sh-should just be able to tell you. H-how hard can it be if y-you told me all about y-you?" His vision swam as his eyes stung. And it was stupid, this entire thing was stupid, but he couldn't stop the sudden shaking of his shoulders as he hiccupped.

Todoroki's grip tightened on his arm. "That's not true. It's not stupid." His voice was kind but firm, and he cut off what Midoriya was about to say next with a soft glare. "None of this is stupid, Midoriya. If it upsets you, then it's not "nothing." Your feelings do matter." He hesitated for a moment before he awkwardly went to wipe his forming tears, his movements slightly jerky as he struggled to show that he cared. "You can't just ignore your emotions and feelings." His eyes turned soft. "That's part of the reason I ended up the way I was before the sports festival."

Midoriya let Todoroki wipe away another one of his tears, even though one of his fingernails poked awkwardly underneath his eye. His hands hovering over either side of his face, one cold and one warm, disappeared as Todoroki pressed them back into his lap. "Forcing yourself to try and help others—like Iida and I—without taking care of yourself isn't fair to any of us." Todoroki looked away from Midoriya, taking to staring at the wall opposite them. "So... you don't have to say anything if it makes you uncomfortable. You have no obligation to tell me. You don't have any duty to say or do anything for us." He paused for a moment, almost as if he was considering his next words before he spoke up again. "You want to be a hero, right? So learn how to take care of and be fair to yourself while we're still training so you can be one when we're out in the real world."

Todoroki spoke as if he was saying that the sky was blue. "Being a hero might mean saving others at the expense of your physical wellbeing and health, but it shouldn't include your secrets. You have the right to keep your privacy and happiness. And if your happiness lies in taking care of yourself from time to time, you have that right." He frowned. "And it's true that in the future, people might tell you that as a hero you should put others' lives above your own. And I can't disagree with them. But..." He looked to Midoriya, his eyes pleading slightly. "On behalf of everyone who cares about you... please don't forget about your own wants. And don't forget that your feelings matter too—more so than anyone else's. Only you should be able to say whether or not you want to do something. That isn't anyone else's decision. It's yours."

Midoriya stared back at him for a moment before he felt his face scrunch up. His eyes began to water again, but much more furiously than before. It was an unusual phenomenon. He did cry often. He
didn't like crying. But here he was for the third time in a few weeks, hiccuping as his shoulders shook. Todoroki, awkward as ever, simply let him lean against him as he rubbed his back in small circles.

Midoriya wasn't quite sure why he was crying. But as Todoroki gently wrapped an arm around him, he found that he couldn't care. Not when it relieved a chunk of the weight on his chest.

=====

come now endeavor,
surely you can do better.
you, the number two hero?
don't make me laugh!
you deserve rank zero,
i wish i could burn you in the stack.
you're poison, an attention-seeker,
and i can't help but think that your tombstone is the only thing sleeker than that fake image of which you are known.
come now, endeavor,
don't make it this easy.
i want you to suffer,
i want you to die greedy.
come now endeavor,
let me have some fun,
it'll never be over
until i decide i'm done.
come now endeavor,
learn your place.
you're no human,
you're a mistake in the human race.
come now endeavor,
let's watch as you fall,
don't feel too offended,
we just want to see you crawl,
and who are we?
why, that doesn't matter.
but just remember to protect them, please
even at the cost of your skin.
daizō, daizō, make sure you're safe,
poor shouto's going to be late.
please, please be careful,
you-know-who's coming,
and he isn't gentle.

=====

Asagiri waited tensely as she and Ghost waited impatiently for any sign of movement.

"I can't believe that you would contact Nana without any sort of warning to me beforehand," Asagiri said again, probably for the eighteenth time in the past hour or so. Ghost sighed.

"I already said I was sorry. What more could you want from me?"

Asagiri opened her mouth to respond, but she clamped it shut when a sudden crash carried from the alleyway to the left of the building the two were hiding on. Her hand immediately traveled to her hip, and she wrapped her fingers around the hilt of the blade sheathed there. Behind her, Ghost rocked back and forth on the balls of his feet, his muscles tense as his mask glowed slightly.

There was a moment of silence. Asagiri kept still, knowing that one wrong move would leave her dead. Even so, she glanced at her surroundings, making sure that there wasn't anything lurking in the shadows.

The wind that had been kicking up suddenly stilled. Asagiri breathed shallowly as she unsheathed her dagger, and she internally winced at the small sound it made as the sharp sides slid against the inside of the holder. She flipped the blade so it was in front of her as she looked around. Ghost's small breaths were loud from a few feet away in the cold night air, so much so that she wanted to clamp her hand over his mouth.

The clouds from above slowly trickled in front of the moon, covering part of their light source. Lamposts erected high up into the air, solemn and firm, flickered. A dark shadow fell over the area.

"You're scared."

Asagiri whipped around, dagger raised to injure the giggling voice, but her attempt was futile—the disembodied voice, still echoing in her ears, had nobody in sight for her to attack. The air shifted as Asagiri twisted around, trying to place where it was coming from. She eventually came to a stop as she bumped into Ghost; he placed a firm hand on her shoulder, and he stared into the dark shadows that crawled along the ground toward them.
"We're not here to play around," he said with startling calmness. "We need your help."

There was another giggle before something solidified in the darkness. It was darker than the inky depths of the shadows, and only the faint outline of the twelve-year-old was visible. "Awww, you're not fun," she pouted.

The clouds crawled along the sky, revealing more of the white orb hung in the black canvas of night. The shadows shifted around her, pulling back just far enough to reveal her face. Soft moonlight lit up her features, revealing the fiery orange hair that fell around her face and down her neck in small curls. She was smiling that big, wide smile of hers, one that stretched the freckles (stars) on her cheeks.

Asagiri couldn't help but think that there was a universe in her eyes. Her skin was made from the moons, and her hair was blessed with the sun.

It scared her. It never failed to do so, and it probably never would.

"You said you wanted my help, Touya," she said silkily. She tilted her head. "Don't you want to play a game?"

Asagiri swallowed the lump in her throat as she ignored her fear. "We don't need games, we need your help with a friend."

The girl's smile never faltered as she continued staring at Ghost's eyes behind the mask. "I don't see why I should help you." She finally looked over to Asagiri, who froze at the eyes with the planets and stars and galaxies and black holes centered at her. "I should just get rid of you right now."

Asagiri tensed. With someone like her, she probably easily could.

Ghost's fingers twitched. A small blue wisp appeared around his fingers—whether it was flame or his time powers was beyond Asagiri. "Fine then," he conceded. It was one of the few times he would admit that he was outranked—trying to push her forcefully wouldn't do anything. "You don't have to help us. But at least help Daizō."

That caught the girl's attention. "Hm?" Her smile deepened as she tilted her head down. She peered at Ghost through her lashes. "Daizō? You're assuming I'd waste my time helping him?"

Asagiri frowned. "He's your——" She paused when Ghost's hand tightly gripped her shoulder.

Ghost stared down at her for a second, debating something silently. Finally, he spoke. "He wanted me to tell you that he loved you," Ghost said quietly. "And he wants to be able to tell you that every day if you'd let him."

Something in the girl's eye changed. "Oh?" She glanced up toward the night sky as a small breeze whipped through them, causing each strand of her hair to shimmer and gleam like a mesmerizing wave. "But I just want to play games, Touya. Why does his love mean anything to me?"

Asagiri frowned. "You already saved him once. Why would you do that if you didn't care about him?"

The girl just continued to smile. "I didn't have any other reason besides paying back a favor. I don't see why you think I'd do anything but want to play for the rest of my life."

"That's not true," Ghost said softly, "and you know it. If you hadn't stepped in, no one would have been any the wiser. And Daizō didn't give you any favor other than being your brother. You owed
him nothing, and the same could be said about him."

Ghost bit the inside of his cheek before he bent into a bow. "Please, Kimoto Nana. I don't wish to take advantage of you, I merely wish for your help. Your brother, someone who I have grown to love like family, has been imprisoned in the platform of the society of time by the council. You're the only person who would agree to help, and the only one strong enough to make a difference without us."

Nana stared at Ghost with unblinking eyes until Asagiri followed his move. She too fell into a bow. "I apologize for not treating you with the same respect as I had him, as his sister. I should have helped you escape that household. I already knew how terrible it was. I should have helped you when your quirk manifested too, and it was obvious that your parents would try and take advantage of you because of it. I'm sorry I wasn't there for you when you grew up. I'm sorry I wasn't there to play games with you." Asagiri swallowed thickly. "I'm sorry for not being the aunt you needed me to be."

There was a moment of thick silence. When Asagiri dared to look up, the shadows were empty. The moon-like skin and sun-blessed hair and black holes for eyes had disappeared, fading into nothingness. The light breeze tickled her skin as it ran through the city.

Asagiri looked around in surprise, her lips pressed together in a thin line. "Do you think she's even going to help us?" she asked Ghost, crossing her arms. The other opened his mouth to respond, but he stopped himself and just shrugged.

Suddenly, a small giggle rang in the back of her head, making the hairs on her neck and arms stand straight up. Asagiri jumped out of her skin upon hearing it. "Maybe I'll decide over a game," Nana's voice whispered.

Asagiri listened for anything more. She was disappointed to find nothing but silence.

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Todoroki had just finished icing over his bruises. Their silence was heavy, but not particularly uncomfortable. Todoroki let him rub some salve over his burns, and Midoriya was sure to be gentle when he touched him. The boy was clearly unused to the assistance because he sometimes flinched when Midoriya went to put the stuff on the burns.

He wiped the remnants on his loose shirt, etiquette be damned. He was too lazy to wash his fingers off by the sink.

Todoroki also let him help wrap bandages around the places he couldn't reach, but he did most of it by himself, not wanting to "burden him with something that he could take care of by himself."

Midoriya made sure to shoot that argument down as soon as it came up.

Todoroki pulled his shirt back on, though he didn't move toward his bed. He stared down at his feet. "Tomorrow," he said, his voice hesitant, "do we have a plan past trying to be quicker?" He fell backward so he was laying on his back, and he stared at the ceiling. Midoriya watched him curiously. "The Hero Killer has already killed so many people. I don't want any of us to face that ending tomorrow."

Midoriya bit his lower lip. "I don't know, really. I mean..." He glanced toward his wrists. "I guess with my new fighting style, I'll focus on close combat. It might be best if you focus on ranged combat..."
Todoroki frowned as he heard the plan. Once again, he felt uncomfortable with the idea. "Maybe we should focus more on trying to run away. You could lift Native and Iida, couldn't you? I'd feel uncomfortable with being trapped in close quarters like that if they're really in the alleyways as the news reports said they were."

Midoriya hummed. "The Hero Killer is very quick though. We'd both have to erect a barrier in order to block him long enough to escape."

"A barrier wouldn't keep him for long," Todoroki admitted. He was quiet for a moment before speaking up. "It'd be better if one of us stayed back to keep it long enough so the other three could escape."

"No," Midoriya immediately said. "You're not staying back."

Todoroki refused to look him in the eye. "You're the only one who can carry both of them without being inhibited because of your chains. If I stay back, I can hold him off."

"No," Midoriya repeated. "You're strong, but the Hero Killer is stronger. And if it has to be anyone, I at least can—" He stopped halfway abruptly. Todoroki noticed.

He raised a brow. "You can at least what?" His eyes widened as he realized it a second later. "Right, it's that quirk, right?"

Midoriya sighed. He hesitated, running his hands back and forth over his shins before he responded. "It's called Time Manipulation. It's kind of self-explanatory."

Todoroki fell silent, doing his best to swallow that kind of information. And then he turned on his side so he was facing Midoriya. "How many times?"

Midoriya blinked. "Huh?"

"After USJ, when you were in the hospital, you said that you should have been able to protect yourself from the nomu. You said you should have been able to stop it..." His brows furrowed. "Which means you had some kind of grasp on how to use it. So how many times did you go back at USJ?"

Midoriya ran his tongue over the front of his teeth as he watched the flashing of emotions crossing Todoroki's eyes, bewildered at the question. "Six," he finally answered, slow as he debated the answer. "Maybe seven."

Todoroki looked hurt for a second as he sat up. "Are you okay?"

Midoriya stared at him incredulously. "What?"

"Are you okay?" Todoroki repeated. "You can't do that all the time and tell me that you're okay. That can't be good for you."

Midoriya just continued to stare at him blankly. Disjointed thoughts ran into one another, overloading his brain. He wasn't sure he could take any more world-changing revelations without breaking. "I'm fine." Todoroki didn't seem nearly satisfied with his answer, but he held his hand up to quiet him before they could go further down that road of conversation. "Back to Stain, if you're so sure that one of us has to remain behind, I'm the only one who can without risk of us dying permanently. At least I can go back in time to prevent my own death."

Todoroki pursed his lips, clearly not liking the change of subject, but he let it go. "And how many
times can you go back? How am I supposed to get the two out of there? I'm not strong enough to carry both of them and get very far."

Midoriya frowned. "Before USJ, three times was the maximum before I started feeling immense amounts of pain. I guess after all that's happened, I can go a couple more times." Midoriya held a hand to his chin. "I'm not sure how far I can go in one fight. I went eight times during our fight at the sports festival, but I was really pushing it at the end..." He ignored Todoroki, who was drilling holes in the side of his head with his heated gaze. "Maybe you should take one at a time. If you take Native first and drop him off with the heroes helping with evacuation, then he could be out of the picture. He should be pretty light compared to Iida since his armor is so heavy. If you slid on your ice, you could go pretty fast."

"But that leaves you alone to protect someone else," Todoroki said. "The news reporters were almost sure that he has some kind of quirk that paralyzes his victims. If Iida and Native are both paralyzed by the time we arrive, then you'll be trying to both protect yourself and Iida, which is extremely dangerous."

"I understand that," Midoriya responded, "but being a hero is the epitome of danger. If I can hold him off just long enough for you to come back, then I won't have to worry about anyone else."

Todoroki frowned. "And what then? You face him until someone comes for help? Until he kills you?"

Midoriya paused. He hadn't thought about that. "Maybe we should tell Endeavor."

Todoroki's eyes grew stormy. "What?"

Midoriya winced. "I mean before we leave him. Right before we go to save that woman and deliver her to the ambulances? Maybe we should tell him that someone might be in danger, and when they're done with whatever, they should head to the street that Stain's at."

Todoroki looked at him with a blank stare. "I don't remember which street it was on."

"We could look it up," Midoriya offered.

"It hasn't happened yet, Midoriya."

"Oh."

"Oh."

Midoriya ran a hand through his hair. Todoroki watched in mild fascination as his fingers ran through the shiny long locks. The other boy mentioned something about really, really needing a haircut as he blew his long bangs out of his eyes, which were still ringed pink from his earlier crying. "I can just... run through it and go back," he offered.

Todoroki frowned. "Are you sure? That'd tire you out, wouldn't it?"

Midoriya nodded. "A little, yeah. But instead of going back to that morning, I could come back to this time?" He glanced at the clock, wincing when he saw that it was already ten at night. "I can just tell you and write it down somewhere..."

Todoroki pursed his lips. "What if I just sent my location to Endeavor's contact? He would probably know that we're in danger."
"I don't know..." Midoriya frowned as he leaned back into the backboard of the bed. "What happens if he doesn't pick it up?"

Todoroki shrugged. "Well, if we're going with our plan, then Native would probably tell the evacuation heroes, wouldn't he?"

Midoriya curled into himself. "There's a lot of what-ifs here."

"Well, there's not a lot we can do without saying it upfront that something's wrong. And that would raise even more questions, especially about your..." He paused as a realization came upon him. "Is that why you never talk about your quirk? Because people would want to take advantage of you?"

Midoriya laid down on the bed and curled onto his side. "That's a huge reason, yeah," he admitted quietly. He played with the corner of the pillowcase, trying to avoid eye contact. "But I... I also don't want people to look at me differently, or leave me because of what my quirk entails."

Todoroki looked at him carefully. He laid beside the boy, making sure that Midoriya could see him. "If someone would leave you just because of your quirk, that doesn't mean that it's your fault. It means that your relationship meant very little to them, and so they didn't care enough to continue it. And anyway, I'm sure that if someone cares more about a quirk than a person, their opinions aren't very worthwhile."

Midoriya snorted softly. And then, after a moment of hesitation, he said, "Thank you."

Todoroki shrugged. "It's nothing." He then pulled himself off of the bed, and he shot Midoriya a small smile. "You should really go to sleep now. You're going to need your energy."

Midoriya nodded and slipped beneath the covers, bringing them up to his chin. Todoroki shut off the lights not two minutes after. Midoriya realized that he forgot to brush his teeth, but his aching muscles and tired bones refused to move when he tried to make them. Emotionally exhausted on top of that, he found his eyes closing on their own.

Sleep held him hostage for eight long hours.

======

_There were hands in his hair, softly breaking the knots and tangles. A giggle or two could be heard above him, and he sighed as the nails softly scratched at his scalp._

"Oh lord, your hair might actually even be longer than Kirishima's by now," Yaoyorozu said. She gently tugged at his hair as she began to braid it.

_Midoriya hummed. "I think I'm gonna get it cut today, actually."

"Oh really?" Yaoyorozu said. "And how are you going to get it this time?"

_Midoriya smiled. "Well, I was thinking..."_
"Hey." Soft golden wheat-colored eyes bore into him. It reminded him of bright canary eyes, but they were warmer and darker. "You know, you hold yourself in a way where you seem like you don’t belong, if that makes sense... but you do, you know? You’ve always belonged here."

Kaminari smiled at him.

"So please don’t act like you don’t. You can participate in life with us. No one's stopping you."

"Oi, Deku." Bakugo stared out the window, looking at the dark clouds rolling in. "There's a storm coming." He rolled his eyes when Midoriya stiffened. "If you want, you..." He hesitated before steamrolling through his offer. "You can stay with me tonight."

Midoriya stared up at him with wide eyes. "Are you sure?"

Bakugo growled. "I wouldn't have offered it if I wasn't, dumbass!"

From behind him, Kirishima broke out into laughter. "Aww, Bakugo, you're really as soft as they say you are."

Midoriya hid his giggles behind his hand. "Maybe I should call you a name that matches your fluffy personality."

"Don't you dare!"

Midoriya pretended to hold his hand by his chin as he thought. "Hm. What about 'Kacchan'?"

Bakugo exploded. "I swear, if you call me fucking Kacchan in front of anyone, I will make sure that you won't fucking see the light of day for the rest of your fucking shitty life!"

Midoriya and Kirishima just laughed.

There was a boy with dark brown hair and blue ocean-like eyes and a sharp chin. His skin, several shades darker than Midoriya's, was highlighted by the light of the world around them.

Seiya smiled.

"I'm so sorry that you ended up like this," he whispered. And then, after a moment of silence, he offered a hand out to him. "Would you like to dance with me?" just like when we were kids was left unsaid.
Midoriya stared at his hand with a blank gaze. And then he took the outstretched hand with his own shaking one.

"Can we go to the flower garden after this?" he whispered.

Seiya's smile turned sad. "Of course." He squeezed his hand lightly. "Of course we can."

Midoriya was pulled into the older boy's chest.

He cried.

There was a girl with sun-blessed hair and skin carved from the moon and a universe in her eyes.

She stared at him very, very carefully.

"I came to save you, 'Midoriya Izuku,'" she said lightly. "You'll let me, won't you?"

Midoriya's brows furrowed. "I'm sorry, you must be mistaken. I'm not Midoriya Izuku. Who is he to you?"

The girl blinked. "Daizō, that's what you've been calling yourself since you were nine."

Midoriya blinked. "As I said, I think you're mistaken. I don't know any 'Midoriya Izuku's. Who are you again?"

Nana's eyes widened. "Don't you remember USJ? Or the sports festival, when you helped Todoroki learn to use his powers? Or the time with Stain?"

Midoriya just continued to stare at her with a worrying gaze. "What on earth are you even talking about?"

Nana stared at him for a long, long time. And then, quietly, she said, "I guess you really do need my help, huh?" She sighed. And then she raised her hand out for him to take.

Midoriya stared at it for a long, long time.

"What do you know?"

A thin arm wrapped around his shoulders and Yagi sent him a bright grin.

"Looks like you got to be a hero after all."
Midoriya’s provisional license was heavy in his hands as he smiled.

Midoriya woke up two minutes after six. Todoroki was already awake, and he was fidgeting with his costume nervously as he continued to glance at the clock. He glanced toward Midoriya as he yawned, though he seemed distracted.

"We should be leaving in about an hour. Breakfast's downstairs in the lobby."

Midoriya nodded, half-aware as he slipped out of bed. He stretched and sighed in relief when his spine popped.

Todoroki watched as he disappeared in the bathroom, and he bounced his leg as he waited for him to come back out. In his hand, his phone buzzed for the fourth time. Endeavor was nothing but impatient, and he was constantly barraging the male about what they were going to do and what routes they were going to take on his patrol. Probably not to lose time when they left the agency.

Midoriya was quick to get dressed, and Todoroki watched from the corner of his eye as he picked up a briefcase, not unlike the ones that had their hero costumes in. Except this one was darker, and Midoriya huffed as he picked it up—clearly, it was very, very heavy.

Okay, Todoroki was curious now.

Midoriya flipped the two locks and pushed the top of the briefcase open. Todoroki stared at the contents inside, the numerous gadgets making his head spin as he tried to identify what the heck they were.

"What are those?" he asked quietly.

Midoriya flinched, clearly not expecting to be put under scrutiny. "A-ah," he stuttered. "Well, it's just some... stuff my family put together in order to protect me..." He trailed off as he rearranged some of the technological pieces.

(It was a lie. Midoriya, on one of his summer breaks, took a plane to Brazil. He found the bridge he had hidden under for weeks and retrieved the small briefcase and took it back home with him. Some were weapons. Some were support items. Some were meant to help with reconnaissance. All were meant to help him take down All for One.)

"Your family?" Todoroki murmured. "Don't you live with Midnight, though?"

Midoriya nodded. "Yeah. She's my guardian at the moment, since..." His eyes clouded over. "I mean, my family isn't around that often, so... U.A. took it upon themselves to put me in a more present guardianship."

Todoroki stored that information for later. He decided not to press into the "around that often" part and looked over his shoulder at all the devices. "Do you know how to use these?"

Midoriya laughed awkwardly. "No?" He rubbed the back of his head. "I mean, I know what a few of these do, but... I barely know how to use the rest." He picked up a small locket and tied it around his neck, snapping it in the back. "But I've decided that I might as well start wearing some of this stuff if we keep on running into trouble out of nowhere."

He pulled a small band out of the roof of the briefcase, and he tilted it from side to side. "I think that
this is a bracelet. Want to try it? I can't with my metal bands." He gestured to the thick pieces of metal wrapped around both of his wrists.

Todoroki blinked. "If it doesn't get in my way, I don't care."

Midoriya beamed at him. Todoroki blinked at the brightness as the boy clipped it around his wrist. "There!"

A moment of silence passed. And then harsh blue lines lit up on the band's exterior. Without warning, a few random words emitted from within the device, and Todoroki flinched.

"Undimienté an yestuñal. Ostō atle lantugánces patentlimas?"

Todoroki stared at it for a long time. He looked at it with a stormy expression, his eyes cold and analytical. Midoriya's face grew pale as the silence continued.

Todoroki lifted the arm with a band up to scrutinize it further. And then he pointed to it with a deadpan expression. "I have no idea what the hell it just said."

Midoriya chuckled awkwardly. "Ah, it was just saying that it was turned on and it asked for what our preference of language we would like." Midoriya leaned over and said clearly and slowly, "Lantugánces quapineste, punto."

Todoroki blinked at him. His eyes, slightly wider than before, struggled to calculate the new overload of information dumped on him.

"Understood. Uploading services now. What would you like me to do?"

Todoroki stared blankly as a hologram appeared above the wristband. About fifty different icons were shoved in his face, and he dreaded pressing one of them. He gained a slightly constipated look on his face as his finger hovered over one of them. "I am overwhelmed."

Midoriya sidled up to him to look at the options. He made a sound of distress. "There's so many."

Todoroki held a finger up to the hologram, eyes racing over the different choices. Finally, he sighed and pressed a random one in the middle.

"Ow!" Midoriya yelped, holding a hand up to his neck. He sucked on his teeth as he groaned, and Todoroki looked at him, bewildered.

"What did I do?" he asked, finger still hovering over the hologram.

Before Midoriya could respond, the devil on his wrist spoke up. "The tracker has been placed. Identifying subject now..."

A pop-up appeared on the hologram, and Todoroki frantically tried to press the 'x' button in the corner. "No, no, no, no, no—"

"Subject identified." A human base, formed similarly to Midoriya's, appeared in front of him. "Species: Homo sapien. Height: approximately one hundred and fifty-five centimeters (5'1" in imperial form.) Weight: approximately forty kilograms (eighty-nine pounds in imperial form.) Gender: Male. Age: 13-17 years. The subject is currently experiencing a large amount of hormone influx, most likely due to puberty. Mood swings, physical attraction, and other activities such as—"

Midoriya's face was bright red as he stammered uncontrollably, "Next!"
"Okay then! Your tracker has been placed in the subject's body. Activate my tracker system by saying, "Find blank for me, Relie" upon my awakening. Is there a specific name you'd like to give this subject?"


"Midoriya it is!" There was a moment of silence before the blue lines that lit up the band glowed brighter. "Subject named. Would you like me to do anything else?"

"No," Todoroki and Midoriya said at the same time. The device flickered.

"I see. If you ever need my services again, please don't forget to use me!"

The band turned off. Midoriya sighed a breath of relief.

Todoroki stared at the bracelet. He glanced away. "I think we should eat breakfast."

=====

Midoriya sent a kick to the thug, who dodged clumsily. Chains burst from the brace on his ankle, wrapping around her neck and shoulders as Midoriya's leg swung down. He landed in a crouch, pulling the woman to the floor. Todoroki froze her to the sidewalk as soon as she was down, leaving just enough room for the chains to retract and for Midoriya to stand back up.

"You've gotten the hang of it," Todoroki commented idly as he took out his capture tape. Midoriya leaned the struggling and cursing woman forward as Todoroki unfroze her hands from the ground—he then quickly tied the freed limbs with their capture tape, making sure to not stare at her lips for too long lest he become entranced.

(Another unique and amazing quirk—shame that she was a thug rather than a hero.)

"I guess it has been easier," Midoriya admitted. Todoroki unfroze the ice, and Midoriya pulled the woman to her feet. "With all the extra practice, I—"

A loud bang interrupted Midoriya's comment, and he flinched as a wave of heat overcame him. Someone screamed. The woman in Midoriya's arms struggled, and a policeman only barely just managed to take her from her arms before she escaped.

"Shouto, Midoriya!" Endeavor called out to them, running down the street toward the attack. "Follow close to me!"

Todoroki was quick to react, and Midoriya followed quickly after him. Cars in the street had come to a stop, and passengers were piling out of the automobiles and racing away from the explosion. Like ants, people were evacuating the front of the building in concentrated clusters.

Another explosion erupted from the side of the building, and just like last time, something lodged up in Midoriya's throat. Debris fell from the side of the building as something was flung through it.

The hunched figure was slammed into the ground, and it twitched a few moments before robotically finding its way to its feet. Smoke drifted up from the crater it had been sent inside. Midoriya gritted his teeth as he recognized the nomu, and Endeavor sent a column of flame toward it.

The nomu leapt out of the way, and Todoroki took that moment to throw his own wave of ice at it, freezing it in place. The nomu shrieked, stretching its neck as if to break through the ice, sending a chill down Midoriya's spine. Endeavor reached the nomu, and he sent a quick burst of flames that
resulted in a sharp, earth-shattering cry. By the time Endeavor's attack was over, the nomu was slumped over, pupils twirling in rage.

"Shouto, the capture tape—" Endeavor began.

The ice, or what was left of it, around the nomu's lower body cracked, and it burst through it, reaching a clawed hand toward Endeavor's face. Midoriya, on instinct alone, felt his skin burn in warmth as a burst of chains exploded from his wrist bands, and they slammed the nomu into the front of the building. More debris flew outward, and Midoriya winced at the property damage he'd probably caused.

Endeavor didn't thank him. Midoriya wondered why he was even surprised.

The hero sent another harsh attack of flames, red and orange and hot hot hot, and it dropped to the ground. Its clawed hands twitched slightly, but it didn't get up again. Midoriya watched it with a queasy look.

That was almost too easy.

"Endeavor!" a new voice called.

Midoriya glanced over to see another hero—Manual. He was leaving the building that the nomu had been flung through. Most likely he had been the cause of the force that originally flung it to the ground.

"What is it?" Endeavor grumbled. The new hero ignored it.

"These are attacks all over the city, and they're headed westward—they've already taken out Igudorashiru," Manual relayed. "There's two more of them, I think. We need to head that way."

Another explosion rocketed the area, and more screams from stragglers could be heard. True to Manual's word, the attack was westward from where the group was.

Endeavor growled under his breath. "Shouto, Midoriya, get out of here. Help with evacuation." He glowered down at Manual, who only flinched slightly under his gaze. "I'll be taking care of the nomus. Don't interfere."

Midoriya kept tight-lipped as he nodded and turned around. Todoroki seemed to hesitate, glancing at his father for a second before his expression hardened again. He followed after Midoriya, his footsteps just as quick.

"Ready?" Midoriya called.

Todoroki's eyes turned steely. "No one's dying tonight."

=====

They'd see about that.

=====

"I'd rather die than let you walk another day after hurting my brother."

Midoriya felt the lump in his throat grow bigger, making it hard to breathe as he ran head-first into the alleyway, two chains already sent like a column to knock Stain off of Iida. The Hero Killer's sword was flung from his hands as he was shoved back, eyes slightly wide at the newcomers.
Beside Midoriya, the air suddenly turned frigid, and his sharp breaths as he ran came out visible. A sudden wave of ice was thrown at the hero killer, sloping upward into one large barrier. He could hear the crystallization of the ice as it formed, both in the huge structure in front of him and in a thick layer of frost over Todoroki's right side.

Almost immediately, Todoroki sent a wave of fire off his left side to melt the said ice as he slid over to the form of Native. He visibly winced when he saw the state that the hero was in, but he still picked him up and held him close to his chest.

"Midoriya!" he called. When the other boy glanced toward him, he stared at him with a firm gaze. "Don't die."

"I won't," Midoriya promised as he stood in front of Iida.

Speaking of which...

"What are you two doing here?" Iida cried out. His voice was filled with pain and grief, and it was shaky at best. "This has nothing to do with you... You can't get involved!"

Midoriya felt something strike in his gut as he planted his feet firmly. "No," he said firmly. He watched from the corner of his eye as Todoroki left the front of the alleyway, Native in hold. "I won't let you die here, Iida. I care too much about you to let that happen."

He concentrated on the bands around his wrists and ankles, ignoring Iida's response. If he was going to create the chain-like beast as he had had at the sports festival, he would need to gather his energy. Surely it would also be difficult to create, and he wasn't sure the alleyway would provide enough room for him. Not to mention that it was big and clumsy. Maybe he'd do better with creating a huge chain wall instead, that way Stain couldn't get through the—

The metal of his bands felt dead against his skin.

Midoriya's breath caught in his throat as his eyes widened. He stumbled back one step as he glanced to the metal wrapped around his wrists.

What—?

Distantly, he could hear the ice cracking. His stomach fell to the floor.

My quirk... it's not working, either?

The two chains he had already summoned curled around him protectively, though they were heavy and hard to move. His mouth grew dry at the prospect of not being able to summon the barrier like he had hoped he'd be able to.

Oh god. Oh god, oh god, oh god—

Something smashed through the ice, sending chunks flying through the air. Stain stepped through, looking slightly disgruntled.

"More of you, huh?" he said to himself. He glanced to the empty spot where Native had been lying. "You know, if you hadn't chosen a sneak attack, you wouldn't have gotten away with that."

"Doesn't matter," Midoriya said sharply. He ignored the way Stain's eyes slightly widened fractionally in interest. "I came to save my friend. Whether or not that was my business, whether or not my tactics may seem underhanded to you, their lives are more important than images." He also
ignored the sudden gleam in Stain's eyes. "If I don't seem fair, hate me then. But I'm leaving here with Iida, and both of us are going to be alive when we do."

Stain chuckled lowly. "Oh no, I don't think I could hate you. Quite the opposite, really." His smile fell. "But I have a duty I must uphold." His eyes leered at him, thick with emotion and the self-assigned weight of "purging" the hero society. "If we clash, the weaker must be culled. I hope you won't stand in my way, 'Midoriya.' It would be a shame if a true hero was killed amongst the fake ones."

*True hero?*

Midoriya bit his lower lip as he hid the broiling anxiety in his gut.

*But I'm not even meant to be a hero.*

Stain swung the swords in his hands. The blades gleamed in the moonlight.

*So... why...?*

"You have to run away!" Iida exclaimed behind him. He seemed frantic, though his words were laced with pain from the wounds currently bleeding. "I told you, didn't I? It has nothing to do with you!"

Midoriya's hands clenched into fists at his sides. "Are you even listening to yourself?" he argued angrily. "If I leave you now and you die, what kind of person does that even make me?" His two meager chains shuddered, falling in front of him and swaying from side to side, like snakes ready to pounce. "Let alone being a bad hero, I'd be a bad person!"

Stain chuckled, and his voice was eerie. Midoriya shivered as the laugh surfaced familiar memories—except the owner of the laugh he was thinking about was so much scarier, much more terrifying than this man ever would be.

At one last glance to make sure that Iida was okay, Midoriya leapt forward, drawing a small smoke pellet from his belt. He threw it at the ground new Stain's feet watching as the smoke expelled outward to envelop Stain entirely.

It was a good thing that he remembered to wear his contacts—the one with the heat vision system built into it, left behind by Hisashi.

Stain's figure appeared in a haze of reds and yellows, stiff in his crouched position. His bandanas were slowly flowing in the smoke, and the tip of his blade dragged across the ground. Midoriya gritted his teeth before sprinting forward, feet pounding against the floor. He jumped directly above Stain's head, sending his two chains to grab onto Stain's wrists and pull them down. Stain immediately pulled back, but he choked as Midoriya landed a kick to the back of his neck from his jump. He stumbled forward, but he didn't fall to the ground.

Midoriya landed back on his feet, but he propelled himself even further backward as a sword was swung, the tip of the blade missing his face by a few inches. Another sword came down from above, and Midoriya lifted his arm, blocking the attack with the brace on his wrist. His chains retaliated, soaring through the air and aiming for the man's stomach. Stain didn't even seem bothered by the attempt, and his swords clashed against his chains easily, throwing them to the side.

"You're fast," Stain observed, grin fully in place as he leaped forward. "But you're also so, so fragile."
A kick zeroed in on Midoriya's stomach, and he felt his breath leave him as a cry escaped him. A moment of paralyzing pain rushed up from his side, and he gagged as oxygen, or lack thereof, burned in his chest. He collapsed onto the alleyway floor a few feet away from where the impact carried him, tears building in his eyes as he coughed up blood.

"Midoriya Izuku," Stain called as he stood over him, red eyes leering. "The boy who survived USJ after an attack by the infamous anti-All Might." His grin turned feral. "That's right. Now I know why I wanted you dead for so long."

He approached Midoriya's shaking frame, still experiencing wave after wave of pain. "Heroes like you who get injured severely, who are no better than a useless weight, trying to get the benefits of doing this job without actually contributing anything..." He raised the sword up. "—don't deserve to live."

Midoriya, still coughing, made his chains shove him away from the attack. The metal of the blade clanged and sparked when it hit the alleyway floor, and he rolled back to his feet, hands shaking as he held them out in front of him.

_Distract him, distract him, you have to distract him..._

Midoriya flung his chains back at Stain, who dodged it with ease. He tried to close in on Midoriya, but he wouldn't let him. The chains circled around, aiming to hit the man's back. But Stain was quick, and he noticed them as he turned to the side. Bending his legs so he was in a crouch, he pushed himself and slid beneath the chains.

Upon twisting himself back around, pushing himself back upright into a standing position, he threw a small dagger back at Midoriya. The boy flung himself to the side to dodge it, and Stain followed up with a high kick aimed at his face. Midoriya parried it with his wrist, going in for his own roundhouse kick at the man's side.

He was met with a blade millimeters from scraping the skin along his thigh.

His breath caught in his throat, and he instinctively reached for the feeling of fireworks going off on his skin against the metal—

_Except he couldn't use it._

_Shit._

Eyes widening, he reached for his two small chains and used them to slam into Stain's chest, propelling him backward.

Stain coughed at the impact as he was thrown back slightly, but he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and laughed. "You really are weak, aren't you?"

His grip on his swords tightened. "I was expecting more from you... especially with how hyped that fool Shigaraki was to kill you."

Midoriya felt his stomach turn to ice. His eyes widened even further.

_Shigaraki? Don't tell me..._

Stain's grin grew when he noticed his expression.

_They're allied together?_
Stain licked his lips. "Don't tell me you're scared, Midoriya." His eyes hardened. "I thought you told me that you were going to protect your friend." He took a few steps back, moving away from Midoriya slowly.

He was getting closer to Iida.

"Don't worry though," he said. "I'll make it quick for the both of us."

It was an adrenaline rush. Static piling in his ears, skin thrumming with energy, Midoriya felt the world flash around him. He wasn't sure when he jumped on Stain, other than that his fists and feet were suddenly meeting skin and muscle. Stain whipped a blade at him, and he blocked it with his arm brace again.

"You're not laying another finger on him," he said coldly.

Stain's eyes gleamed. "I see. So now we're seeing the real you." His smirk turned venomous. "You know, Midoriya, you're kind of terrifying. I wonder if anyone would be able to look you in the eye when you're like this."

Midoriya slammed the heel of his boot into the man's gut in response. He doubled over momentarily, but he quickly went on the defensive as Midoriya aimed another kick at his face.

It was wave after wave, kick after evasion after punch after block after parry. The movements following were too quick for him to keep up with, half of his split-second decisions made from pure instinct. His wrists were getting chafed from the bands taking so much weight at one time, and the muscles in his arms and shoulders strained as he blocked another blow. Stain's attacks were swift, and Midoriya only barely managed to stick with the pace.

He ducked underneath another swing of a blade, blocking another barrage of them with his wrists. Stain threw a third dagger at him, and Midoriya didn't have time to dodge as it slipped beneath his arm, swiping a minor cut along his ribs. It hurt, but not as much as his side still did from where Stain had kicked him—which was both worrying and relieving.

He twisted to avoid another thrust of one of Stain's swords, facing him to the outside of the man's arm. He grabbed onto the man's outstretched limb and swung him around. He followed up with a punch to the stomach, which barely seemed faze the man at all. Stain swung his swords at him from either side. Midoriya jumped up to avoid them, bringing his foot down on the man's head. There was a grunt of pain before a sword was thrown directly up into the air. Midoriya tilted backward to avoid it, losing his balance as he fell.

Stain twisted back around as Midoriya's back hit the ground. The blades of his swords rushed toward him, and he could barely roll away before they were slammed into the ground behind his head. His breath stuttered for a second as a wave of fear gripped him, but he let it go not a second later to get back to his feet.

He panted as he wiped the back of his forehead with his hand. He swayed once, but he dug his feet in and stabilized himself not a second later.

A soft voice could be heard from behind him. The abruptness of it made Midoriya flinch.

"Why are you..." Midoriya glanced behind him to see Iida. "Why—?" His breathing was ragged. "Stop. I've inherited my brother's name—!" Midoriya clenched his jaw. "I have to do it... That guy's mine...!"

_Inherited?_
Midoriya's fists clenched. *If your brother could see you now, he would be so sad, Iida—*

He really shouldn't have gotten distracted. A gleam of metal reached him from the corner of his eye, and he only barely managed to raise an arm to block the blade that was aiming for his face, and—

A sharp creaking sound reached his ears. The blade slid against his metal band, and Midoriya felt a sharp pain go through his forearm. An ache burned his skin. When the blade came away from his face, the sharp edge was tainted red. The band around his wrist fell away, clattering as it hit the ground.

Immediately, he went to jump forward. He couldn't breathe as the blade was brought closer to Stain's mouth. He reached a hand out to stop him. Stain's tongue grazed his blood.

He collapsed to the ground, numb and cold.

Tongue thick and heavy in his mouth, he gasped for breath as Stain stood tall over him. His chest heaved, even though the pain was still stabbing him.

"Like I thought," Stain noted. "You're just as weak as the rest of them." He stepped over Midoriya, whose breath caught in his throat as his eyes zeroed in on his movements. His footsteps were loud, and they echoed through the alley. "I suppose I really shouldn't kill you," he admitted as he raised his weapon. "Even if you're not as true of a hero as I thought you were, you're still close to that ideal." His grip tightened on the handle of the sword. "But no hero should ever hold himself back for personal reasons if it means protecting one's life. So I'm afraid you'll have to die."

Midoriya stared up at the blade, his eyes watering as his breaths came out in shallow gasps. He tried to reach deep inside himself for that feeling of his stomach twisting, but it never came.

*Time Manipulation too!?*

And then the sounds and voices were cut entirely.

Stain spoke. Nothing reached Midoriya's ears.

And then the corners of his eyes began to fill with static.

He couldn't see.

*He couldn't see.*

*He couldn't see.*

His hands were very, very numb.

=====

Iida stared at Midoriya as the boy's eyes went blank and unfocused, almost as if he wasn't seeing anything.

Fear gripped his heart.

*I know that you want to go after him, but you really shouldn't act based on your emotions. Don't worry, Stain will get what's coming to him. But I don't want you getting hurt in the process."

He clenched his fists.
Stain raised the blade up. It glinted in the light.

"I wouldn't want the same thing that happened to your brother to happen to you."

"Eh, if you admire me, Tenya, then I might become an amazing hero!" Tensei laughed joyfully.

"Wow, Midoriya," Iida said as he pointed to one of the pictures hung on his wall. "This artist really captured our classmates well."

Midoriya laughed awkwardly as he pointed out one of the frames. Iida was there too, standing proud and tall next to Uraraka, who had a fierce expression on her face. "I got you, too."

"Why didn't you get one of yourself?" Iida asked carefully.

Midoriya chuckled. "Because all of mine make me look scary!" He smiled sadly at Iida's framed picture. "I want to be remembered as someone who saves others, not scare them." He shot Iida a bright grin. "Plus, I wanted to hang up someone super cool on my wall. And you're one of the coolest people I know, Iida."

"I want you to know that you're like a brother to me, too."

"So please... be careful."
"Recipro Burst!"

There was a harsh gust of wind, and then Stain's sword was knocked out of his hands, the blade shattering on impact. Stain's eyes widened as Iida knocked him out of the way, shoving him down the alley.

Stain's eyes were ablaze with fury. "You again." He growled. "Don't get back up when you have nothing to say. You've already proved yourself to me as the worthless kind of hero that permeates society."

"I don't need to prove to you anything," Iida said as he stood in front of Midoriya, much like the latter had done before. He sucked in a sharp breath. 

*A cool hero protects others. A cool hero helps others.*

He glanced back toward Midoriya's limp body.

*I'm sorry for forgetting that, Midoriya!*

"I won't let you hurt my friend any longer," Iida said, falling into a fighting stance.

Stain huffed. "We'll see about that." He sprinted forward, blades drawn, only to have to jump back when a burst of flame shot toward him. He paused and glowered at the newcomer.

"Todoroki Shouto," he snarled. "You're back."

Iida looked behind him, surprised. Todoroki sent a wave of ice at the vigilante as he ran to Iida's side.

"Sorry I'm late," he said coldly. "Some idiots tried to keep me back. But they'll be coming for backup in a minute. They just had to load Native into the ambulances."

He sent another wave of fire to Stain, who tried to leap for them. A large burst of ice followed, lasting about two seconds before Stain cut through them.

"Todoroki, I need you to ice my exhaust pipes without clogging them up," Iida said. "Do you have enough control over your ice to do it?"

Todoroki grunted in confirmation as he sent a second wave of ice at Stain, who used the spikes as pillars to jump around. Todoroki was quick to lean down and run cold air over the pipes. With his other arm, he shot a wave of intense heat.

"What happened to Midoriya?" Todoroki asked as he glanced at the boy behind Iida. "I didn't think the paralyzation made you unresponsive."

"It doesn't," Iida admitted. "But he did fall into that state shortly after getting paralyzed."

Todoroki opened his mouth to respond, but he let out a sharp cry as two blades dug into his arm. "Shit!"

Stain bounced off the side of the alleyway wall, dagger raised to impale Todoroki. Faintly, Iida
wondered where he was getting all these weapons from as he threw his arm in the way.

"Iida!"

"I'm fine," Iida gritted out. "Just hurry!"

Todoroki hesitated, but Iida heard him continue icing the pipes on his legs. There was a faint rustling sound from behind him, and a small groan, but Iida ignored it in favor of watching Stain. The man leaped forward again, just in time for Todoroki to say, "Now!"

Iida ran forward, feeling his engines burn as he ran. His hair whipped from his face as he sprinted forward.

"I'll kill you, Ingenium! Just like all the fakes like you!" he roared.

Iida gritted his teeth. "You can kill me after I save my friends!" His engines grew louder. "But I won't let them shed any more blood because of me!" He slammed his foot against Stain's head, sending him flying backward.

Another burst of heat was sent flying at Stain, causing him to jump back onto one of the ice pillars remaining.

"You may act like you have changed, Ingenium, but you have already shown your rotten core. You will not survive this night!" He raced across the ice, dodging Todorki's rapid fire attacks. Iida froze momentarily when he saw where Stain was headed.

"Todoroki, **protect Midoriya**—!" He cut himself off with a pained shout as another blade was thrown, embedding itself into his shoulder.

"Got it!" Todoroki yelled, sending another wave of ice at the incoming threat.

Stain was getting more frantic, now. His fighting style had changed drastically since the beginning, and he was getting more desperate—it seemed as if even Todoroki was the target of his attacks, aimed to kill even though he had never been declared as a "fake."

"Die, son of Endeavor!" Stain snarled. Sword in hand, the other one half-broken, the blade was poised to cut Todoroki's arm off. Todoroki's eyes widened.

Iida's engines burned with a sudden intensity as he shot forward, heart in his throat.

Metal clashed against metal. Stain's blade hit a familiar steel band, belonging to a familiar person with green hair and green eyes and freckles.

"Dammit," Stain cursed loudly through gritted teeth.

Midoriya stared back at him with hollow eyes. He opened his mouth, as if he wanted to say something, but he merely mouthed the words silently. His green eyes disappeared into murkiness, and Todoroki had to push him out of the way. He sent another column of flames at Stain, causing him to jump back.

Iida took that moment to power the engines in his leg.

**Recipro...**

He leaped up, meeting Stain in the middle as they both flew through the air. Stain turned his head back, surprise painting his face as Iida slammed his leg into the man's back. Stain's grip on his sword
was released, leaving the weapon to drift in the air.

*Extend!*

With a loud cry, he followed up with his other leg, which he used to shove the man downward with a kick to his head. For a second, he seemed unconscious for good, but then his eyes snapped open. Stain grabbed onto his sword's handle, whipping it around and just barely missing Iida.

Iida glanced over to Midoriya, who looked empty.

*You're one of the coolest people I know, Iida.*

"I will defeat you!" Iida said, as his engines roared. "This time, you as a criminal—!"

"*Keep after him!*" Todoroki shouted, his flames roaring around his hand.

Iida kicked the man in the back with as much might as he could muster. "—and I, as a *hero!*"

Todoroki stomped his right foot forward, sending a large chunk of ice at the falling man. Iida appeared beside him not a second later, standing protectively in front of Midoriya.

(The boy continued to stare at nothing in the sky. "Pretty," he whispered.)

The three (two) of them waited in tense silence before they realized that he was unconscious.

"I... guess that's it," Iida said, dumbfounded.

Todoroki stared at him. He had an odd look on his face, one that Iida couldn't place.

"What is it?" he asked. He was met with a slap to the back of the head. "*Ow!* What was that for?"

"Next time you plan on doing something stupid, tell me," Todoroki said seriously. "I don't want to have to bury you."

Iida's expression suddenly turned solemn. "Don't count on me doing anything like that again," he said quietly. "I was wrong. I shouldn't have gone after Stain, and you bled for me because of it." He went into a bow. "I'm sorry."

Todoroki waved him off. "It's fine. Make sure to say sorry to Native too, though. And don't do it again."

Iida nodded. He cleared his throat awkwardly. "I'll apologize to Midoriya too..." He glanced back to the smaller boy. "... when he's more coherent."

Todoroki looked back to Midoriya, who was slouched over slightly. His eyes were glazed over. Todoroki's eyes furrowed as he gently grabbed onto Midoriya's shoulders and shook him.

"Hey," he said softly. "Midoriya?"

Midoriya didn't respond. Iida was growing worried.

"Maybe Stain's quirk works better than others?" Iida guessed. "So that's why he's acting like this?"

Todoroki was about to respond when voices caught his attention. "Oh," he said, annoyed. "Here's our *backup.*"
They get berated, which annoyed Todoroki. "You shouldn't have come back," they said. "You could have gotten hurt," they said.

Well, where the hell were they when they needed them, huh? That seemed like a pretty good question to ask.

Todoroki glanced at all the heroes there. He ignored his father's gaze, which was proud—after all, his son had taken the Hero Killer. Todoroki didn't share that excitement.

"Midoriya?" he asked, turning to the boy. He responded to simple commands, it seemed, but everything else was lost on him. "We gotta go."

Midoriya blinked. He opened his mouth, and then closed it, and then opened it again. And then he glanced up.

"Monster," he said simply.

Todoroki blinked at him. "Huh—?" A harsh beating of wings reached Todoroki's ears, and his eyes widened as he whipped around.

That was his first mistake.

A speeding figure streaked past him. Todoroki stared with wide eyes as the thing grabbed onto Midoriya, whisking back into the air.

"Midoriya!" he called out, his voice strangled. Iida called out, saying something similar.

Another hero, a blonde woman wearing a green and white suit, gasped. "It must be one of the villains that we thought were already taken out—!" She cut herself off as a blob of red splattered against her cheek.

A long tongue licked it when she was caught off-guard, and the seemingly unconscious form of Stain leapt forward, sprinting as the nomu started to crash to the ground.

"This society, overgrown with fake heroes..." He jumped up, his red eyes glinting as he down at Midoriya's blank face. "... and the criminals who wave their power idly..." He slammed his blade deep into the nomu's brain, blood cascading down the nomu's face and tainting his hands. One hand gripped the back of Midoriya's costume as they hit the ground, breaking through the concrete and ground.

Todoroki wanted to sigh in relief. He wanted to feel the relief. But the only thing he could feel was the panic as Stain spoke up, his words clawing down his throat and nestling in his lungs.

"... should all be purged." He ripped the blade from the nomu's brain, cutting more of the organ. Blood sprayed the Hero Killer's face and chest. "This is all to create a more just society."

Todoroki felt like cotton was stuffing his eardrums. The voices around him may have reached him clearly, but they wouldn't register like they normally would as he saw Midoriya's limp form.

The heroes were talking. Something about a 'hostage,' something about 'saving'...

Midoriya was struggling against Stain's grip. "Let me go," he slurred. There was a bit more light in his eyes, and a small amount of panic seemed to grip him. But even with the improvement, his eyes...
were still mainly empty.

"Hero Killer!" Endeavor shouted. He grinned as his flames bounced around his body, and a ball of flame appeared in his hand.

"Wait, Dad!" he choked out. He didn't care about his slip-up, even as bile rose in his throat. "Midoriya's there, you can't attack him—!" His words fell silent on his tongue as Hero Killer looked back, his anger pooling out of him in suffocating waves.

"You fake," he spat. He stepped forward. Todoroki felt his throat choke up. "I must correct this mistake... I must make this right." He took another step forward. From beside him, Iida wheezed, his breath leaking from punctured lungs that Stain created with a single look. "You'll be dyed in blood... and I'll take back what it means to be a hero!" He held his head up high. "So come get me, you fakes—!"

Todoroki would always remember that moment for the rest of his life. That moment when Stain was the most terrifying thing he'd seen to date—when Stain had paralyzed him with his words alone. When his conviction rooted him to the ground—

A chuckle could be heard from behind Stain. And then the flames hit him from behind.

And though the Hero Killer hadn't yelled out in pain once in their fight, that all changed.

Stain screamed. It was down from the core, suffering and agony achingly screeched. It was pain, it was surprise, it was torment. When the flames stopped burning him from behind, a hand gripped his head and slammed him into the ground. Debris scattered from the impact.

—and when he was thrown to the ground like he was nothing.

"'Criminals who wave their power idly,' huh?" The man crouched over Stain was tall, and he had broad shoulders. He was smirking as he stared down at the bleeding figure, though his hair covered his eyes. "I must say—" He pressed his foot into the back of Stain's head, shoving his head into the dust and debris. "—that's quite a cocky statement to make. I was wondering if you could uphold it for the sake of your "better society," which is why I came over here..." He pressed his foot harder onto his head. Stain coughed up blood. "... but I guess you're really as weak as I thought you would be."

The man looked up. Todoroki felt his entire mouth grow dry as he looked into those canary-yellow eyes.

"N-no way," one of the heroes said, trembling. "I-Ignition?"

"Get back!" Endeavor yelled. His hands were alight with fire, and Todoroki could feel the heat from where he stood.

"No, wait—!" he cried futilely, reaching for Endeavor's arm. It was too late though, and the burst of flames sent toward the man came forward like a tsunami. Windows from the buildings beside them broke and shattered as the flames licked and scorched the buildings, the temperature so hot that the concrete began to melt in certain places.

Todoroki watched with wide eyes as the sea of flames devoured everything in the man's path. The man, Ignition, was hidden by the reds and oranges and yellow. Todoroki felt sweat pour down his face, and a look at everyone else showed that they were sweating from the intense heat too, even at the distance.
The flames trickled down until they were hugging the streets tightly. And there, standing as if one of the most powerful attacks had never been thrown upon him, was Ignition. Standing on either side of him were two newcomers, ones that hadn't been there before. There was a giant woman with flowing red hair, holding the curled up figure of Midoriya bridal style—he was unharmed, thankfully—and a man with pale blue hair and a purple mask.


Ignition burst out into faint laughter as he clapped his hands. "My my, that was certainly an impressive attack, Enji." His smile, sickly sweet and kind, turned venomous. "But if you want to even try to put a scratch on me, you're going to have to do better than that."

Todoroki's eyes widened as Ignition's throat gained an orange glow to it. His canary-yellow eyes were filled with red, freezing Todoroki to the ground.

"Reminds me of our younger years, Enji, back when we were kids." His eyes narrowed. "Your fire could never compare to mine." His eyes trailed from Endeavor's face to Todoroki's. "But let's see if your son really is as great as you say he is." Without warning, a cloud of steam left his mouth before a column of fire shot toward him.

His eyes widened as he saw the blue flames rocket toward him. The heat was unbearable, even though they hadn't even hit him yet, and his feet felt glued to the ground.

"Todoroki!"

A hulking figure stepped in front of him, blocking the attack from hitting him. Todoroki's eyes snapped to his father's as the man grunted in pain, and he felt them grow wider with every passing second.

A roar that could be compared to a lion's escaped Endeavor's mouth, but he clamped his mouth shut shortly after. The attack was cut abruptly as Ignition stopped expelling his fire. He yawned, though his smile was quickly back in place.

Todoroki stared in horror at his father's shoulder, which took the brunt of the attack for him. His suit, created for the purpose of taking the number two hero's intense temperatures, was peeled back and burnt to a crisp. The skin beneath it was scorched black and deep red.

He... Todoroki felt his eyes glaze over as he stared at the wound. *He hurt him badly with fire?*

"Man, Enji, I really underestimated how much you cared about your kid," Ignition teased. "I wasn't expecting you to take an attack like that for him."

Endeavor turned to face Ignition, and Todoroki tried to ignore the split-second show of fear that crossed the man's eyes. "This is nothing, *Hisashi.*"

Ignition laughed. "Oh, that's good to know." His friendly gaze turned into a sharp leer. "Because I'm only getting started. And it'd be such a shame to kill you so easily." He huffed a small wisp of fire into his hands, alighting them as he crouched.

"So come on now, Enji," he taunted. "I want to see you *burn.*

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Midoriya blinked.
Recipience, his quirk, was acting up.
Hm.
Perhaps he was missing something.

Chapter End Notes

welcome to the discord server of madness. come join us.

Also, just so we can clear this up (because I don't want to have anyone mad at me): I am not going to have Endeavor be weak in this fanfiction. If it may have seemed like it in this chapter, don't be fooled. I may think his personality is trash, but he's the number two hero, and his strength is outrageously powerful. I'm not about to undermine it. At all. The reason why I had Hisashi attack him and hurt him was because I wanted to show that there's a reason for why Hisashi's so terrifying. Also because Enji and Hisashi do have a history together, which will be revealed.

I wanted to add this because some people did seem upset at first before I explained this to them. But no, Endeavor is powerful. I don't plan on changing that. Hisashi's just powerful as well. Their fight isn't going to be "we destroyed a street," it's, "we destroyed an entire block and haven't broken out in sweat yet, bring it on." So I hope that makes a little more sense to all of you. I just didn't want to have to explain it multiple times before the next chapter comes out, haha. But thanks so much for reading, guys!
"Enji, look, look!"

Todoroki Enji had been digging his bare feet into the ground, letting the blades of grass tickle the skin between his toes. He blinked as he looked at his four-year-old friend. He himself just turned five. "What is it, Hicchan?" he grumbled, but his eyes widened when he saw what Hisashi was doing.

"Hisashi, unbothered by his "grumpiness," shot him a bright smile that lit up his whole face. He licked his lips again before breathing out sharply, and Enji watched in awe as a bright (but small) burst of flames slipped out of his mouth. "Oh, that's so cool!" Hisashi crowed as he jumped up and down excitedly.

"When could you do that?" Enji asked, eyes almost comically wide as he appeared by Hisashi's side.

Hisashi laughed. "Just now, dummy!"

Enji's brows furrowed as he frowned. "Your quirk is so much cooler than mine..."

Hisashi lightly hit his shoulder. "Nah. I mean, your fire might be smaller, but it's still super amazing!" Hisashi put on that endless smile of his again. "Plus, even if mine is hotter, you're still going to be a hero, aren't you?"

Enji smiled back at him.

(Hisashi wished he never put the idea in the boy's head.)
Fire crackled around Endeavor as he ignored the stinging pain in his shoulder. It wasn't often that he got hurt, and badly at that—but it had been decades since flames ever burned him. Part of his costume meant literally setting parts of his skin on fire, parts of his face on fire. If anyone told him that he'd get severely burned by a single flame, he'd scowl at them and call them insane.

(But of course Midoriya Hisashi would be able to do that. His flames had always been stronger than his—there never seemed to be a time when he wasn't overpowered by the other man.)

Endeavor might have not known exactly what Hisashi (he's Ignition now, not Hisashi, he hasn't been Hisashi in forever) wanted, but it was obvious that his son would be one of his main targets. Endeavor knew why, and he didn't doubt for a second that the man would aim to kill him.

He couldn't let that happen.

"Shouto," Endeavor called, "you need to get out of here, now. Take your classmate with you, and call U.A. Make sure that Nedzu knows the situation."

Anyone who was old enough to understand underground heroes and villains knew Ignition. The widespread fear of him had disappeared slowly after his disappearance and after his group had been taken down, but even so, some lingered. With Horror's Dove out of the picture and other high-ranked officials falling off the map, it had been suspected that Ignition would end completely. Or, at least, that was what everyone had been hoping.

It had taken All Might, himself, and several other pro heroes—Edgeshot, Best Jeanist, Gang Orca—to track them down and take them out after a particularly bad siege put them in the spotlight. Nedzu had been aware of said event himself. Endeavor was hoping that the rat could help bring backup as soon as possible since the principal was in contact with many powerful heroes high up in the rank.

Of course, Endeavor would be taking Ignition on by himself. He could and would hold his ground against the villain; he wasn't the number two hero for nothing. Ignition would be under his foot by the end of the night if he could help it, and he didn't need All Might to help him. He would be taking care of Ignition himself.

(But could he really? Could he really fight fire with fire? Could his own really match up to Ignition's?)

The answer was yes. And he'd be damned if it wasn't, because he wasn't going to let that man touch his son.)

Across from him, Ignition smirked. "Actually thinking with that pea-sized brain of yours this time, Enji? I'm surprised."

Endeavor felt the anger in his chest flare and smolder in his chest, but he begrudgingly stamped it down. Had it been anyone else, he might have reacted in anger, but he couldn't make a wrong move here—not if he wanted everyone to make it out alive tonight.

Not if he wanted anyone to make it.

"Vulture," Ignition called out sharply, his smirk turning grimmer. "Hand Izuku over to Horror's Dove. Kasumi, you have to get him out of here. Take him with you." The pale blue-haired man beside him nodded. "Vulture, take care of the heroes who try to escape or get past you. I'm going after my dear old friend."
Horror's Dove—or Kasumi, as Ignition called him—quickly pulled the limp form of Midoriya into his arms. The boy's expression had gone relaxed, and his gaze was distant as he blinked blearily. His was practically curled up into the man's arms. Vulture seemed to be sad to let him go, but she gained that familiar gleam in her eye as she glanced at the smaller heroes who flinched under her stare.

"Sure thing, boss," she chirped. "I'll take care of them."

Horror's Dove didn't say a word as he twisted on his heel, sprinting in the other direction. Endeavor watched them go, eyes narrowing. He spread his palm wide, concentrating his fire into an intense bolt of heat and flame that sparked threateningly. Ignition's smirk grew as Endeavor twisted his body to the side, arm held at its highest point backward, before flinging his upper body forward. The bolt of fire zipped through the air, aiming at Horror Dove's back.

A blurred figure shot through the air, and Endeavor's attack unraveled into a cloud of wisps of flame and smoke as his attack hit it. Endeavor leaped into the air, and Ignition—although he was unharmed in the attack—seemed surprised as Endeavor brought his fist to the man's stomach as he began his descent to the ground. Ignition was sent flying back down the street, and his body dragged through the concrete, creating a long line of indentation not unlike the one that the nomu had created but a few minutes prior.

Ignition's flames were no doubt strong, and he was physically stronger than the average man. But Endeavor had always been stronger that way than Hisashi—it was the only way he was able to keep up. It was the only way Hisashi hadn't left him in the dust.

Smoke rolled off of Ignition's body as he pulled himself to his feet. His face was etched into a scowl. Endeavor crashed to the ground in front of the man, his feet burning holes in the street. From the corner of his eye, he saw Horror's Dove get ready to turn a corner, and a flash of something akin to determination (panic) ran through him. Endeavor raised a hand, fire just starting to shoot toward the male when Ignition's throat gained a warm hue.

Damn it.

Endeavor lifted his other hand, sending a harsh blaze of fire that entirely engulfed Ignition's body, obscuring him entirely from view. The stark brightness was rough against his eyes as it contrasted against the dusk that had fallen over the city, but decades of using his quirk made him used to the glare. He knew that the attack did nothing more than blind Hisashi for a few seconds, but it was the seconds he needed. His column of fire, blazing and hot and burning, sent at Horror's Dove struck hard and true.

(Behind him, he heard the sounds of bones snapping as Vulture activated her quirk. He would just have to accept that those heroes, even if they weren't the strongest, would be able to last the night against her. And if not, that they would at least protect his son and his classmate.)

There was a moment of silence as Endeavor's flames died down from attacking Horror's Dove. The dark figure trapped in the storm of flames, rigid and still, surrounded by ash and smoke and scorch marks that were burned into the ground, twisted around. The purple mask rested on his face gleamed in the light of some of the small fires that hugged the ground.

Horror's Dove smirked. "Nice try," he drawled, a hard glint in his eye.

"Watch out. Horror's Dove is a formidable figure—his quirk, Avian Bond, lets him establish links with doves. It makes it so that any pain and damage he receives is equally distributed to all the creatures he's linked with. He's even been able to stand against All Might's punches."
Endeavor had no time to react as he felt a rush of intense heat explode toward the side of his face. He ducked and twisted to the side, watching as the flames nearly singed his cheek.

"Hey, hey, hey," Ignition teased. "You should really be focusing on your opponent, don't you think?"

A glance over in Horror's direction told him that he was gone. Midoriya's gone too, then.

Endeavor cursed as he thrust both of his palms out at Hisashi, waves of flame shooting from his hands, though the man ducked and rolled away. Sliding into a comfortable crouch, the man's eyes flashed dangerously red before another wave of flame leaped from his mouth, flames dancing as they arched through the air. Endeavor dodged again, and Hisashi's flames blazed strongly until they crashed into the building across the street.

The shattering of glass echoed through the area, clashing the grunts of pain and yells of shock that were still happening behind Endeavor. Cracks appeared in the building hit, the bricks collapsing as part of the support structure melted and crashed. Endeavor ignored the debris that he knew was there, already coming to terms with the fact that property damage was inevitable.

Endeavor was prepared for another attack to be sent toward him, but he was surprised when Hisashi frowned.

"Honestly, I've never seen you weaker than I have now, Endeavor," Hisashi taunted, though he sounded vaguely disappointed. "Here I was expecting a huge challenge." His eyes lazily glanced to the figures behind Endeavor. "But you're scared of hurting them, aren't you?" A small puff of smoke escaped his lips. "Come on now, Enji. Give me some of that fire that I want."

Endeavor clenched his jaw as his hands balled into fists. He wanted to spit in the man's face, tell him that he couldn't rile him up so easily, but—

Hisashi's eyes turned a deep crimson. "If you're not, I can just hurt—"

The fire along Endeavor's shoulders blazed brightly, and his shoulder ached from the injury as his skin began to burn. His hands flashed as flames erupted from his palms, and a wave of red and orange and yellow (and small, small hints of blue) circled into a twirling firestorm. Hisashi's eyes flashed yellow for a moment before the inferno circled around him threateningly.

"Sorry," Endeavor said for the first time, "but you're the only one who's going to burn tonight."

Hisashi's smile flickered, and Endeavor saw a genuine grin there. His fire spun until it slammed into the man's chest and flung him backward. The wave roared as Ignition was flung through the building opposite the one he attacked, and the flames reached high into the sky as they followed the trail Ignition left behind. Fire swallowed the building whole, even as they shoved Ignition further through the sky. The windows in the tall multi-storied building cracked and splintered, while the roof and ceilings caved in. The entire structure collapsed, and Endeavor jumped over the wreckage to the street over.

As he landed, the ground shaking slightly with his landing, Endeavor's eye caught the crater in the side of another apartment complex. Laying not too far away was Hisashi—he most likely clipped the side of the building with his fall.

The figure on the ground, smoking slightly as he pushed himself up, laughed. He pulled himself from the crater, almost tripping over some of the cracks.

"Not bad," Hisashi said. "But you forgot one little detail of my quirk, Enji." His shoulders shook as
he laughed even harder. "You're so damn easy to play with..." He turned around. Endeavor, feeling his skin begin to grow uncomfortably hot, felt his eyes widen.

Hisashi stood in front of him, smile too wide, too many teeth showing.

"Such a shame, really." Hisashi's eyes crinkled in the corners as soft laughter escaped him. His yellow eyes burning like candles hidden within a fog. "I was really hoping you wouldn't fall for that."

Dark blue fire lit up the inside of his mouth as his pupils narrowed like a snake. Hisashi smirked, and then the burst of flames raged outward, blistering everything in its path.

"Hell awaits all who try to fight fire with fire."

Endeavor couldn't have agreed more in that moment.

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Hisashi smiled as Enji panted on the ground. "Come on, Enji, you can do better than that!" he encouraged.

Enji shook his head. "I can't keep up with you, Hisashi. Your fire's so much stronger than mine."

Hisashi just grinned and clapped a hand on the older boy's back. "So? You're so much more physically stronger than me. Plus..." He held his hand in front of him, and he gained a faraway look in his eye before shoving his palm in Enji's face. "My quirk makes yours super ineffective. My skin absorbs heat and stores it in sacs along my body that power up my own Fire Breath." He laughed as he jumped up and down. "But that doesn't matter!"

Enji sighed as he rubbed the back of his head. He plopped down on the ground. "I don't know how you can say that when you're not the one who's constantly getting their behind handed to them."

Hisashi looked sheepish as he sat down next to him. "That's true, but..." He gained a determined glint in his eye as he clenched his hand into a fist. "That's what makes you so cool, Enji! You're always fighting to beat me, to get stronger so you can defeat me..." His smile was brilliant as he held his fist out for Enji to bump. "That's what's going to make you such a great hero. Hell, you'll be number one, no doubt about it!"

(Enji wished that he could really hold up to that expectation.)

=====  

"Shouto," Endeavor called. Todoroki flinched as he looked to his father's back. His eyes zeroed onto the wound that marred the skin of his left shoulder. Blood stained the already-dark fabric of his suit. "You need to get out of here, now. Take your classmate with you, and call U.A. Make sure that Nedzu knows the situation."

Todoroki nodded even though his father's attention was still glued to the villains standing across from them, meaning that he couldn't see it. Fumbling for his phone in his pocket, he quickly pulled out the device and unlocked it. His father shot forward, and Todoroki clenched his eyes shut momentarily as a gust of hot air rushed over him.

It took him a second to unlock his phone with shaking hands. (The woman in front of him, Iida, and the other heroes—Vulture, he was pretty sure she was called—smirked as she took a threatening step forward. The heroes took one back, afraid of the woman standing over two hundred and forty
centimeters tall.) U.A. had given each of the students an emergency contact number after the USJ attack happened, and Todoroki struggled to find it as his phone lagged.

"Watch out!" one of the heroes called. It was the one with the short blonde cropped hair and green and white striped suit. "Her quirk allows her to transform her skin into bone-like armor. If she eats any organic matter belonging to animals or humans, it'll get—"

The woman was cut off as a fist buried itself into her stomach, throwing her back with a rush of air. Todoroki's breath caught in his throat as surprise shot through him. The blonde hero landed several meters away on her back, barely rolling to a stop as she coughed and heaved any food in her stomach. Tears gathered in her lashes as she pushed herself over on shaking arms, choking and spluttering on the puke that got stuck in her throat from throwing up while still looking to the sky.

"Dani!" one of the other heroes cried out in horror. He watched as saliva dripped from between her lips.

Todoroki's feet were glued to the floor, even though every nerve in his body called for him to help the woman up. Iida was frozen next to him too, and Todoroki couldn't help but think *wow, they really were pathetic, and they just need to leave this to the pros and get out of the way, no no they'll get hurt and won't be able to protect themselves, he's a hero dammit—*

"Now's not the time," another hero growled. "Son of Endeavor, brother of Ingenium, get to safety now! Move it!" He crouched before leaping forward, several shadowy figurines identical to his appearing by his sides as he whipped out several shurikens. The small weapons gleamed in the light of the fire, glinting ever so slightly as he swung his arm. His shadows mimicked his movements as he shot them at the giantess.

Vulture smirked before she rapidly disappeared from view, shurikens embedding themselves inch-deep into the ground. The ninja-like hero and his shadows didn't have time to fall to the ground before she reappeared, red plump lips carved into a smile. Her hand grabbed onto the hero's arm tightly, her long nails digging into the fabric of the man's costume as he yelped from the sudden change in direction. The shadows dissipated, and the twist probably pulled a muscle in his arm or shoulder.

Vulture leaned forward, teeth bared as the skin along her cheeks suddenly started to pale. The blush of her makeup couldn't hide the sudden wash of sickly white that covered the sides of her face. A swift tongue darted out to touch the man's neck, the only part of his costume that revealed any skin. The man grunted and slammed his foot into Vulture's stomach the same time one of the other heroes rammed his shoulder into her side.

Todoroki watched, mesmerized as the ninja jumped backward. He winced, and a hand automatically raised to press against his shoulder, but another group of shadows soon appeared. The ninja-like hero sprinted forward, his shadows jumping along the walls of the buildings to gain high ground as the other hero, the one who had rammed into Vulture, followed his lead. (The man had thick horns on his head, shiny and bright and—)

"Todoroki!"

Todoroki glanced over to see Iida, his face pale. He was gripping the wounds on his arm tightly, and his fingers were coated with blood. "U.A.!" he shouted, desperate. He couldn't choke out any more words, but it was enough for the information to slice through the sudden fog and click the pieces together.

Todoroki's hand clenched tightly onto his phone as he stared down at it. *Right. I should be focusing.*
In his mind, an image flashed. There were seafoam green eyes. The teasing tilt of red, plump lips. Soft snow white skin, like porcelain, only marred by the small scars that littered the gentle slope of her shoulders and firm arms, and there was a small splattering of freckles on her neck too, stark and almost too dark for the rest of her skin, and those freckles reminded him of *shut up stop it get out of my head*—

Grabbing a fistful of his own hair, Todoroki continued to look through his contacts on his phone before he found it, ignoring the mesmerizing images floating in his head. He faintly could hear Iida grunt as a kick collided with the metal bits of his armor. *Vulture,* some part of his brain provided as he stumbled back. *Vulture's right here, right here, right here*—

Pressing the call button, he pressed his phone up against his ear.

*Come on, answer, answer*—!

The images in his head suddenly cleared as a groan cut through the air. Todoroki looked over, eyes wide to see Vulture glowering at the blonde hero with the green and white costume from before. The woman was glaring right back.

"Damn seduction tricks," the blonde muttered harshly. Todoroki decided that calling her Stripes was much easier on his mind as the phone rang innocently a few times.

Vulture sighed as she pulled a small throwing knife from the side of her bicep. Blood spattered along the ground and from the knife, but she didn't seem that bothered. Todoroki swallowed thickly as he stared at the blood—there was only a little bit, and it was dark and looked almost dry. The wound barely bled despite the fact that the blade had dug deep into her body. "And I was so close, too."

Todoroki gritted his teeth as the hairs on the back of his neck stood up. That feeling of being uncontrollable of his actions, that feeling that someone else's thoughts were being shoved into his brain... "That was you," he spat.

Vulture ignored him as she lurched back from a shuriken thrown at her throat. The ninja-like hero seemed grim as another dozen of the small weapons appeared between his fingers. "So annoying," she muttered as she avoided another attack aimed by Ninja.

Todoroki was about to press forward, but a hand on his arm stopped him. He looked over to see Iida with a bruise on his face. His lip was split, but he still had that fierce look in his eye. *When had he gotten that?*

"Focus, Todoroki," Iida said. "Remember what happens when you rush into danger like that without a clear head."

Todoroki’s eyes flashed to the limp form of Stain, who was still lying face-down on the ground.

"*Todoroki Shouto,*" a sudden voice called through the phone, causing him to flinch. "*Is something of the matter?*

Todoroki could recognize Nedzu’s voice from anywhere, even if he hadn’t met the bear-mouse-rat-creature face-to-face (he had heard the few public speeches he made.) Todoroki gripped his phone even tighter as the sudden realization came to mind that it was late at night—he and Midoriya had been on patrol with Endeavor since around seven in the morning. On top of that, he had just faced off one of the most feared vigilantes in history—the Hero Killer: Stain.
So excuse him for being bitter and tired and angry.

"Ignition and his annoying bugs are at Hosu with us," Todoroki spat. "My father's taking on Ignition right now, there's this fly that three heroes, Iida, and I are facing off, and this guy named Bird's Awfulness or something has Midoriya."

*Shit. He has Midoriya!*

Todoroki glared at the direction that the purple masked man had gone, but all that remained behind was scorch marks. He felt an icy grip drag his stomach to the floor, panic briefly overcoming him as the realization hit him. How had he forgotten about Midoriya? In the background, Vulture threw Ninja to the floor, slamming him into the ground.

A moment of silence dragged on on the other side of the line. Todoroki waited with bated breath, ready to leave the moment he got confirmation. If help was on the way, he and Iida could leave. Granted, it wasn't something that he wanted to do, but if he continued to get in the way... if the heroes had to hold back to protect him, he had to—

*Click.*

Todoroki took the phone away from his ear, staring down at the screen incredulously.

*What...?*

Iida grabbed onto his shoulder, pushing him out of the way as the man with horns atop his head (Todoroki would call him Hornman from now on, to make it as simple as he could) was flung straight through the place they had just been standing.

"What did they say!?!" Iida yelled, frantic even as determination morphed his features.

Todoroki continued to stare at the screen with eyebrows raised high. His eyes were wide when he finally spoke. "They didn't say anything," he said. And then, in the most deadpan voice he could make, he said, "They hung up."

Iida reacted very slowly, but when he did, Todoroki was sure that his jaw was about to hit the floor.

"They did *what*—!?!"

Iida was interrupted, and Todoroki would be grateful if it wasn't for the person who had done the interrupting. "Focus on me, Kätzchen," the voice purred.

A rush of air flew past Todoroki's face as he ducked, and he stared with wide eyes at the hand that came close to clocking him upside the head. Iida lurched to the side to avoid it, leaving Todoroki wide open to Vulture as she grabbed onto his outstretched hands.

Nails digging deep into the skin of his forearms, Todoroki felt a rush of cold come over him before ice burst from his right foot. The frost spread along the ground before abruptly shooting upward, slamming the woman back. She grunted at the impact before the ice engulfed her entirely. The encasing wasn't that big, barely reaching above her head, and faintly Todoroki could see her twitching in the ice.

Todoroki looked down at his arms, noting the scratches the woman's fingernails created on his skin. Small amounts of blood started to form along the deepest parts of the wounds, beading in small little droplets that were bound to trickle down his forearms.
"Good work, son of Endeavor!" Hornman called. "Dani, get ready to grab her the minute she shows any sign of trying to escape—"

It began with the sounds of crunching, squelching, *snapping*, *grinding*, and Hornman froze in his tracks. Ninja's shadowy clones surrounded the ice as he whipped out several shurikens, and Stripes (Dani, was it?) got into a fighting position. Iida stepped back beside him, face growing pale.

"Son of Endeavor, huh?"

Todoroki felt his blood run cold as the top of his ice structure splintered and crashed to the ground, leaving half of it behind to encircle the body. Vulture was there, except the seafoam green eyes had been replaced with empty sockets as thick bones cracked and morphed together into a mesh of warped osseous matter. A nest of small bones wrapped around her head, jutting at an angle at the back and curving in the front like a beak.

Vulture's breath was visible as she—*it*—exhaled heavily. Its shoulders heaved as it breathed in and out heavily. Blood dripped from the numerous holes in the makeshift armor, *pittering* and *pattering* as it hit the floor.

The figure was no longer the beautiful woman that stood in front of them. Instead, it gasped as its claws scraped along the ice, shattering it into small ice fragments. Its breaths were wet and shaky, and its shoulders trembled as it limped forward.

Hornman visibly tensed as he hesitated; Todoroki didn't blame him, and he found his eyes resting on the blood that continued to drip from those small holes. Hornman clenched his jaw before rushing forward with a war cry. "Everyone," he yelled, "on her at once!"

A deep rumble escaped it, its bones rattling as it lunged right back at the male, ignoring the shurikens thrown at it. They bounced off harmlessly as it slammed its clawed fingers into the horns on Hornman's head.

There was a terrible moment of silence as the horn snapped. It clattered as it hit the ground. The man choked on his breath as he stumbled, and Vulture grabbed onto the man's arm.

A burst of flame rushed toward it, but the small scorch marks that appeared on the armor didn't seem to even faze it. Todoroki cursed as his attack did nothing. Its jaw opened widely, the bird-like mask of bones opening with it as it crooned. From beside him, Iida's engines roared to life.

Hornman struggled against its grip as it clamped its jaws along his shoulder, bone digging deep into his skin. Hornman screamed as blood dripped from the wound, and it slipped down into the jaws of Vulture. As it nosed into the red liquid, rattling gasps quickening upon licking the substance up, spikes shot out from the bones along its spine, and the morphed nest and armor gained a sickly hue as some of the holes in them were filled.

Iida rushed forward, and he smashed his foot deep into the cavern of bones, breaking a few as it was pushed back. At the same time, Ninja's shadows leaped onto its back, puncturing small daggers into any surface it could reach.

It screeched as Todoroki shot another wave of ice at it, and it evaded the cold attack as it threw the shadow figures off of it. It shivered as it looked at Todoroki, and the hero-in-training tried not to grow nauseous when he saw the blood seeping through the hole in its chest from the bones Iida had broken.

Hornman stumbled back as he pressed a hand to his shoulder. "Thanks, you guys," he huffed.
"Your horn—" Iida started.

"It's fine," Hornman said. "It'll grow back within a few months." he winced as he pressed into his wound harder. "Son of Endeavor!" he suddenly called loudly as Stripes sprinted forward, her body stretching thin as she leaped to distract Vulture. "What's your name?"

Todoroki blinked. "Todoroki Shouto," he called in a slightly quieter voice.

Hornman clicked his tongue. "Not that! What's your hero name?"

Todoroki had a double-take as he stared at the man. From beside him, Iida jumped back into the fray, engines blaring. "Shouto," he finally answered. "My hero name is Shouto."

Hornman grinned. "All right then, Shouto! Come over 'ere! You had better be able to control your fire, cause this wound needs to be cauterized. I don't plan on bleeding out tonight."

Todoroki felt his stomach clench in nervousness as he looked at the wound that Hornman was clenching tightly. "I—" he started weakly. Blood started to stream down his bare chest, and there was so much of it, and he was right, he would bleed out—

His nervousness still clung to him, but he pushed it away to nod to the man. "I'll do my best."

Hornman grinned and nodded. "Well, I suppose this might be late to say this, but..." He held his other hand out to him.

"Welcome to the hero life, kid."

=====

Hisashi stared down at Enji, his face solemn. He sighed and ran a hand down his face before he plopped himself beside the boy, who looked downtrodden beyond relief.

There was a moment of silence as they both sat quietly beside one another. Hisashi was the first to break it.

"So. What happened this time?" he probed, cutting straight to the chase.

Enji shrugged, still keeping quiet. Despite the bruises on his face and his split lip, he still radiated an air of somber annoyance.

Hisashi sighed again and bumped shoulders with him. "Come on, I know that you beat the shit out of three of our classmates. Saw 'em bawling their eyes out like babies. There has to be a reason."

His smile faded and cracked when Enji still refused to look at him. He frowned lightly. "Enji..."

"They told me that I'm never going to be a hero," Enji said sullenly. "Said no asshole like me could ever save a person, that I would leave someone I hated to die for no reason."

Hisashi took a second to react to that. "Well, they're wrong."

Enji looked away from his shoes to stare at Hisashi. "And how do you know that?"

Hisashi smiled. "'Cause you want to be the number one hero, don'tcha?" He stretched his arms in front of him. "You can't just "leave someone behind because you hated them" if you want to have good publicity. And anyway, I know that you're going to become the strongest hero. All of these losers wanna be a hero, but they don't have any drive. You, though?" He lightly punched Enji's
shoulder. "You have the drive to save everyone. You have the drive to do what no one else is willing
to do. That's what separates you from everyone else."

Enji's lips finally tilted upward. "Yeah... but that still doesn't change the fact that I'm suspended now
for getting into a fight."

Hisashi laughed. "Just remember that being a hero means sacrificing yourself." His grin softened.
"You'll have to give up a lot to save those that matter. You'll make enemies if you don't."

Enji snorted lightly. "That's obvious, Hisashi. Of course I'll put those needing saving first."

(Hisashi wished he realized it was all a lie.)

=====

Aizawa yawned as he graded the last pair of students on their project. Right before their internships,
he had thrown a huge project at his class for them to finish. It was amusing to see their looks of
horror as they saw that they had to finish it in four days.

Well, whatever. Their other classes were lightening their workload considerably because of said
internships—they had plenty of time to finish them.

And finish them indeed. In fact, all the groups had, in fact, completed them. It wasn't as hard as it
looked, and most of it was stuff they had already covered in previous classes. It just looked like a lot.
Even those that procrastinated till the last day had done pretty well. He wasn't about to give them a
B, mind you, but a high C would be in order.

So even Kaminari might not fail this semester.

As Aizawa was filing away the last of the papers he graded on, he couldn't help but feel relief spark
through him. He had already caught up on a lot of the sleep he didn't get due to school—hell, he
even got five hours the previous night. It was pleasant.

He was looking forward to another nap. Maybe he'd even be able to last a whole hour before his
insomnia kicked in.

He was just zipping up his sleeping bag when the door to the teacher's lounge opened. Aizawa
sighed before glancing over to the person entering. He swore, if it was Kayama or Yamada trying to
shove a dog toy into his sleeping bag while he wasn't looking, he would have to have some words
with his fists—

A small white creature walked into the room. Aizawa immediately felt on guard as Nedzu stared at
all the teachers there with his beady black eyes.

He wasn't smiling.

"Ignition is in Hosu. Three students are currently under the attack of himself and his subordinates."

Silence.

The legs of a chair scraped across the floor as Yagi stood up. He opened his mouth to speak, horror
in his eyes, but Nedzu cut him off.

"Todoroki Shouto and Iida Tenya are currently facing off against Vulture." Nedzu's tone grew even
frostier as he spoke again. "Midoriya Izuku is currently in the hands of the enemy. Specifically, he's
There was a thick moment of tense quiet. Aizawa felt that relief in his chest shrivel up and crumble away as he quickly slid out of his sleeping bag, wide awake and alert. It felt like someone poured ice water onto him, and he felt his mouth grow dry. Something in his chest stirred, and the world tilted for a moment as the realization that three of his kids were in danger, were in peril.

"I will be there in a few minutes," Yagi clipped, stepping past Nedzu. Immediately, Yagi Toshinori was gone, replaced by the fearsome build of All Might. He was gone with a gust of air.

Nedzu sighed before glancing over to Aizawa. "Kayama, Aizawa, Ectoplasm, Snipe—" Nedzu called, "you all will be accompanying Best Jeanist as soon as he arrives. Special transport will get you there in twenty minutes. They'll be arriving in three minutes."

Aizawa clenched his jaw, hoped to any lords above that they wouldn't be flying, and nodded.

"Of course."

Nedzu nodded back before heading out the room. Aizawa glanced down to his hands, and he clenched them tightly as Kayama left the room, costume in hand. A hand was placed on his shoulder, and Aizawa looked to see Yamada there, unusually serious.

"Beat 'em up," Yamada said quietly.

His fingernails dug into his palms as he tightened the ball of his fists. "I will," Aizawa promised.

He hadn't expected this to be how he spent his time during his class' internships—in fact, this had to be one of the worst results that he could have expected. He brushed Yamada's hand off as he stalked out the door, Snipe following him at his heels, his shoulders tense. An image of Midoriya in Ignition's hands, of Iida and Todoroki lying on the floor, dead, flashed through his mind. He shook his head to get rid of it.

*I swear problem children, if you die—!*

He gritted his teeth.

*Just hold on for a little while longer!*

======

*Hisashi huffed, panting and sweating as the unforgiving sun burned everything in its path. He was laying on his back, arms splayed as he tried to catch his breath.*

"Holy shit, Enji," he said. "You're getting really good at this."

Enji snorted before towering over him, his shadow falling over Hisashi's face. Enji was smirking, some strands of his red hair falling into his face as sweat plastered others to his forehead. Hisashi took a moment to admire his bulging muscles and broad shoulders. "Well, your flames might be stronger than me now, but you don't have a lot of lower body strength."

Hisashi chortled. "No, I guess I don't." He grunted as he sat up, running a hand through his hair. "Hey, but congratulations on finally beating me."

Enji rolled his eyes as he helped the now-shorter teen to his feet. "If you're going to congratulate me every time I win, you might as well just jump the gun and ask me out now; there's no use buttering
Enji cackled as Hisashi sent him the middle finger. "Fuck you," Hisashi spat playfully.

Enji summoned two fireballs in his palms. "Come on then, Hisashi." His smirk grew. "I'm feeling another round."

Hisashi rubbed his back before letting out a little bit of laughter. "Sure thing, Enji." He grinned right back at him. "Let's see if you can keep up with that streak of yours."

=====

Horror's Dove sprinted down the road, his footsteps light and quick as he swiftly put more and more distance between himself and the heroes.

He would have already been out of the city if it weren't for the light boy in his arms, but it was no matter. Sure, it made him slightly nervous at the fact that he wasn't as quick as he'd like to be, but the circumstances were too good to be true. The streets were empty, the police and medics distracted with other people...

Sure, using mobs of civilians made it easier to blend in, and the heroes wouldn't be able to go all out to take him down. That was true. However, Horror's Dove knew from experience that civilians weren't incapable. They had grown in the past years from being afraid and freezing up at the first sign of fear. Some of them even went as far as to play hero, and Horror's Dove didn't want to risk that chance.

So tonight was the best night to come back into the fray. Tonight was the best night to make a move. Did it still have its risks? But of course.

However, Kasumi trusted his allies. Ignition was a powerful man with flames that could rival magma. He was sometimes overconfident, that he could admit, but he was intelligent. He had the skill and the talent to back it up.

More than that, though, he had the will. He had the reasoning to do what he did. He wasn't doing it half-assed because he liked it. And that was the reason why he never stood down, and that was the reason why the name "Ignition" had never truly died.

Vulture... was a monster. A master of seduction and the power of words, the giant woman was beautiful on the outside like a model could be. It was a shame that her quirk made her out to be nothing but a horrific, slimy beast that dragged her claws at her insides. Horror's Dove pitied the hundreds that died at the animalistic side of her, driven by blood and gore. She relished in the screams, in the hurt, in the pain... it was something that made Kasumi shudder.

As he turned another corner, the boy in his arms let out a soft whimper, and he buried himself deeper into his clothes. Something in Horror's Dove clenched tightly, probably his heart. Sure, he hadn't ever really gotten that close to Midoriya when he was a kid, but he had been friends with Hisashi for long enough that Kasumi had grown fond of the boy even before he met him.

Plus, he was really cute for a nine-year-old. He was pretty sure that it was normal to want to squeeze the kid's cheeks, except he didn't have any experience with children other than the fact that he was one once upon a time. He didn't even know if it was normal to hold guns around them like that.

Fuck. Maybe he should've googled it or something.
A small whine escaped Midoriya’s lips, and he shifted in his arms. Horror’s Dove wanted to curse and tell him to keep still, except the boy was very, very out of it. The slim boy clenched his clouded eyes shut as he gripped the front of his jacket.

Oh, duh. He was cold.

In the background, a huge blaze of fire shot up into the air, careening higher than most of the buildings. The heat wasn't obvious now, but Horror's Dove was sure that in an hour or two, the city would be burning and uncomfortably warm. For now, he simply wrapped his arms tighter around the small teen and hoped that they had blankets back at the place they had been resting at.

He crossed the street, entering through another alleyway that lead to a more well-used street that would (hopefully) lead him directly out of the city. Horror's Dove admitted that it would be easier if they just agreed to use Kurogiri's portals, but...

Well, he didn't trust the League of Villains with anything.

Sure, the man behind the scenes, pulling all sorts of strings and puppets, had invited them (or Hisashi specifically) to this fight. Whoever it was knew that Hisashi wanted Midoriya back, and quickly. And while Horror's Dove could appreciate the deal (Hisashi, in return, would ally himself with the League of Villains for as long as needed to gain the publicity), he knew that there was more going on in the background.

Hisashi knew this as well, so he politely declined using Kurogiri’s powers to extract Midoriya and Horror's Dove. They both were sure that Shigaraki wanted to kill the boy—he wasn't exactly subtle for his distaste of him—and neither of the two wanted that result. Because of it, Hisashi said that they were only allowed to be dropped off using Kurogiri's quirk, and only Hisashi was allowed to use the portal after their entrance.

Which was great, because while Masquerader was tough, he wouldn't last for long; Hisashi would have to step in then—

Horror's Dove's thoughts screeched to a halt as exited on the other side of the alleyway. A small, lithe figure dropped in front of him, landing in a crouch as they looked up at him from behind a mask. Two holes were left open for the eyes, but it was covered in tinted glass.

The figure was wearing a tight suit with thin paddings wrapped around their forearms and their knees. Straps were pulled tightly around their thighs, and sleek shoes that melded perfectly with their suit gleamed. Small parts of their suit and mask glowed ominously neon green, while a huge evergreen hood cast their mask into shadows. The fabric of their hood matched the back of what was made to look like a cloak, which wrapped around the back of their waist and ended in a triangle shape. All parts of their skin were covered, revealing no traits except the fact that they were small and thin.

Horror's Dove's breaths were even and shallow, and he wasn't yet exhausted—though his legs were starting to get tired. His grip on Midoriya tightened momentarily as he absorbed all the information in front of him, and it took him a second before he recognized the figure.

"Green Screen," he stated slowly. "A hero in the business for a couple years. Rumors had it that you started later than most, but no one can be sure what your age is because you're so hidden."

The person in front of him dipped their head in acknowledgment. "You're not wrong, I guess." Their voice came out muffled behind their mask, but it was clear enough for him to hear.
Kasumi smiled. "Well, I'd recommend that you stay out of my way. You're inexperienced at best. I'd rather not have to fight you and risk hurting my friend here."

Green Screen snorted lightly. "Sorry, but I won't be leaving here until either I'm dead or you're unconscious."

Horror's Dove frowned. "Hm? Oh really?" he asked. He adjusted his hold on Midoriya slightly. "How come?"

Green Screen reached for their belt, coming back with a small dagger. "Personal reasons, Kasumi Ryota." They flicked the blade outward, and it glinted in the overhead lights coming from the lampposts nearby. "And trust me—" They bent their knees slightly as they got into a fighting position.

"—I have plenty of them."

=====

Hisashi was quiet. So was Enji as they swung themselves slowly along the swingsets.

"I got in," Hisashi said. And then, repeating himself: "I got into the Police Academy."

Enji nodded. "I'm getting ready to graduate from U.A.," he admitted. "I'm going to get the number one spot as soon as I can."

Hisashi smiled softly. He pushed himself lightly back and forth on the swing, the chains creaking slightly. "I believe that you can do it."

The wind gently pressed against their backs, rustling the grass and sending a chill over the both of them even as they ran hot. The chill in the air was becoming more noticeable as the sun finally disappeared beneath the horizon.

Hisashi tilted his head back and up to look at the stars. Enji usually wasn't patient enough to sit and stare at specks in the sky, but for Hisashi, he stilled himself and let the silence run.

"I'm gonna miss you," Hisashi admitted quietly. He glanced over to Enji. "You promise you won't forget about me when you become number one?"

Enji rolled his eyes. "Don't be stupid."

Hisashi huffed out a small laugh. "I guess I am, huh?" He quickly sobered up, and he shyly pressed the toe of his foot into the ground. "I- uhm..." His cheeks grew a little pink. "I met someone recently." He avoided Enji's gaze, even as his face flushed a deeper color. "If you, uh, if you'd like to meet them..." He trailed off, clearly wanting for Enji to take the hint.

Enji grunted. "No thanks." He crossed his arms as he blew a small wisp of fire. "I'll wait until after you're married to meet them. I might scare them off otherwise, and I don't feel like comforting you when you get all crybaby-like."

Hisashi stared at him for a moment before bursting out into laughter. When he finally calmed down, he shot Enji a smile. "All right then, Endeavor. I'll hold that to you."

=====

Hisashi's flames were bright blue, and they tore through anything and everything without a second
thought. Endeavor bore against the intense wave of heat that rushed through the air, causing his already-overheated body to burn.

Hisashi's fire hissed lowly in his mouth as his eyes turned a deep crimson, and the fire that burst from his tongue was condensed into a single shot aimed at Endeavor's head. Endeavor dug his feet into the ground and let his own fist burn, and fuck, how much more heat could he take before he overheated entirely, before he collapsed and couldn't get up?—

His flames burned white hot as he concentrated it into a thin beam. They collided together, and the two attacks blasted apart in a shockwave that blew hot air directly into his face. Endeavor reeled backward as a foot swiped for his face, and he shot a small burst of fire at Ignition's face to knock him back. The smaller man hit the ground and rolled back to his feet, heels scraping across the concrete.

Hisashi leapt back forward, eyes blazing and fists clenched as he breathed in heavily. "At this rate," he spat, "you'll never be able to get out of this alive, let alone save your son."

Endeavor felt something twist in his stomach. "Shouto has nothing to do with this," he snarled back.

Hisashi bared his teeth. "Your son has everything to do with this," he spat. His throat, which had been glowing faintly orange, burned brighter as flames licked his lips. Smoke poured from his mouth, and Endeavor sprinted forward, fists clenched.

*He's strong, but if I can get in close, I can defeat him before his flames burn me—!*

Endeavor's fist aimed for Hisashi's abdomen; the man dodged the first attack, but the second landed in his chest. Hisashi coughed as his oxygen was momentarily knocked out of him, his crimson eyes growing wide. The punch sent him flying through the glass storefront of the building behind him, and the shattered remains clinked as they hit the ground. Endeavor raised a hand, flames budding along his palm before shooting out into the building, setting the insides ablaze.

Endeavor cut the flames shooting from his palm. The fire crackled inside the building, hugging the walls and the floor and machinery as it burned—but there was no other movement.

Endeavor stared with wide eyes as he started forward. *That... that couldn't have been that easy—*

Blood was pouring down his face when Hisashi appeared in front of him. His lips were pulled back into a snarl as a condensed column of flame shot from his mouth.

And, for a second, Endeavor almost considered that Hisashi might hold true to his word that he would be burned. He was thrown down the street as his upper body and torso suddenly felt a stinging bite hit them, and sharp pinpricks of pain repeatedly burrowing into his skin.

There was a moment when his world devolved into twisting as he went airborne, and then his vision stuttered to a stop as he crashed down the street. The burning in his back as he scraped across the ground was only drowned out by the pain in his chest. The concrete sizzled as his fire burned it, and one of his eyes were clenched shut as he pushed himself upright. He could faintly feel blood sliding down his chest as he pushed himself up further—no doubt his costume was a wreck, and a glance down proved it. The back of his head ached, and he ignored the burning pain even though there was probably a wound there.

Endeavor swayed as he got to his feet, but he quickly righted himself after. Hisashi was standing down the street, his mouth smoking terribly. Had his eyes not secreted extra moisture than the average person did due to the amount of smoke that would get in his eyes, Hisashi might have had
eye problems already. Endeavor only had a second to roll out of the way before another wave of blue flames was sent toward him, and the buildings behind him suffered the blow and collapsed to the ground in a pile of burnt rubble. More glass shattered and the fire alarm systems rung loudly.

Endeavor cursed under his breath before sending his own wave at Hisashi, and the man merely held his arms in front of him to take the attack. Endeavor's strike burned high in the sky, towering above the buildings surrounding them as his blitz crushed the unfortunate structures nearby. He could feel the burning in his chest scorch brighter, and he grunted as the heat seared his insides uncomfortably.

The attack did very little to Hisashi, barely seeming to faze him at all, and the man sprinted forward. He breathed out soft wisps of flames into his hands, which alighted them with blue fire. Endeavor shot another condensed burst of flames at him, but the man rolled out of the way and jumped upon him. Hands raised, fire wisping, Endeavor raised a hand to shoot fire and shove him back.

He was lucky when a thin thread of something wrapped around Hisashi's middle, pulling him back and to the ground. Soon enough, the thin strings piled together, and Endeavor found himself staring at the cool and collected form of the number five hero.

"Heard that Ignition popped up," he explained, his eye narrowed in concentration. "But I didn't expect you to be fighting him alone, Endeavor."

"Edgeshot," Endeavor greeted. "What are you doing here?"

Edgeshot tilted his head to the side curiously. "I had to stop by Hosu for a mission nearby. I was just about to head back to my agency when I received the news." He glanced upward, and Endeavor followed his gaze to see a helicopter above them. "You're live now—probably half the country knows Ignition has decided to attack Hosu."

Endeavor clenched his jaw when Edgeshot's body unraveled, leaving behind just his head as sharp strings shot toward Hisashi, who dodged them by throwing himself backward. The distance did little to resolve Endeavor's dread as Hisashi shot a flame at the strands, pushing them backward.

There was a moment of silence as the man hunched over, shoulders tense. "Eh?" Hisashi muttered. "Backup already? That was pretty fast..." He huffed out a small flame. "I guess that means that I'll have to end this quickly if I'm ever going to kill your son..."

Edgeshot's eyes widened momentarily, but he calmed back into a relaxed state. "He's aiming for your son?"

Endeavor growled under his breath. "Unfortunately."

Edgeshot hummed as his strings flickered around him. "Don't worry. We'll get him before he can hurt him."

Endeavor didn't know how to feel about said reassurance. He glanced back to his opponent. "Shit. Get out of the way!" he called, and Edgeshot hissed from beside him.

Hisashi was fuming. His eyes, dark crimson, had gone so dark that Endeavor was sure that they turned black for a moment. The man was trembling, and he choked out a pained sound as thick smoke poured out from his lips. Edgeshot unraveled himself before shooting himself into the air, and Endeavor lurched to the side as Hisashi coughed.

He muttered something under his breath, something Endeavor couldn't hear, and then his mouth opened wide.
His flames weren't red or orange or yellow. They weren't even blue.

They were black.

"My quirk makes yours super ineffective! My skin absorbs heat and stores it in sacs along my body that power up my own Fire Breath."

Endeavor felt an overwhelming surge of heat overcome him, and sweat poured down from his face. The strings of dark flame were thin, and they shot out in a web of strings that soared in too many directions to count. Endeavor did his best to avoid them, just as Edgeshot did in his stringed state.

From the corner of his eye, he saw one of the black strings, glowing and bursting and crackling. Shit.

Something seared the skin of his already-burned shoulder, and he gritted his teeth so hard against the pain that he was sure that he was going to crack a tooth. The wound on his shoulder had been ignorable before, and it had numbed overtime, but now it throbbed and ached as he bore through the pain and leaped further back.

He heard a small grunt of pain, and then the fire slammed into the buildings and cut through each of them like a blade through butter. Endeavor held his arm in front of his face as another structure collapsed to the ground, and then another, and then another, debris flying as clouds of dust rushed up, hiding Hisashi and Edgeshot from view. The ground shook as the sounds of crashing mildly hurt his eardrums, and Endeavor coughed into his fist as smoke and dust burned the back of his throat. Damn it.

Endeavor glanced around at his surroundings, trying to find Hisashi and Edgeshot amongst the smoke. It was almost silent, however, except for the soft breeze blowing the fire closer to him.

Of course he would have stored the heat from my attacks and used them against me. Endeavor glanced to his side as he heard faint footsteps. If he keeps on making attacks like that, I'm not sure there'll even be a city left, let alone people in it.

Edgeshot stumbled through the smoke, coming into view as it swirled past him. His single eye was watering, but it looked as if he was ignoring it. Endeavor noticed how he gripped his arm, though if he was in any pain, he didn't show it.

"I guess that means enough meaningless chatter for us," he admitted. His arms disappeared into thin strands, and Endeavor didn't fail to notice how a chunk looked frayed along the edges. "Any weaknesses and strengths I should be aware of?"

Endeavor clenched his fist. "He can absorb my flames and use it to power up his attacks. That's how he pulled off that attack without straining himself. He's also practically immune to my fire." He winced as his shoulder flared up with pain, as did his chest, which he was sure was going to scar over at this point. Some parts of his skin even looked charred, and had he been young and inexperienced as he had once upon a time, he might have thrown up upon looking at it. "He's physically weaker than some of the more dangerous villains, especially with his lower body strength. He has hand-to-hand combat experience. Not to be underestimated."

"I would hope no one would be foolish enough to," Edgeshot murmured. His body began to unravel again. "Fine. I'll get into close quarters and initiate combat. You can serve backup."

Backup!?
Edgeshot seemed to notice his anger immediately because he ended up shrugging what was left of his shoulders. "Our best bet is to make sure his fire cannot get any stronger than it already is." And then he bluntly stated, although he didn't mean to come off as harsh, "If you care about your son, you should stay back and make sure that Ignition doesn't get to him."

Edgeshot unraveled a second later, and in just the right time. A hole was broken through the smokescreen as a shot of fire blasted forward, aiming for the place Edgeshot had just been standing. Edgeshot's body thinned into tiny fibers that whipped around Ignition's attacks with ease. Strand after strand flung toward him, changing direction only to avoid the searing flames that followed.

*If you care about your son...?*

There was a moment of quiet stillness. A feeling of uselessness washed over him for a split second. He was the number two hero, and yet he was standing here, doing nothing?

*And care about my son? Of course I—*

"So I heard your wife's pregnant, Hisashi."

"Hehe, you heard? But yeah, she is... I'm so excited! Like, is the baby going to be a girl or a boy, and are they gonna be super tiny, and I can't wait to paint their bedroom and buy some toys for them and—"

"You're rambling, Hisashi."

"Well, I can't help it, Enji. I'm gonna be a father!"

A father.

Edgeshot formed back together, appearing in the air right behind Hisashi. He swung a kick at the male, but the villain dodged it with ease. Edgeshot unraveled again when an attack was sent toward him, and he shot strands toward his feet. Hisashi grunted as one caught his foot, cutting through his boot's thick protective layer.

In a split-second of action, he relit his hands and grabbed onto the fiber, pulling it out of his foot (which was no doubt bleeding.) He tugged it toward him, and Edgeshot's upper body formed just long enough for Hisashi to slam his heel there, efficiently knocking him away.

Hisashi was breathing hard as he sent another wave of flames at Edgeshot, who ducked even further backward to dodge it. His eyes were back to their murderous crimson. He sighed out another breath, smoke wisping around his face as he glared down at the two of them coldly.

"I just don't get it," he murmured softly. He had a faraway look in his eye. Endeavor stiffened at the sudden laxness his figure held. "You're so determined to defeat me Endeavor..." His eyes trailed up to his face. "But if I wasn't the one attacking him, would you be so angry then?"

Edgeshot tilted his head. "Every parent cares for their children. It doesn't matter who it is, if their
child is in danger, they'd run into the fight."

Hisashi was silent for a very, very long time. "Debatable," he finally said. "And a foolish wish."

Edgeshot glanced to Endeavor. "Is there a specific reason as to why he's so hellbent on killing your son?"

Endeavor frowned. "Hisashi," he said instead. Ignition tilted his head in acknowledgment. "If you kill my son, you're becoming the same people you set out to get rid of."

Ignition stared at him. His eyes turned yellow for a moment, and Endeavor was reminded of sunshine and light and—

"Sorry," Hisashi said. "But I'm long past that stage." His eyes washed with orange. "I'm not here to save the world anymore. I'm here for an overdue dose of karma." He clenched his hands into fists. "Your son will be the casualty of your mistakes, Enji. His death will be blamed on no one but you."

"You seem pretty confident," Edgeshot replied calmly.

Hisashi barked out in laughter. "I've been planning this moment for decades, number five hero." He raised a hand to point at Endeavor. "Some come on now, Enji. Stop hiding behind your fire. You never did when we were kids—so why would you do so now?"

Endeavor could almost feel Edgeshot stiffen from beside him at the revealed knowledge of their past relationship. "Hiding?" Endeavor felt the flames around his face and shoulders flare up. "I'm not hiding anything. I just thought I made it quite clear—" A fire swirled in his chest. It burned. He felt too hot for his own good. "—that you'd have to roll me into my grave before I'd let you get close to any of them." He bore his teeth into a snarl. "And you aren't going to kill me anytime soon!"

Hisashi smirked. "Now that's the Enji I knew as a kid."

"Endeavor—" Edgeshot started. He cut him off.

"I'll hold him off. You finish the job," Endeavor said, already feeling the fire start to ache his skin.

Smoke poured off the buildings still alight, and the wreckage of broken glass and brick and stone littered the street. It was a painfully familiar sight, one that made Endeavor's chest hurt and twisted even though he had done his best to stomp those feelings down years ago. Heroes didn't have feelings. They weren't wanted, weren't needed until it benefitted the people. And so Endeavor's expression turned stone cold as Edgeshot recognized the order.

"I see." The smaller man started to unwind into small fibers again. "Do your best, Endeavor."

Endeavor didn't respond as the man disappeared entirely into strands, and with a burst of wind and a small popping sound in his ears, Edgeshot was gone.

Ignition across from him raised a brow. "So this is where the battle's conclusion begins, huh?" He smirked. "Let's see if this plan up your sleeve will get you the ending you want, Endeavor."

The unspoken words rang in Endeavor's head.

*Let's see if your son will make it the night.*

=====

Hisashi stared at the wall for a moment as he gripped his phone in his hand. He was sitting in the
kitchen, and Inko was in the living room, tidying up his mess because he was unorganized as hell. He told her that she didn’t have to, but she whacked the side of his head and told him that he’d never get any work done if she didn’t, but “don’t expect her to be his maid and do it again for him anytime soon.”

His phone case was warm in his hands from holding it so long, and he started when he realized that he hadn’t even tried calling the number and had procrastinated for ten minutes straight.

Taking in a shuddering breath, he turned on his phone (and was greeted with a picture of him and Inko smiling together) and unlocked it. Pulling up his contacts, he scrolled down until he found Enji’s.

He paused, his finger hovering over the contact.

Biting his lower lip, he sighed before pressing call on his contact and holding the phone up to his ear. He wasn’t expecting Enji to respond, but he wanted to at least try—

"I’m sorry," Enji said as he picked up the phone. Hisashi flinched. "I should’ve been there. I should’ve ignored the call."

Hisashi grimaced. "I mean, yeah, you probably should have," he admitted, wincing at how obviously fake his cheerfulness was. "You were my best man, and you never showed up. But... it’s okay now. I don’t mind, you had to go save the world."

But I wish you didn't put your hero work over me, was unsaid.

When Endeavor was silent, he spoke up again. "Hey, you promised you'd meet her after we got married. You can't scare her off now. Why don't we meet up sometime?"

"I think..." Enji's voice was distant. Hisashi crossed his fingers, hoping. He wasn't sure what he was hoping for, just that it was for something..."I think that sounds great."

Hisashi smiled. "Great! How about next week, at the Blue Ravens?"

There was a moment of silence. Hisashi felt a ball grow thick in his throat, and he suddenly regretted what he said. Had he overstepped his boundaries? Did he push him at a time when he was busy?

"Sure. Next week sounds great."

Hisashi breathed out in relief. "Great." And then, jokingly, "Make sure you’re on your best behavior. I don't want my wife to fuss at you if you're not, she can be really scary."

Inko snorted from the other room.

"Yeah, yeah, sure," Endeavor said, distracted. "Bye, Hisashi."

"Bye, Enji," Hisashi said brightly.

The call ended shortly. Hisashi was practically bouncing as he bounded back into the room where Inko was.

She rolled her eyes. "I told you if you just try then things'll work out for you. Now I finally get to meet that man."

Except they didn't.
Endeavor never showed up.

And he never did the next time, either.

And when the time came, Hisashi was not Endeavor's best man.

======

Horror's Dove glowered down at the figure in front of him. Letting Midoriya slide from his arms and carefully placing him on the ground, he shed his jacket and wrapped it around the boy. Stepping over him, he cracked his knuckles threateningly.

"Sorry about this," he said confidently. "I wish I wouldn't have to hurt you like this."

Green Screen didn't respond and instead bounded forward, daggers flashing in the light as they swung them too fast for the eye to see. Horror's Dove ducked backward, taking their wrist and pulling them forward. Slamming his knee into their gut, he followed up with a punch to their face.

His knuckles flared for a millisecond before it eased away, his quirk kicking in straight after. Green Screen's mask held up against the attack, and though they stumbled back slightly from the impact, they leapt back forward. Horror's Dodge lurched out of the way, eyes following the movement of a blade aimed to slice across his face. The sharpened dagger slid centimeters from his nose, cutting through his pale blue bangs.

Green Screen's hand, which was gripping the dagger tightly, swung back around to strike the hilt of the blade into Horror's Dove's head. Their other hand slammed into the man's gut with a jutted palm.

Horror's Dove's breath was knocked out of him, and Green Screen took that moment to raise the blade in their hand and swipe again. Kasumi raised an arm in instinct, and the dagger was thrust into the meat of his muscle. Once again, a sharp of pain rocketed up his arm before it eased into a low thrum, and he kicked Green Screen away.

Without thinking, he ripped the blade from his arm, and another sharp pain came over him before the wound left behind (nothing more than a scratch now) only stung slightly.

"I can take much more than that, Green Screen," he mocked. "I could even stand up against one of All Might's punches, once upon a time. How do you think you can defeat me?"

If Green Screen was bothered, they didn't show it. Instead, with a small war cry, they pulled out another dagger (this one the size of his forearm) and shot back at him. He huffed in slight annoyance. He had to end this fight, and soon, preferably before any backup arrived. If he was ever going to get out of here with Izuku, then now was the time.

The long dagger was swung at his face again, and Horror's Dove stepped back. The same attack? I thought Green Screen was supposed to be unpredictable—

Green Screen's heel came down onto his knee, making him stumble forward before they swept his feet out from underneath him. Green Screen's foot slammed into his chest, locking him into the ground. His breath knocked out of him, his back flared with pain before numbing again.

Ah. So that's what that meant.

Green Screen's blade came whizzing toward his face, and his hands flew up, grabbing onto their wrists just as the tip of the dagger was about to hit the spot between his eyes. Grunting at the exertion from trying to push the weapon further from his face (holy hell this person was strong).
"You're gonna kill me," he huffed, grunting as the end of Green Screen's foot pushed into the area of his stomach just under his ribs. It burned, and he choked as all oxygen left his lungs.

Green Screen scoffed under their breath. "Trust me, you'd share the pain and damage with all of those doves, you would be fine." The blade shoved forward another centimeter. "The most that would happen would be memory loss and synapse failure."

"Only memory loss? What are you, crazy!?"

Green Screen, arms trembling, hissed under their breath. "You deserve a lot worse."

"Worse!? What kind of hero are—!?"

"Sorry, but I won't be leaving here until either I'm dead or you're unconscious."

"Personal reasons, Kasumi Ryota. And trust me, I have plenty of them."


Just as he expected, Green Screen stiffened. He took that moment to duck his head to the side, and he let go of her wrists. The blade clanged as it hit the ground, and he took that moment she was off-balance to slam his heel into her gut, pushing her back. His other foot found the back of her heel, pulling toward him and causing her to stagger. In an instant, he was on his feet, and he reeled a fist back, flinging it toward her masked face.

This time, when his knuckles came into contact with the glass of the eyes, it shattered beneath the impact. Green Screen's hand whipped up to grab onto the arm before it disappeared, and she gripped it tightly between her fingers. Her eye was swollen and blood had already started to form along her waterline, and though shut, Kasumi was sure that some of the glass shards had gotten stuck there.

She cursed under her breath sharply before throwing her own punch, hard enough for Kasumi to curse loudly even though the pain receded directly after. Reaching blindly back, his hand found purchase and wrapped around the still-upright handle of the dagger, whose tip had been buried into the ground.

Pulling it out of the ground, he swung it with as much force as he could put behind it. The blade came upward and sliced through some of the leather of her costume's chest piece. It didn't stop there, and the blade cut the mask in half.

He didn't like brutalizing people. He didn't like beating them into the ground until they were black and blue and bleeding like Vulture did. But because of his quirk, he had nothing to show. And so all of his fights were with bare fists and sometimes a pistol, and they were always messy and he always walked away with his knuckles tainted red.

But he was not going to let Green Screen get away and call for backup. He was going to get out of the city, and he was going to take Izuku with him.

And so he didn't feel that bad when the mask clattered upon hitting the floor, his dagger following soon after. And he didn't feel bad when he punched her in the face again, and again, and again until Green Screen raised her arms above her head and took the blows there.

No. He couldn't fail Hisashi, not again, not like he had before—not like how he sold him out after nineteen hours of interrogation after his arrest. No, he had killed people without question, had stood up to All Might without flinching under his gaze, surely he could at least do this—and yet at the end of the day he had been pathetic when he was captured and thrown in jail and he was lucky Hisashi
was even giving him another chance to rekindle decades of friendship broken by his mistakes and 
damnit his palms hurt, and his shoulders hurt, and they hurt, hurt, hurt, and they burned and 
the red skin ached, raw and fresh and he was sorry, Hisashi, he was sorry, he would do anything to 
make up for it, please stop hurting him—

His hands were shaking when he snapped out of it, his shoulders trembling just as bad.

Breath stuck in his throat, he stumbled back upon seeing Green Screen's bloody and bruised face. 
She turned over, spitting out a loose tooth that he knocked loose. Her movements were lethargic, and 
she was shivering like a wet dog.

Kasumi, hands burning, shoulders aching I guess you don't have any birds to save you from the pain 
now, huh? turned around. Izuku was sitting up when he got to him, and he looked faintly 
constipated. His lower lip was quivering as he went to go pick him back up in his arms. Raising a 
hand up into his face, he whined—his face was scrunched up and he had tears pooling in the corner 
of his eyes.

From behind him, he heard shuffling. He only just barely managed to scramble back before that dang 
dagger (why didn't he keep it on him, why was he stupid enough to drop it to the ground and ignore 
it) whizzed right where his face just happened to be. Green Screen, shoulders hunched, lower lip 
bleeding, eyes swollen, stared at the two of them but mostly focused her attention on Kasumi. Her 
eyes only trailed over Izuku momentarily.

The light from the lampost was harsh and warm yellow, lighting the part of her face that wasn't cast 
into dark shadows from the hood of her costume. Small flecks of glass sprinkled on her cheeks were 
glinting, harsh against the blood that was smeared along her face. A soft wind, carrying smoke from 
the other side of the city and warmth from the roaring fires, gently pulled the fabric of her costume.

"You're so determined," he said softly. "Even though you couldn't beat me if you tried."

Green Screen tilted her head. "You may be able to take a thousand hits," she clipped, "but you do 
have a weakness. Oxygen deprivation, if I'm correct."

Kasumi's stomach turned to lead as his eyes caught onto the still shaking of Green Screen's 
shoulders. His hands weren't doing much better.

Horror's Dove clenched his jaw. "Good luck with that," he stated. "Because you're going to have a 
hard time if I kill you first."

_Please don't make this hard on me, he couldn't help but think. I know you. I can't stand the thought of delivering to you a painful, brutal, bloody death. Please just let me make this clean. Please don't fight me, please don't fight back, I don't want to—_

"And that is where you are wrong!"

A huge gust of wind slammed into his back as something heavy landed behind them. Horror's Dove 
flinched, his mouth growing dry as he recognized the voice. He slowly turned, and his eyes widened 
upon seeing the man standing there.

All Might was not smiling. "I am here, now," he said. "And I'm taking my student back with me."

(Behind Kasumi, Green Screen's hood flew off her face. Her face might have been swollen and 
bloody and purple with all the bruises forming but, to Izuku, she was recognizable any day. Her 
green hair, tied and pinned up, was starting to come loose. A few of her bangs fell out and hung over 
er her equally green eyes.
Yes, Midoriya could never, never forget Inko.)

=====

"So I heard your wife's pregnant, Hisashi." Enji's voice was unfamiliar, gruff, and nothing like it had been when they were children—but after two years of radio silence, it was a welcoming thing to hear through the phone. And even now, Hisashi could make out the smallest tinge to his voice that he never heard in his interviews or when questioned on TV. It had to be something like pride, or happiness.

"Hehe, you heard? But yeah, she is... I'm so excited! Like, is the baby going to be a girl or a boy, and are they gonna be super tiny, and I can't wait to paint their bedroom and buy some toys for them and—"

He and Inko had been planning this for a while now, but it took them quite a bit of time to gather the courage to take the leap into what would be their parenthood. Fortunately for them, they were pretty well-off financially so it wouldn't cause too many strains. Inko had been working as a nurse for years, taking what she earned and saving most of it for when the time came. Hisashi's work as a police officer, and with all the nights he stayed overtime, he was getting enough pay to support the two of them and then some.

"You're rambling, Hisashi."

"Well, I can't help it, Enji. I'm gonna be a father!" It's a word he never dreamed of calling himself, not when he went into training to be a police officer. He heard all the stories about hardships, about family being killed and slaughtered and the chiefs never trusting anyone again. But here he was, about to enter one of the most exciting/terrifying parts of his life.

And it was terrifying, really. Terrifying to hold something so small and delicate in his arms, bouncing him lightly and cooing at him as Inko rested, still tired from yesterday's laborious (puns galore, apparently) turn of events.

And it was terrifying when his son began to walk on his own. Terrifying when he reached for sharp things and it made Hisashi have several heart attacks before they finally learned to shove all the sharp stuff far, far away from where a toddler could reach it.

And it was exciting when he spoke his first words, which just happened to be "Herro!" as he pointed to Endeavor and All Might on the TV. And it was exciting when his son, Midoriya Izuku, with his bright green eyes with small flecks of yellow and black hair and chubby cheeks and a few freckles here and there called him Dad for the first time.

"Oof," Hisashi dramatically cried. "You're getting so heavy, Izuku! And so tall!"

And Izuku always giggled and laughed and Hisashi couldn't help but laugh too.

If anyone could steal his heart in a moment, could have wrapped him around their little finger, it was Izuku. Hisashi didn't even realize that he could love someone more than he used to love Todoroki Enji—they had been brothers since two but never by blood. Yet, here he was, entirely proven wrong by this small boy who barely reached his knees.

He picked up the small boy and placed him on his shoulders. Izuku giggled. "Ready, 'Zuku?" he asked, holding onto the boy by his thin legs.

Izuku bounced eagerly. "Yeah, let's go beat those viwains!"
Hisashi put on his determined gaze. "Those darn bad guys! We gotta zoom!" He ran (pretended to run) through their house, stopping around every corner to peek around the corner. "There's the villain!" he said, pretending to be shocked.

"We gotta go get him!" Izuku whispered conspiratorially.

Hisashi grinned up at him. "Of course we will!"

Their game ended when Hisashi turned on Izuku, tickling him until he was senseless. And the two of them laughed, and laughed, and laughed until they were wheezing and couldn't anymore.

"I love you, Izuku," Hisashi said upon tucking him in for bed later that night.

Izuku smiled back at him. His eyes were bright and sparkling and lovely and it took Hisashi's breath away.

"I love you too."

=====

Brocollisunshinechild:
kayama

Brocollisunshinechild:
jomsh ere an shes scaing em

Momnight:
Midoriya?? What's going on?

Brocollisunshinechild:
here

Momnight:
where

Brocollisunshinechild:
mom

Momnight:
om?

Momnight:
wait

Momnight:
your mom's there?

Brocollisunshinechild:
:-;

Brocollisunshinechild:
imm tikeed kaymaa

Momnight:
i know, sweetie

Momnight:
buts you gotta tell me where you are

Momnight:
are you okay?

Brocollisunshinechild:
yehh, allmights ehere

Brocollisunshinechild:
his spre strong

Momnight:
all might's there?

Momnight:
izuku?

Momnight:
izuku, come on, respond t me

Brocollisunshinechild:
This is All Might. Young Midoriya is fine. He does seem to be out of it, though. Maybe drugged or something of the like. I'll take care of him.

Brocollisunshinechild:
Or high. He might be high.

Momnight:
he's fucking what

Brocollisunshinechild:
Keyword here, might.

Momnight:
fukcing

Momnight:
just, goddamit

Momnight:
I didn't want to give him the "don't do drugs" parent talk this early

Brocollisunshinechild:
I'm more surprised you haven't yet.

Momnight:
god i hate it when you're rght

Momnight:
but look after him for me, okay? i'll be there as soon as I can
Momnight:
and don't you dare leave him alone

Brocollisunshinechild:
I won't.

Momnight:
good. I'm about to b dropped now, see you on the field.

Brocollisunshinechild:
Good luck.

=====

There was a fire. A fire that was eating away at their house, that rose smoke and burned and—

"My son," Hisashi gasped as the medics started to push him back toward the ambulances. There
was blood. Blood in his hair, on his arms, from his side, blood that was nothing but his own. "My
son, he's in there, with the villain—"

He brushed off the hands of the medics and tried to limp back toward the house. "I'm a cop," he
slurred, "I can take care of myself. I just need to save him—"

He watched as Inko was dragged out of the smoke, coughing and writhing and crying. One of his
squadmates, a man with a quirk that allowed him to see a person's mental state (he was so, so
young, a junior compared to him), stumbled out of the house as well, ash covering him from head to
toe. A familiar figure, wreathed in flame, bounded toward the house.

Enji.

He stumbled forward. "Enji," he croaked. "Enji. Izuku's in there, he's—he's with the villain, I—I
need your help to save them, I can't let him get hurt—"

Endeavor placed a hand on his shoulder. "It's fine, Hisashi. Go back, I don't want you to get hurt." His
gaze turned steely. "I promise you, I'll save him even if it costs me my life."

Endeavor turned and ran into the house cloaked in flames.

"I promise."

I promise.
A small body was handed to him, burned and cold. His shoulders shook as he ran his shaking hands through his son's hair, rocking back and forth on his heels. His eyes were wet even though his throat was dry, and he could taste the smoke and ash on his tongue—

Someone took Izuku away from him. He pleaded with them, told them no even though he knew what had happened. Death was not a new experience for him, he had been in the Police force for years now, but it was never supposed to be so close to home, so close to his heart—

I promise.

Hisashi fell to his knees and screamed.

=====

"Just remember that being a hero means sacrificing yourself. You'll have to give up a lot to save those that matter. You'll make enemies if you don't."
"That's obvious, Hisashi. Of course I'll put those needing saving first."

=====

Todoroki leapt out of the way as Vulture came barreling toward him, sending a wave of ice at it that it quickly shattered with a well-aimed punch. Hornman rammed into her side, knocking her away from Todoroki (after several failed attempts to get Todoroki and Iida out of the picture, the heroes all agreed to just do their best to make sure they never got hit.)

Ninja followed up with several shurikens thrown at its boned armor, his shadows then falling on top of its shoulders and arms to hold it down. Stripes came up a second later, letting out a small war cry as she kicked its front, breaking some of the ribs there. Iida came from behind, whacking it in the back of its head with an engine-powered kick.

"Get back!" Todoroki cried out, and Iida, Stripes, and Ninja jumped away from Vulture as he sent a burst of flames toward it.

Though his fire attacks did very little to the bone armor and didn't seem to affect Vulture as much, they did cause the material to become brittle and weaker, enough so that they were easier to break. Of course, with Vulture's quirk, if she consumed any blood or organic animal material, she could mend the broken bones and create more.

Thankfully for them, Vulture caught them rarely and only caught little of what it needed. Sure, Hornman was still bleeding, and Ninja and Stripes were bruised, but they had gotten good at this. It was like a dance routine, each of them partnering up to attack and then defend and then flipping the roles and then moving around one another—like some kind of complex arrangement that never ended.

It was true that they were clumsy at first, but by now, they worked like a well-oiled machine. None of them got hurt, and they were slowly wearing Vulture down bit by bit. At this rate, it would only take a few hours to take it down, and they could probably get away without even getting injured.

Vulture jumped high in the sky to avoid the flames, turning to face—

"Iida!"

The creature burst forward, grabbing Iida by the throat as he was still midair from jumping away from Todoroki's fire attack. Vulture skidded down the street, dragging Iida with him. Hornman cursed before sprinting toward Vulture. Frost started to cover Todoroki's right side, but he hesitated. Though he knew he had a good amount of control, what happened if he hit Iida? And would freezing its lower half really be enough—?

Vulture peered down at Iida, who was struggling in its grip. It opened its mouth, which was nothing but a thin layer of skin on the inside of its cheeks and a cracked, salivating tongue lapping forward. Vulture was breathing heavy, drops of saliva pooling out of the corners of its snout—

Iida looked green in the face as Vulture leaned down to lick his cheek. Hornman cried out from behind him, and he was about to ram into it, except its tail (gosh dangit not the dang tail) made of bone whipped around to slam Hornman in the chest. Hornman was sent flying back, and he crashed into Ninja, who was sprinting forward as well.

Hm. Well, there went their well-oiled machine-ness.

Wow. It kind of sucked.
Vulture opened its mouth again, rotten teeth gleaming with its wetness as it crooned. (A terrible sound, by the way. Zero out of ten would Todoroki recommend listening to it unless you wanted to freak the heck out of your friends. Pranks, Todoroki was sure Kaminari called it.

Todoroki was about to throw caution to the wind when several somethings slammed into the creature, pushing it back. Vulture swung a clawed fist at the things (oh, were those people?), cutting through them. They turned to slush that hit the floor. As Vulture was distracted, white wrapped around it, pulling it back and even further away from Iida. The boy scrambled to his feet, and Todoroki watched, shocked, as red eyes and floating hair entered his vision. Vulture screeched before its bones collapsed inwards, crawling back into pale skin. The bone mask disappeared into the face of the beautiful giantess with the red mussed hair. She scowled, and Todoroki noted that her lipstick had faded.

A beginning of a curse made it on her lips as she tried to move in her bonds, but it was interrupted by a yelp as three more figures identical to the ones she had swiped through pounced on her, keeping her distracted. It was followed by rapid gunfire that could be heard as it echoed through the streets. Blood blossomed on her hands and calves as the bullets made their mark. Though some of the damage was blunted by her suit (which was ridiculously strong), it still pierced through the material. A whip cracked at the cement by her feet, causing her to startle and fall to her side, and those three figures from before held her down.

Todoroki finally recognized the clone one—Ectoplasm. And Aizawa, he was the one who disabled her quirk and wrapped her up, and the one who shot the bullets, Snipe, and—

Midnight stepped forward, whip still in hand as she pulled at the skin-tight fabric along her upper arm. A small amount of gas leaked from it, and she crouched so Vulture would breathe it in.

It wasn't but a few seconds before the woman's eyes rolled up into the back of her head, and Todoroki let out a sigh of relief. He hadn't even realized that he was holding his breath, but he had. He fell into a crouch, his leg muscles protesting as he put his face into his hands. Iida sat down beside him, armor clinking before putting his hand on his shoulder.

Aizawa and the other teachers were here. They were here. They were fine. Todoroki let out another shaky breath, something building in his throat and making it hard to breathe.

It seemed so... so easy. Like that time when all the teachers arrived at USJ. They had taken Shigaraki and Kurogiri out with ease, and it was almost funny how comparable both of these scenes were. While Todoroki, Iida, and these three heroes were fighting endlessly with Vulture, four of his teachers managed to easily take her out.

But that didn't happen with Stain. When it was Stain, it was just you, Iida, and Midoriya—

Todoroki's eyes snapped open, and he jumped back up to his feet. Somewhere he recognized that the heroes were gushing at the other four, particularly Ninja at Ectoplasm—probably due to the similarities of their quirks.

"Midoriya," he gasped. "He was taken by someone named Horror's Dove—"

Aizawa turned to him and raised a hand. "Calm down, Todoroki. All Might found him, and he's taking care of him now."

"All Might?" Iida questioned. "He's here?"

Midnight nodded, her expression unusually stern and cold. "Midoriya is in good hands for now. All
Might promised that he would keep an eye on him until we could meet up.” She tilted her head, eyes scouring the area. "Endeavor and Ignition. Where are they?"

A light thump could be heard from behind him, and Todoroki stiffened before whipping around. He was greeted with blonde styled hair and a jean outfit...

"I found them," Best Jeanist said. "They're about a block or two away, not too far off. I don't think we can get too close, though. The two of them are spitting fire, and it's too hot to get in proximity with either of them. I might be able to bare through it, and it seems as if Edgeshot is too, but it would be best if Aizawa used his quirk at a long distance."

"Edgeshot's here too?" Midnight asked, surprised.

Best Jeanist nodded. "No doubt it is affecting him negatively—I wouldn't be surprised if he comes out of this with severe burns—but he doesn't seem to be stopping. He and Endeavor might have a plan."

Snipe huffed. "Great, so we shouldn't get up close—but where are we supposed to find high ground?"

Stripes, the blonde hero from before, coughed lightly. "There's a tower, not too far from here..." She pointed upward, the dark structure only a block or two in a different direction of the fight.

"High enough," Aizawa said sharply. "Snipe, come with me. We might need your firepower."

Snipe blinked. "O-oh, sure."

"Wait," Ectoplasm cried out, "what about us? We can't just sit here and do nothing!"

"You're not," Aizawa shot back. "Get Todoroki and Iida out of here. And Vulture as well. Take her to the police station." His eyes trailed behind all of them. His eyebrow furrowed. "Is that the Hero Killer: Stain?"

Iida suddenly looked sheepish. "Ah. About that—"

"Midoriya, Iida, and I all took the bastard down," Todoroki deadpanned, "cause idiot over here chased after him head-on without putting two brain cells into it, and we had to protect his ass."

"Todoroki—" Iida started, aghast.

"Is this true?" Aizawa clipped.

Todoroki nodded. "There was another guy here, too. A hero called Native or something. I dropped him off with some ambulances."

Aizawa looked ready to chastise them but then thought better of it. However, he still growled under his breath. "I will expel you the next time something like that happens, you hear me? You're lucky none of you got seriously injured, or else I would have."

Todoroki glanced down to his forearm (the one with those small blades sticking out of it from Stain) and hid it behind him. "Right," he stated blandly. "Glad we're on the same page."

Iida laughed, though it was weak and high-pitched and it trembled and shook. "Of course, of course, sir! We were practically unharmed at all." A hand covered his other arm. The smile that he put on was so blindingly fake that Todoroki was half tempted to elbow him in the side to get him to stop
being so obvious.

Aizawa rolled his eyes. "Midnight, Ectoplasm, you get all of them out of here. Best Jeanist..."

Aizawa fell silent, awkwardly probing.

While it was true that both of them were experienced, Aizawa knew that trying to order the number four hero around would come across as cocky and trying to talk his superiors down. Sure, it might have been different if Aizawa wasn't an underground hero—maybe he would have even gotten a higher ranking status than the other, or close enough that he could give orders. But he wasn't, and he was a mere underground hero; while he did a lot in the shadows, it was just that—shadows. Best Jeanist probably never heard of him and had no reason to trust his decision-making. In fact, Best Jeanist was his senior, and so he had more experience under his belt, no doubt.

But Best Jeanist merely tilted his head. "Yes, Eraserhead?"

Aizawa stumbled for a moment before he composed himself. "I would try to get in as close as possible to lock Ignition in place. While I trust the number two hero to stay alive, he is known to be reckless, and there's no guarantee he has a plan. I can't let anyone else get hurt if they're still in the vicinity."

Best Jeanist nodded slowly. "Of course. I shall do my best to restrain him." Without a further word, he went off, jogging down the street.

Aizawa sighed before shaking his head. "Snipe, come on."

Snipe jumped slightly at the sudden call of his name before he followed the sprinting man, lagging only slightly behind. He mumbled something incoherent behind his mask just before he was out of earshot, and Midnight and Ectoplasm turned to the other two.

"I'll carry Stain," Hornman offered.

"Ah, would you be willing to take Vulture, then, Midnight," Ectoplasm joked.

Midnight glowered at him. "She's over eight feet tall."

"Ah. Right, I should've known that you wouldn't have been to carry her."

Venomous waves rolled off of Midnight as she stared at him with a cutting gaze. "The only reason I'm not going to prove you wrong is so I have my arms open for my pseudo-son, dammit."

Ectoplasm chortled as one of his clones went to go pick up Stain, who was still unconscious.

Hornman, looking like he was about to collapse, helped Stripes and Ninja carry the unconscious giantess.

Upon noticing the pained grunts from Hornman, Iida stepped up. "If you'd like, I can help," he offered. "You're still injured from your fight."

Hornman, even though one of his eyes was squeezed shut from pain, shot him a smile. "Nah, I'm good. And you're just as messed up as me, kid. You shouldn't be carrying anything if you can help it."

Iida opened his mouth to protest, but Todoroki did elbow his side then. Hesitating for a moment, Iida pursed his lips and nodded shortly.

"Glad that's all cleared up. Now then—" Midnight raised a hand and held it over her eyes. "—I think
we're gonna have a bit of company."

=====

Hisashi stared at his hands. The old-fashioned clock in his room was ticking away, and the soft moonlight illuminated enough of the room with the curtains wide open. Inko was sleeping in the bed, but he had already had nightmares and couldn't bring himself to fall asleep.

Dark green eyes with flecks of yellow flashed in his mind. It made the lump in his throat grow thicker and slide further up his esophagus as his breath hitched. He squeezed his hands, ignoring the way that his fingernails bit into his palms. It didn't even hurt, anyway—he was too numb to feel as if it mattered.

Shutting his eyes, he counted to ten in his head before counting back, and then doing it again, and again, until all the letters mushed together in his head and he couldn't make out anything.

"Heroes do what no one else is willing to do."

Gripping his hair tightly, he breathed in deeply as an onslaught of emotions washed over him.

Endeavor... Endeavor, promising me he'd save him. Endeavor, promising me that he'd put those who needed to be saved first.

Endeavor... promising to meet his kid, his wife, his family, but never keeping it.

He's... the number two hero now. He's the number two hero, and he— he—

He let my son die?

Hisashi knew that he was on the verge of having another panic attack, and he tried to repress it, tried to shove it down.

"Heroes... they're becoming corrupt. One of the only times you could trust that all of them truly, totally cared was back when society was still getting back on their feet... when they had a crisis to fight, only the ones who were entirely dedicated to helping others stepped forward, while the weaker-willed hid and waited for help to come to them. That is the only way to cull the weak—not to get rid of them one by one, but to have a crisis that unites the real heroes.

"It's easier said than done, however. I'm just a news reporter, and while I disapprove of most of the up-and-coming heroes nowadays, I don't wish a crisis on any of us—"

A crisis.

It struck a cord, one deep in his heart. Hisashi stood up and stalked out of their bedroom, heading to the small bathroom down the hall. He stumbled inside, splashing the cold water on his face as the world spun around him.

No, he was a Police officer. He saved people, he didn't— he didn't—

"I'm sorry, Hisashi. I couldn't save him."

He gripped the sink so tightly that he was sure it was going to crumble under his fingers. He was being stupid, he was being clouded with rage—everyone made mistakes, and while he could never forgive Endeavor, he was still—he was still a hero—
Heroes do what no one else is willing to do.

*It burned. It burned, it burned, it burned, it burned in his chest like a firestorm that would just never leave—*

*Hisashi went back to bed. He was wide awake for the rest of the night. And the night after that, and the night after that, and the night after that.*

*But he wouldn't listen to that voice in his head. He wouldn't listen. He still wanted to do good, even if it hurt, even if it made his heart ache, even if it brought back the voices of "I want to be just like you when I grow up, Daddy!"*

*Hisashi always hurt.*

*He hurt for four years, for four more years of work, surrounded by heroes that proclaimed that they were great, for four more years as he watched as Endeavor solved hundreds upon hundreds of cases, for four more years as he watched as Todoroki Enji disappeared, for four more years as Endeavor had his first kid and then his second, and then for four years as he and his squad was awarded medal upon shitty medal for everything they accomplished.*

*And then, just before the fourth anniversary of his son's death, his squad got called into action.*

*He should've known better.*

*He should've known better.*

*He should've known better.*

*There was a new hero there, a fairly popular one.*

*He should've known better.*

*His squad, one of the only things keeping him together, responded accordingly to get the civilians out of the way.*

*He should've known better.*

*The hero's control over his quirk when he was stressed was lackluster.*

*He should've known better.*

*When his squad arrived, there were about eight of them. When they left, there were only two. Midoriya Hisashi lost almost everyone he cared about left.*

*When they left the scene, it was just him, and his junior officer Hiroji Chikara.*

*(Hiroji resigned the next day.)*

*(Hisashi decided that he'd do what no one else was willing to do.)*

=====

Horror's Dove knew the second that All Might showed up, he was screwed.

Sure, he had been able to take on the number one hero's punches back when All Might was in his prime. Even with a punch sent to his face with one hundred percent of his power, he still stood.
Granted, a huge purple bruise took up half of his face, but that was beside the point. One could argue that All Might wasn't in his prime anymore, and so he had a fair chance.

But he wasn't in his prime either. Not anymore.

Hacking up blood from a loose tooth, he cringed as the taste of iron burned in his throat. He gasped for breath as he watched All Might pick up Midoriya into his large arms. The large man had taken his phone from Midoriya—the boy was texting someone, he thought—and looked at it for a minute before responding.

Well. There went his hope for no backup.

Gritting his teeth, he ignored the pain radiating through him. He stumbled to his feet, feeling the twinge in his muscles.

"Still up?" All Might questioned. "I must say, you're quite impressive. I hadn't expected that."

Horror's Dove hunched his shoulders, eyes shadowed by his pale hair. The purple mask he always wore was shattered beneath the force of All Might's punches, the small remains glittering against the floor.

Panting as he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, he stumbled forward.

"I won't take another failure from you, Kasumi." Hisashi's canary-yellow eyes bore into him. "I won't."

Horror's Dove felt a drop of blood running from the corner of his lip and down his chin.

"Ryota," Inko said sharply. "You won't be able to make it if you try to fight us again. At least, you won't remain conscious."

Green Screen was right. He wouldn't make it through another fight. He wouldn't make it through another punch—not after All Might had already hit him four times. Not after Green Screen had cut him with her blades.

Not after Izuku was in the strongest hands in the country.

He reached back for an item in his belt, and he whipped it out. His hand was shaking, his eyes refused to focus on one spot. All Might stiffened as he noticed the form of the gun.

Could the number one hero dodge a bullet?

"Promise me, Kasumi." Horror's Dove took a shuddering breath in. "Promise me that when the time comes—"

Horror's Dove pressed against the trigger. The glazed-over green eyes of Izuku stared back at him, his lips pulled into a frown. His curly hair brushed over his brows and around his face, some stray strands gently tickling his freckled cheeks.

Could the number one hero move out of the way in time?

If the All Might failed to save someone who was in his arms, wouldn't the hero world fall apart?

"—you'll kill what means most to you when it comes to our goal."

Horror's Dove hesitated, momentarily. He always did.
"Come on, boy," his father whispered in his ear. Grabbing onto his small hands, he wrapped his own hands around them. He positioned Kasumi's hold on the gun correctly, adjusting the way he was gripping tightly onto it. His bigger hands almost swallowed his as he aimed the gun at the crying teen, who was tied up and gagged.

Tears pooled in the corner of his eyes. He was shaking, now.

He didn't want to hurt his brother. He told his dad he didn't want to kill him. His brother was nice to him—surely he didn't have to kill him, even if his brother refused to hurt someone. Surely he didn't deserve it.

His father squeezed his hands. "Come on now, Ryota," he soothed.

"Just like we practiced."

Horror's Dove saw his brother's face then, if just for a second. And so he hesitated.

He didn't pull the trigger. He didn't— he didn't want to pull the trigger. He never wanted to pull the trigger.

But then his palms and shoulders hurt, and so did his bruises, and his scars, and all the hurt that he bore through, if only for a second before it was divided and passed away. After all, if he only felt the pain for a second, if his scars were faint and barely noticeable, then surely what he went through was simple? It wasn't— wasn't bad, or anything, and maybe not good, but it could have been so much worse—

And he didn't know why it hurt so much now of all times.

His hand was shaking terribly, now, enough so that he probably wouldn't make his mark, even if he tried.

Suddenly, something crashed into his back, causing him to drop the gun. His hands felt cold without it there. A blinding amount of pain crashed into him, most likely from the wounds on his back that still had yet to heal. Groaning as he twisted around, he was greeted with an old man in a yellow and white suit, probably not even to half his height.

"Bringing a gun to a fight?" the old man chastised. "Not a very good idea."

Horror's Dove was about to respond when another voice, this one bland and dry, spoke up.

"Hey, I think I might recognize you," he said. Kasumi, ignoring the hairs standing on their ends at the back of his neck as he realized he was surrounded, glanced toward the boy. "Aren't you Nightmare Pigeon or something?"

Kasumi felt his nerves, jumpy and shaky and restless, begin to burn away into frustration. Like hot coals underneath his skin, he turned to glare at the teen icily. "If you aren't competent to even know my name, then you should get off the field."

The boy just smirked at him. Horror's Dove couldn't tell why until he felt like the ground had been ripped out from beneath his feet. The boy's purple hair and eyes burned into his mind as a command broke through the sudden silence cast over him.

"Relax."

And Horror's Dove didn't know why the pain in his hands and shoulders seemed to fade away, or
why he felt so relieved after the tightly strung parts of his body eased up.

It took a moment. But, for the first time in a while, Horror's Dove accepted the warm static with welcome arms.

If only for just one moment.

If only so he could keep up with life for a little longer.

Just... one moment?

=====

Hisashi spoke with the tall man as they walked down the path.

"It's unusual," the man admitted. "Never seen anything like it."

Hisashi nodded absentmindedly. Though he didn't know the man's name, he knew that he was trustworthy. Plus, he was one of the few recruits from Brazil that he managed to snatch.

At the moment, they were searching for the source of a series of odd wavelengths. They couldn't tell back at the institution what they were coming from, but Hisashi was intrigued enough to have the man bring him there with him.

He found the source, all right.

He looked down at the small child in front of him. So this was the cause of all of their problems? A homeless kid? They might as well kill him now unless he wasn't the source but had information on who or what was.

The kid turned around. Hisashi's breath caught in his throat as he saw dotted freckles, dark curly hair (though this one had flecks of green in it) and big, round orange eyes—

The coloring might have been different, and the freckles were dotted in different places, and his skin tone was just a bit darker, and his eyes weren't green like his wife's—

But they looked so alike it hurt. For a second, Hisashi didn't see the kid there in front of him but instead the boy that grabbed onto his pant leg when he wanted to play and who laughed and giggled and said "I love you" one night when he went to go tuck him in.

Hisashi did not cry. Not even when the kid started speaking (broken) Japanese.

He didn't cry.

(He just crossed his fingers and hoped that life was going to give him another chance.)

=====

All Might blinked and looked up at the two arrivals as Horror's Dove slumped over.

"Gran Torino and young Shinsou?" he asked.

Shinsou shot him a lax smirk. "You looked like you were in a little trouble, sir."

That... was partially true. He was running low on time, but he was sure that he could have gotten out of the way before the bullet hit. (Pretty sure did not mean he was positive, and a lurking feeling deep
in his stomach told him that he could have let young Midoriya get killed.)

Shinsou yelped as a cane whapped him in the back of the head. Gran Torino looked at him disapprovingly.

"Don't speak to your superiors like that," he scolded.

"I said sir."

Gran Torino rolled his eyes. "Too bad."

Green Screen decided to speak up, then. "We should head to the police station. At least then we don't have to worry about Horror's Dove if he's in captivity."

Gran Torino frowned. "Weren't there other students here, though?"

All Might nodded. "Indeed. Young Todoroki and young Iida were both caught in the crossfire."

Green Screen sighed before raising a hand. Horror's Dove body, which was limp, suddenly tensed when he was moved through the air. He flew closer to Green Screen until he stopped, and she grabbed a hold of him before throwing him over her shoulder. "Come on then," she clipped. She turned, her eyes pausing on Midoriya's face momentarily as she did. "Let's go meet up with them. They might need help."

"I will accompany you to ensure you make it back to the others safely," All Might said, "but after that, I must leave Midoriya with you. I must help Endeavor take down Ignition."

Shinsou frowned as he followed after Green Screen. "Wouldn't your punches just create bursts of wind, exasperating the fire problem?"

"Not if I'm careful with my output." Hopefully, anyway. He hadn't thought about that.

Gran Torino grunted. "Maybe Shinsou should go with you."

If All Might wasn't in so much of a hurry, he might have stopped in his tracks. "What?"

Shinsou looked a little pale at the idea, but his eyes hardened. "My quirk is great for immobilizing enemies. If anyone responds orally to me, I can control them. If Ignition talks a lot, it would help all of us in the long run."

Green Screen snorted. "Good idea. That man talks up a storm when he wants."

Gran Torino raised an eyebrow. "And you know this how?"

Green Screen stopped momentarily to look back at him and send him an unimpressed stare. "I'm his ex-wife."

There was a moment of silence until a groan could be heard. Eyes snapped to the small form in All Might's arms (it was almost laughable at the difference in size—All Might completely dwarfed Midoriya.)

Midoriya was still glassy-eyed, but he was showing a bit more emotion—this time, annoyance.

"Hisashi's butthole," he slurped.

Green Screen coughed, trying to cover up her laughing. "Oh yeah, totally."
"Hisashi?" Shinsou asked. "Who's Hisashi?"

Green Screen blinked. "Ah, Hisashi is Ignition's first name."

"Young Midoriya," All Might said, sounding grave, "you know Ignition?"

Midoriya just stared at All Might for a long, long time. And then he nodded.

"Yeah," he said, his words garbled. "He's dad."

======

"There's a new villain causing havoc in Yokohama, and people are calling him Ignition—"

Endeavor turned the TV off. He stared at the black screen for a second. His phone was still in his hand, the case warm from him holding it for so long. After a long moment of silence, he turned on the device, and he looked through his contacts. He had very few, most of them his family's and close allies that managed to strangle his number out of him.

It didn't take him long to find the Hs, and Hisashi was the first contact there. Pressing the call button beside it, he held it up to his ear and waited.

It rang.
And it rang.
And it rang.
And it rang.
And it—

The voicemail struck up. Endeavor pulled his phone away from his ear. He stared at the screen.

He ended the call.

He had a sinking feeling that he knew just who this "Ignition" was.

"He doesn't seem to have any weaknesses," his sidekicks said later. "Ice and cold temperatures don't faze him. Fire just makes him stronger. He's really good at hand-to-hand combat, and—"

Weaknesses.

Weaknesses, huh?

Hisashi smiled at him as he held a hand out to him. Enji was on the ground, beaten into the ground by his friend. "My quirk might seem like it puts yours to a disadvantage and all—" His grin grew wider, and his eyes closed. "—but it's actually a double-edged sword. I might be able to absorb your heat to make my attacks stronger, but—"

But.

Endeavor looked out the window of his office, watching the clouds slowly cross the sky.

Careful, Hisashi, Endeavor couldn't help but think. You might get yourself in trouble.

======
Edgeshot flew through the air, shooting down the streets as fast as he physically could. The heat around him was almost unbearable, and sweat started to form along his face and neck. The rest of his body would no doubt be sweating too if it weren't for the fact that it was formed into sharp, fiber-like material.

When Endeavor asked him to do what he was about to do, Edgeshot couldn't help but be slightly nervous. The last time he did this was a couple of months ago, (or maybe it was a year) when a villain attacked a plaza. While some of the junior heroes held him off, he had circled around the block just outside the plaza, dividing another fiber from his body every time he came across an opening. (The fibers were still attached to him the entire time he ran around the circle, making the first ones he created unnecessarily long while the ones he did last were much shorter.) By the time he came around a full circle, all of his fibers were stretched into hair-like thinness.

All of this effort was done so he could control and send the fibers at him from all directions, thus trapping him and making him unable to further use his quirk.

It didn't take long, either. Maybe a minute at most, which was spent trying to avoid civilians in the surrounding areas. If he pushed himself, he could transform his body and how thin he made it faster than the speed of sound; however, that was if he was in ideal circumstances. He had to push himself, and it didn't help that his quirk wasn't exactly great when it came to holding up against certain attacks.

His quirk, Foldabody, allowed him to manipulate the thinness of his body and stretch his limbs, and it allowed him to move swiftly—on top of that, he often folded his body into sharp shapes to pierce his targets. But his quirk, for all its ability and swiftness and power, was still a part of him. With his speed, it was easy to oversee that weakness since he often could knock his opponents out even before they got close to hitting him. It only took a single precise strike.

But his body was still his body in any form. And perhaps in ways, his body was even more vulnerable when he unraveled into fibers. Fire, ice, acids, bases, anything corrosive—it all hurt him, and it hurt him bad.

So it was just his luck that he teamed up with Endeavor and Ignition.

No doubt about it, he wasn't going to come out of this unscathed. He could already feel the burns that were no doubt going to form on his body, but—

It wasn't like he had a choice. He had to stop Ignition now before the whole city was burned down. (At this point, they had already wrecked four blocks at this point, so did it really matter?)

Edgeshot almost stumbled when the comm in his ear crackled to life.

"Edgeshot?"

Narrowing his eyes, he created a small strand that pressed against the comm for him since, you know, he didn't really have arms at the moment. "That's me."

"Good. This Best Jeanist. I'm on your two-thirty."

Edgeshot blinked before looking up slightly to the right of him. And, sure enough, Best Jeanist was there, crouched along the top of a building not too far away.

"Is there a reason you're talking to me?" he asked, ignoring the fact that Best Jeanist even found a way to connect to his comms in the first place.
"You're going to get burned."

"I know that."

"All right." There was a moment of quiet. "All of the heroes and civilians are out of the way. Some of them wanted to join the fight, but it's getting too hot. Are you sure that you can handle it?"

Edgeshot blinked away the burning in his eyes from the smoke and cleared the ache in his throat. He just had to remind him, didn't he? "I'm fine," he said with as calm of a voice as he could. "I just need to bear through it a little longer."

"You're using the same strategy as you did at the plaza two years ago, right?"

... Two years? Had it really been that long? "Yes," he answered instead. "It's the best way I can take him down without him burning me."

"All right. I'll do my best to get closer. Tell me when you're about to launch the attack, I'll adjust the threads of his suit to trap him."

"Does your quirk have trouble with certain fabrics?" Edgeshot asked as he sent another fiber from his neck into an alleyway. Through the opening, he could see Endeavor and Ignition fighting.

"Depends."

"Well, Ignition's suit might be made of a special fabric, or the threads could be tied differently. You might have a little trouble with it."

"I'll be fine, but thanks for the concern. You should be more worried about yourself at the moment."

Edgeshot jumped over a fire, (well, "jumped," he really just used his strands to push his neck and head farther in the air) wincing as the flames licked at his fibers. Looking down the block, he swallowed the bile in his throat. "I'm almost done, so it doesn't matter." And then a sudden thought struck him. "Wait, didn't you take up an intern from U.A.'s first-year students? Why are you here now?"

There was a moment of silence on the other end. "U.A.'s principal called me in. And, well, it's not like my presence would do much anyway. My intern refuses to take up the correct mannerisms a hero should account for."

"Bakugo Katsuki, right?" Edgeshot said. "Not even molded by the famous Best Jeanist's conversion program."

"I hope that isn't mockery I'm hearing."

"No, of course not," Edgeshot said as he reached the last opening for him. "That would be rude."

Best Jeanist huffed softly in laughter.

"I'm ready, now," Edgeshot said.

"All right. Give my forty-five seconds before attacking."

Edgeshot narrowed his eyes as he watched Endeavor and Ignition exchange a wave of flames.

"Is it possible to cut that down to thirty seconds?"
A moment of silence. "I can certainly try."

And then, "Yes, I think I can do thirty."

(At the same time, Aizawa was pushing a terrified Snipe up the side of the tall tower, crawling his way to the highest point he needed to see Hisashi and Endeavor. Snipe, shaking as he looked down, was eventually left behind.)

=====

As Hisashi walked past Inko, he stopped.

"Tell him that his name's Izuku," he said. "And that his birthday's on March the twelfth."

Inko whipped around, her eyes wide. She seemed so much more tired. She always was. "Hisashi," she began, "this isn't healthy—"

"I didn't ask for your opinion," he snapped back at her. "Just do as I say for once, would you?"

Inko pursed her lips and said nothing else.

=====

Endeavor wasn't sure how much longer he could hold off Ignition.

His attacks were merciless, and Endeavor knew that he wasn't going to leave without scars. Scars that were no doubt going to haunt him for the rest of his life.

Across from him, Hisashi was fuming, his eyes a deep crimson. Smoke was pouring out from between his lips, and his eyebrows were furrowed.

Endeavor, his hands burning with the constant attacks he sent at the other man, sent another burst of fire that took up the whole street. He let out a muffled grunt of agony as pain sparked up the rest of his arm, burning the skin and causing it to steam.

Even though Ignition didn't seem to be in a lot of pain, his skin was starting to look dry, and parts of it looked red. No doubt because the sacs underneath his skin were so irritated from releasing and absorbing so much heat at one time. Ignition winced as the flames hit him straight on.

But there was no doubt that the pain was minimal. Endeavor had to begrudgingly admit that his flames were useless in this case; they were barely enough to keep Hisashi off of him, but otherwise, they did very little. Had Endeavor fought this battle alone, there was no way that he could take Hisashi on by himself—

My quirk might seem like it puts yours to a disadvantage and all, but it's actually a double-edged sword—

The memory floated into Endeavor's mind, just long enough for him to pause.

Hisashi noticed. Rocking back and forth on his heels for a moment, he leapt forward, flinging himself high in the air. A thick puff of smoke puffed from his mouth before the beginnings of a flame curled on his tongue.

Endeavor cussed. While the aerial attacks were generally risky for Hisashi, they were effective in getting him closer to Endeavor. On top of that, it was hard to ward him off with the momentum carrying him, which meant that Endeavor often had to backtrack or just take the inevitable hit.
Endeavor reared up for another hit, and Hisashi’s flames grew brighter in his mouth—

And then, still midair, his suit shuddered. His arms suddenly were glued to his sides, his legs stuck together as the threads reattached to one another. Not a second later, about thirty different fibers rushed out at the same time, circling Hisashi so he couldn’t evade them even if he tried. The fibers all wrapped around him, from neck to toe, two extra ones sliding up to cover his mouth tightly.

He looked ridiculous, actually.

Squirming, Hisashi tried to struggle out of his bonds. He looked furious, and he was probably snarling.

A sudden head and shoulders appeared by Hisashi—Edgeshot. Sweat was running down his face.

"I believe that's over, now," Edgeshot said quietly, squeezing his bonds tighter. The number five hero had a pained look in his eye, but he remained calm as ever as another one of his fibers raised up—probably to cut his bloodstream and knock him unconscious.

Except his eyes widened. A scream tore from him, and steam arose from the bonds around Hisashi. Endeavor cursed and ran forward, only just managing to put his arms underneath the smaller man's shoulders before a burst of flames tore through the fibers strapping Ignition in place. Harsh light formed on the side of Edgeshot's sharp face, casting some of himself in dark, inky shadows. Edgeshot's body reformed, Endeavor catching him just before he fell, steaming and dark red burns already appearing along the holes in his clothes.

Edgeshot was unconscious, dead to the world as Endeavor was forced to jump away. A column of blue flames hit the street where they had just been.

Hisashi was bleeding.

That was the first thing Endeavor noticed. Cuts along his abdomen, chest, shoulders and neck and arms and legs and calves and one along his cheek— dozens upon dozens of them.

Of course. Edgeshot's fibers were razor-sharp, and he probably cut him when Hisashi started to burn him...

But how, though?

Hisashi was panting across from him, his body smoking slightly. His clothes were still partially attached so his legs were glued to each other and his arms were stuck to the sides of his body. His skin looked... raw, almost. "That's it?" he asked, though he was breathless. "That was your master plan?" He chuckled darkly. "I can absorb heat, Endeavor. It hurts like hell, but I can release it back through my pores if I want to. Getting rid of him was easy as cake."

He tsked. "That was your final conclusion, though? Your final idea? Your final plan?" He scoffed.

If he was about to say anything else, however, it was broken by sharp strings wrapping around his wrist. He twisted around, flames burning bright in his mouth as he spotted—

"Best Jeanist," he snarled. "You too?"

The hero was standing on the other side of the street. Endeavor could see that he was already sweating buckets, and his outfit was singing and fraying at the ends. Best Jeanist opened his mouth to say something, but Endeavor couldn’t hear it.
My quirk might seem like it puts yours to a disadvantage and all, but it's actually a double-edged sword. I might be able to absorb your heat to make my attacks stronger, but—

But.

"Jeanist," he called. The hero turned to him and raised a brow.

"What is it?" Ignoring the disgruntled look on his face, probably because he didn't refer to his full hero name, Endeavor plowed through.

"Take Edgeshot and get out of here," he said.

Something dangerous flashed in his eyes. "That's not your call to make."

Endeavor growled. "Why won't you just listen to me—!"

Before he could finish, Hisashi let out a burst of fire, tearing through the string that Best Jeanist held onto him. "Quit getting distracted, heroes!" he spat.

Hisashi looked like he was about to leap for Best Jeanist, and so Endeavor raised a hand and shot an attack that burned his back. He stumbled forward, just enough of a hesitation to speak back to the fourth-ranked hero.

"Take him, Jeanist!" he yelled. "And get back to my son. He's one of his targets!"

Best Jeanist stared back at him for a long, long moment. And then:

"Don't you dare die, Endeavor." With a blink, wire-thin strands had wrapped around the figure in Endeavor's arms, stealing him away. "And I'm only doing this for your son. Remember that."

And then he was gone, disappearing in a flash of blue.

Hisashi growled under his breath. "So now we're all back to square one, huh?" He clenched his jaw. "I'll kill you. I'll kill you."

Endeavor stared down at Hisashi, at those hate-filled eyes that had watched his hope shatter in front of him too many times. Something akin to guilt clenched his stomach, but...

But this wasn't the right way to go.

"Does that matter?" Endeavor responded. And he wasn't talking to Ignition. Not anymore. He was talking to that friend he had since he was two, to that friend that had been with him through thick and thin, the friend he failed in the worst possible way...

"Heroes sacrifice themselves for the greater good all the time," Endeavor said. They were words he'd buried deep down a long, long time ago. "You could kill me for all it matters, but if it means that Shouto lives..." He looked down at his hands. "—then the exchange is entirely worth it."

Hisashi glanced up at him, his eyes losing their red wash. The normal canary yellow eyes stared at him instead, wide and bright and—

Vulnerable.

But then Hisashi looked down at his feet, and his lips pulled into a frown. "Sorry," he said scathingly, "but your words are twenty years too late." When he looked back up, his mouth was filled to the brim with flames. "And they won't bring my son back."
The flames that shot forward were almost too fast to catch, and Endeavor could barely lift his own arm and let his own fire burst forward to catch the brunt of it. "You're right," Endeavor admitted. "But you're only half right." His chest, which burned with overheating, began to heat up again. His core protested, and he almost felt the urge to kneel as the heat raged inside him.

"But you're just as late as well." Tongue heavy in his mouth, heart thumping in his throat, Endeavor finally spoke his half. "You had every reason to hate me, every reason to hate heroes—but instead of using your experience to change the hero world forever, you let it change you. You let it hurt you."

"But you're just as late as well." Tongue heavy in his mouth, heart thumping in his throat, Endeavor finally spoke his half. "You had every reason to hate me, every reason to hate heroes—but instead of using your experience to change the hero world forever, you let it change you. You let it hurt you." He gritted his teeth as the fires on his hands and along his shoulders burned hotter and brighter. "You wanted to do better. But you didn't. You hurt innocent people, innocent civilians—you're just like the people you want to destroy."

Fire swirling hotter, brighter, burning and aching and hurting and reaching deep into the recesses of his power and clawing out every drop he had left in him, and then more, taking more than he even had left—

"And that is why you'll always lose, Hisashi," Endeavor snarled. "That is why you've always lost."

Hisashi narrowed his eyes. "You say that, but you couldn't possibly take me out, even if you wanted. My fire could easily burn you to a crisp, while yours does little to nothing; all they do is strengthen my own attacks. You're running out of stamina as well. You won't be able to last another hour of this."

"You can say that all you want, Ignition," Endeavor said, "but you're only telling half of the truth. It may seem like you're stronger than me in all the ways it matters—"

*My quirk might seem like it puts yours to a disadvantage and all, but it's actually a double-edged sword. I might be able to absorb your heat to make my attacks stronger, but—*

"—but at the end of the day, there's only so much heat you can take in." Hisashi stiffened. *Right on the mark. The sacs underneath your skin can hold only a certain amount of heat before can't anymore. And when that happens, your body goes into a cooldown mode, leaving you unable to use your quirk and inducing you with heavy drowsiness."

Hisashi's eyes widened before narrowing dangerously. "How the hell did you even remember that? I only told you once in all the time we knew each other."

—searing, whirling, scorching, hotter, hotter, hotter, aching and burning and clawing for anything it can find, and then digging deeper for whatever isn't, and finding, finding, finding—

"I remember what's important," Endeavor said. "And I'm afraid, Hisashi, that I will not be remembering you like this; the only thing I'll remember is our time before."

Hisashi looked at him with fury in his wide-eyed gaze. His irises were red again, and he cursed under his breath. "You son of a—" Cutting himself off, another wave of flames appeared from his mouth, bright and blistering and painful.

Endeavor held an arm up to take the brunt of the attack, ignoring the pain that went through him. It burned, and it hurt so badly that he wished he could just retire from hero work and never have to look at a villain again. But he bore through it with clenched teeth and raised his other arm toward Hisashi.

—tearing at his insides, heat, fire, flame, scorching searing blistering withering biting sweltering roasting, clawing at whatever it can find and bringing it in his palm, burning the skin there and
tearing it apart with each second it grew hotter and forming everything he had left in his body to fight back with, everything he had left—

And then the words long overdue escaped his lips.

"I'm sorry, Hisashi."

The flames that explode from his palm were endless and scorching, so hot that they practically melted the buildings beside them. They crashed to the ground. The fire was red hot, burning his eyes and so bright that it probably lit up the whole city as it roared up from the ground. It almost kissed the stars as it shot high into the sky, whipping around them in a tornado of the crackling and glistening blaze.

And the fire kept coming, and coming, and coming and coming until the cement of the streets melted into goop and the buildings were nothing but small heaps of ash and the air was so thick with heat and burning that it was hard to breathe.

And Endeavor's flames stopped.

Hisashi was standing there, barely upright. His eyes were fluttering, and his skin looked almost swollen as he stumbled. His suit was charred, and so was the block, and his eyes looked to empty they hurt.

"Not bad, Enji," he croaked. "Not bad." His eyes fluttered again. He looked like he was about to pass out.

(In the tower a few blocks away, Aizawa turned around in the tower, eyes focusing on Hisashi's figure.)

"But there was just one thing you forgot to consider."

Hisashi's face began to melt, his body twisting and warping until a shapeless figure stood in front of him. Their face was empty, like a robot's—no eyes or mouth or place for a nose. Just a blank slate that was polished to shine and two lines running down the front.

"Masquerader. His quirk is called Identity Steal—he can become any person he likes (takes their memories, their goals, their feelings, their disorders if they have any) as long as he knows them well enough. However, the longer he goes being the same person, the more glitchy he is, and the weaker he becomes."

The voice that came out of Masquerader was robotic and empty and emotionless.

"You got the wrong one."

They laughed, and laughed, and laughed, and laughed.

And then they hit the floor, their body still steaming, the scars and marks still left behind. Unconscious, Masquerader did not make another peep.

The street was left in dead, dead silence.

=====

Hisashi and Inko were arguing again. He didn't get it, didn't get why she wouldn't listen to him. He was doing the right thing, and yet she just— just—
There was a creak upstairs. Hisashi whipped around to see the small figure of Izuku (no, Izuku was supposed to have green eyes with yellow flecks, and this boy's hair had little bits of green in it and SHUT UP—) standing there awkwardly. His shoulders were hunched, and he flinched when he saw that Hisashi noticed him.

Hisashi smiled at him, trying to be reassuring. "Oh Izuku, come on down here."

Izuku flinched and hesitated before listening to him (at least someone did) before shuffling to stand in front of him. He crouched so he was eye-to-eye with the boy.

"Izuku, my son," he started, "don't you love me?"

And his son would smile and jump on him and wrap his arms around him and laugh and say, "Of course I do, Daddy!"

But this Izuku was quiet and walked like a ghost in the house and was scared and held too much appreciation for a single meal and an act of kindness and was not his son. And so when Hisashi asked that question, he did not brighten up, but rather shriveled up. Fear entered his eyes as he remained silent, his shoulders hunching high until they practically reached his ears.

Hisashi could feel his throat burning and his smile cracking when Midoriya spoke.

"Yes," he blurted out. "I love both of you."

But he didn't say it like he meant it, he said it like he was terrified of him. Like he didn't know what to do, what simple love meant, why it was such an important thing to have—

Hisashi knew he was getting angry. But he couldn't help it. Why—?

Why did it have to be this way? Why couldn't he just— just—

He and Inko have another argument. It seemed like it was all they ever did.

"This isn't our Izuku, Hisashi!" Inko spat. "Our child died a long time ago!"

Or, it was all they did until she was gone.

Todoroki almost fell to his knees in relief when he saw All Might carrying Midoriya toward them. Behind him were Shinsou, a short old man, and a woman who had green hair and looked like she just got a beating and a half.

Midoriya still looked like he was a little out of it, but he was definitely better than he had been before.

"All Might!" Midnight said. "You're here!"

All Might almost teleported to her side, he moved so fast. Dropping Midoriya gently into her waiting arms, he quickly spoke. "I have to go and help Endeavor take down Ignition."

With a gust of wind, he hopped into the air, leaving as soon as he came.

Shinsou cursed. "He was supposed to bring me with him," he said, scowling.

The old man beside him sighed and shook his head. "Don't feel upset. It's normal for him to do
something like that. He'll be okay."

Shinsou still didn't seem happy, though he looked a little relieved to see Iida and Todoroki. "So you two are alive."

Todoroki glanced to Iida. "Define alive."

It was true. Todoroki was exhausted—he had been up since around five thirty, and he and Midoriya had been fighting or working practically nonstop until just a little bit ago. It was, what, two in the morning? However, he felt safe, and that was something that he could definitely appreciate now. With seven heroes with them (presuming that the old man and the green-haired women were heroes) and two more who were in training, he let himself relax. Of course, there were technically four of them in training, but...

"Is Midoriya okay?" Kayama asked, gently shifting Midoriya in her arms. "Did he get hit in the head or something?"

Iida glanced toward him uneasily. "No. He's just... been acting like that recently. We don't know why."

Todoroki cleared his throat awkwardly. "I think it has to do with his quirk. He..." Todoroki found himself at a loss of how to explain his sudden bouts of deafness. "... was experiencing strange symptoms yesterday."

Midnight grew worried if the pursing of her lips and the draw of her eyebrows was any indication. "How long has this been going on for?"

"Not for long, I think," Todoroki responded. "He seemed kind of shocked that it happened to him."

Midnight frowned. "I—"

Todoroki noticed almost immediately the change. The relaxed air around them warped and turned to fear. Todoroki noticed how Midnight's eyes widened, and Iida stiffened from his spot beside him. He felt the faint ring of static in his ears, but it was faint and hardly recognizable.

And then there was heat. It was warm, too warm, too hot, and he could already imagine the way it would char his skin even though it hadn't even hit him yet.

A flash of purple in front of him, and he was knocked to the ground. A burst of blue flames exploded toward the place he had just stood, and the person who knocked him down screamed in pain. Todoroki looked over to see that the one with the wavy purple hair, Shinsou, was clutching his arm.

Hands were suddenly gripping him and tearing him away, and, by the familiar cry of pain, they moved Shinsou too (though none too gently.) It was a sudden change of pace, and a yell of "Get out of the way!" was followed by the grunts and squelches of clones fighting but reduced to sludge.

Familiar hands (Iida's) dragged him further back, also taking Shinsou as well. There were a grunt and a gasp, and a thump—someone dropping Vulture, he thought—and another yell (Hornman?) and then Midnight yelped and the green-haired woman cursed and there was a woosh over him, and was that the old man?

When his head stopped spinning and he could see again, the concrete was warped where he just stood—probably from the intense heat. Midnight looked ready to gut someone, and she was panting, as were Hornman and the green-haired woman and—
Shinsou whimpered from beside him, and Todoroki glanced beside him to see him clutching a bright, angry burn. Todoroki winced as he realized that Shinsou took the attack for him.

When he looked back to the scene in front of him, he was sure that he would be livid. He was all too ready to jump up and scowl at whoever thought about hurting his schoolmates—

But instead, his blood turned ice cold. He stared with wide eyes, muscles freezing to the spot as he looked at the canary yellow eyes that burned like stars and yet were as cold as ice.

*Wh-what? No, my— Endeavor was fighting him, there's no way he—*

Ignition breathed a puff of smoke into the face of the person he was holding. Todoroki felt his heart jump to his throat when he realized that *no, that was Midoriya, Midoriya was being taken away again—*

"Don't bother trying to attack me," Ignition drawled. "I'd rather not have to burn Izuku's face off." He clicked his tongue, annoyed. "Especially because I didn't even manage to get payback on Enji's kid." He jutted his chin toward Todoroki, who flinched.

*No, no, no nononononono—*

Ignition tilted his head so he was closer to Midoriya, and he whispered something in his ear. Something flashed in Midoriya's eyes, but it was dulled and barely seen before it disappeared back into the cloudiness of his gaze.

"Midoriya!" Iida cried in shock. The rest of the heroes flinched as if it occurred to them in one moment just what they'd fail to do.

Midnight was shaking, her hands clenching and unclenching. She looked like she was on the verge of tears, and if it weren't for the fact that he was just about ready to rip Ignition's guts out with her bare hands.

"Midoriya?" Todoroki asked, desperate for the flash in his eyes again. "Midoriya, listen to us, please!"

Ignition readjusted himself so his hands were on his shoulders, and he let out a harsh laugh. Judging by the sudden glowing of his throat, his breaths came out warm. At least, warm enough for Midoriya to flinch. Ignition's hands clenched tightly, and his fingers dug into his shoulders.

"It's quirk over usage. He couldn't respond to you even if he wanted."

Midoriya's head lolled forward, and Ignition released his support on his shoulders, just long enough so that his knees buckled. Hisashi wrapped a hand tightly around his throat. Todoroki felt a flash of anger burn through him, bright and angry and spiteful.

"No!" the green-haired woman yelled. She too sounded fearful. "I won't let you take him!"

"Then take him back," Hisashi said. He laughed. "If you can."

Purple mist formed behind the two of them, and Todoroki felt his throat seize. The static, fainter this time, appeared in his eyes again. He jumped to his feet, but Hisashi's warning rang in his ears—*I'd rather not have to burn Izuku's face off.*

He froze, unable to speak, unable to help, and he felt so— so—
Shinsou groaned from on the ground, eyes clenched shut and tears threatening to flow between closed eyelids.

—useless.

Ignition took one step back, dragging Midoriya with him. Todoroki felt frost starting to cover his right side. Maybe—maybe if he—

"No!" Midnight shouted. It was the first time he ever heard such emotion from her. It was the first time he had ever heard that she even showed such emotion. She was—she was the R-rated Heroine, not some—not some—

"STOP!"

It was a heartbroken yell. One that had been suppressed for too long, for too many reasons, all directed into one pleading word.

Stop.

Midoriya twitched and glanced up to her, his wide green eyes staring blankly. And though he didn't react to Iida, or Todoroki, or the strange green-haired woman, his eyes suddenly exploded with life. As if he had been sleeping and Midnight's voice was a bucket of cold water poured over him, Midoriya suddenly stiffened. He attempted to turn around but yelped as the hand around his throat tightened.

"So now you decide to wake up, huh?"

Midoriya flinched upon hearing that voice, and he opened his mouth to let out a choked gasp as he struggled to breathe. Fingers whipped up to claw and scratch at the hand, and Hisashi growled.

—he's not hurting him, he's not hurting him, I can just send my ice now, can't I—

Midoriya's eyes clenched shut for a second, almost like he was in pain, before he raised a hand to Hisashi's face. And his bright green eyes were large and wet with tears and tired and scared, and he looked so desperate as his palms glowed so brightly—

There were veins of orange running up and down his arms up to his elbow, growing brighter as they reached his hands. And it looked so similar to when he heated his palms, but this was different. This time, Todoroki could feel the heat emanating from it, and his heat didn't usually crackle like that with energy.

The heat in his palm brightened momentarily before it shot upward in a condensed ray, aimed for his face and upward. Ignition cried out in pain as he stumbled back, hand flying to cradle his face, covering his eye in the process.

Midoriya staggered forward, breathing heavily as he fell to his hands and knees. His hands were quivering, and he looked so small and thin and tiny as he hunched in on himself. Todoroki immediately felt his right side freeze over as he sent a wave of ice to block Ignition from his friend. Iida rushed forward to pick up the boy into his arms, but Midoriya scrambled back.

"N-no," he stuttered, holding his still-glowing arms to his chest. He was shaking, his face pale, and his eyes were wide."No, I might—might hurt you, or—or—"

Midnight's arms wrapped around him from the side. "Come on now, baby," she whispered. "It's okay, you won't hurt me, you won't hurt me, I promise—"
Smoke was pouring out of Ignition's mouth, but he had barely any time to react before the green-haired woman flung a knife at him. He ducked beneath the blade, ignoring how it embedded itself easily into the stone building behind them, and rolled to the side to avoid Hornman's rush toward him.

It was a wrong move. The second he got back to his feet, small strands, strong as wire, wrapped around his midsection, tying his arms to his sides in the process. He looked back to see Best Jeanist there, glowering down at him icily.

Holding a hand over his injured eye (and ignoring the blood that poured down the side of his face) Ignition exhaled sharply as he looked at the almost-dozen heroes surrounding him. He closed his eye as he let himself smile. "Guess I should've known better than to try and take my son back when he has all these supportive people around him, huh?"

He didn't even look disappointed as another portal opened up behind him, tugging him through.

"What a shame."

As the portal closed behind him, silence hovered over them.

And then Midoriya curled up, still holding his arms close to his chest, and cried.

=====

Ignition watched as the strings tying him up were cut loose, and the fluttered to the floor. He sighed, looking up at the wreckage of the city around them.

"Come on," he said coldly to the two figures behind him. "We should go."

Shigaraki seemed caught between being faintly amused and annoyed while Kurogiri was emotionless as ever.

Kurogiri nodded. "Of course. As you wish."

As Shigaraki stepped through the portal, and Ignition went to step in after him, he looked back on the city. Smoke rose from still-burning buildings. Several blocks had been reduced to ash. The huddle of heroes and heroes-in-training were far, far away, but he thought he could hear Izuku's crying from here.

Maybe if he tried harder, he could have gotten him. Maybe if he didn't talk so much, maybe if he just pulled him through...

*This isn't our Izuku, Hisashi!*

Maybe a part of him, deep down, knew better. Maybe a part of him, nagging and poking him all these years, had been right—he had just always ignored it.

Hisashi frowned and stepped through the portal. It didn't really matter, anyway. At the end of the day, it always came down to the same thing.

He should've known better.

Chapter End Notes
Continuing from my warning at the beginning of this chapter—no, Hisashi and Enji are not right. They did not make the right decisions. They both fucked up. They are not justifiable. I did not present their backstory to make any sort of excuses for them. They're in the wrong, I get that—the is just trying to show them why they do the things they do. If this makes you uncomfortable, just know that I will not be pulling off another topic like this unless it is requested with overwhelmingly positive reviews and has a really good argument for why—but that argument had better be spot on.

Also: Inko. Yes, I know, she is in the wrong too. Many of these characters, no matter if they are hero or villain, are in the wrong. It will be developed in future chapters, but this is too long as is and I hope you can forgive me for waiting until the next chapter to develop it.

If I have made anyone uncomfortable, have angered anyone, or have upset anyone—I deeply apologize. I am not trying to make you forgive Hisashi or Enji. You don't have to. In fact, I don't really think you should forgive Hisashi, and Endeavor... he's not fully developed yet, and I'm not sure I'll ever fully develop him either. It depends on how much I can fit into this story.

I hope you did enjoy this chapter if none of the above affected you—and if you did, and you want to hate on me, please refrain from making up arguments that I'm trying to give abusive characters sob stories so I can romanticize them. I'm not, and I'd like to have a civil conversation. If anyone wants to point out something I did wrong with them, or I failed to correctly characterize Hisashi and Endeavor, point it out to me. But, most importantly, tell me why I failed in that aspect.

Anyway, I hope you all have a wonderful day/night/week, and thank you for reading! 
— Owl
Healing, Hiding, Warm—Dusk

Chapter Notes

Traitor Theory:
Shinsou: III
Kaminari: V
Sero: III
Mineta: I
Iida: I
Bakugo: II
Kirishima: I

*slides chapter forward quietly*

Uh,,, it's here. It's late, but it's here. Uhm, sorry that it is late, and thanks for all the support last chapter. Really meant a lot to me.

If I haven't responded to your comment, I promise I will. I haven't forgotten about you. Just,,, time. Energy. I don't have either.

I am very sick. So thank Mr. Platypus and Ro for saving my dear ass. They are both my lord savior jesus christ, otherwise you would've gotten a chapter that didn't make any sense on paper. Of course, the ending's super rushed, so sorry about that. Uh, they haven't looked over that, which is probably why it s u c k s.

Uh,,, I think that's it??? Oh, yeah, I'm sorry this isn't the quality of last chapter. I know, please don't remind me. I get it. I was going to do more development and character stuff but then the interview got in there and that took up like,, a majority of the chapter xctyuiojo.

Shinsou grunted as he sat down on the hospital bed. He almost immediately fell limp into the comforting mattress, exhaustion burning deep in his bones.

His arm and upper shoulder twinged with pain as the movement jostled his injury, and his other hand instinctively reached to grasp it (though he stopped himself at the last second, realizing that it would hurt beyond reason). Instead, he glanced at the bandages that peeked out from his hospital clothing. He had already been given several different pain medications, and the nurses had cleaned up his burn with experienced hands. As much as it hurt, they had done an excellent job at not putting him in as much pain as they could have. Which was something that Shinsou would have taken granted for any other day. But after running into one of the most feared villains of all time, as well as one of his underlings, without knowing if you were going to live through the event?

Well. It was definitely a change of pace, certainly.

After Ignition had disappeared, they had all just... sort of stood shocked in the middle of the street. Midoriya literally went into shock, followed up by a horrific panic attack that Midnight eased him
through as they waited for—well, for nothing, really. After Midoriya's hiccup-crying had dissolved into a quiet sniffing, Midnight picked him up. Villains were carried and dropped off by heroes at the station, while Hornman, an unconscious and burned Edgeshot, and all the heroes-in-training were practically dragged into the hospital.

Shinsou still hadn't heard about what happened to Endeavor, All Might, Eraserhead, and Snipe, but he presumed that they would have heard the news if one of them died.

(Though the thought that Eraserhead—one of the few people close to him—could be dead; it made his heart jump into his throat with terror).

Iida and Todoroki both suffered from knife wounds, most of them small cuts with the occasional deep gash. However, Todoroki took the cake with the small daggers still embedded into his arm. He looked faintly shocked when one of the nurses pointed it out (or as shocked as a Todoroki could be; his eyes only widened by a hair). "Oh," he had said. "Those are still there."

It was... both concerning and amusing. But more the former than the latter.

Iida had to get a transfusion due to all of the blood he had lost. Shinsou himself was given burn salves and creams with instructions for him to follow after promising to “take it easy.”

Midoriya suffered the least amount of physical damage out of them all. He had a few cuts, a multitude of bruises and looked to be in extreme pain when he moved his abdomen, (And Shinsou faintly remembered that Midoriya had suffered from an injury there during the USJ attack. Shinsou winced; Iida had mentioned that Midoriya was hit around the same area in Stain’s fight, and it was no doubt a painful experience), but other than that, he was quite fine.

Well… physically fine, anyway.

At the moment, the four heroes-in-training were sharing a hospital room. Because Midoriya had the least amount of severe injuries, (Shinsou, although he only had one, had quite a bit of charred skin to worry about) he was the first to make it back. Judging by the dried tear tracks on his face, he had been crying again, but he was asleep now—a well-earned rest, from what Todoroki had said.

"Sixteen hours," Todoroki said sourly. "We've been up for nineteen, but we've been doing hero work for sixteen, not counting what happened after Stain since he was unconscious for most of it. I've been up for longer."

Shinsou was suddenly glad that he had decided to intern with Gran Torino. Demanding as he was, he wasn't about to ask them to work until he was burned into the ground. Clearly Endeavor didn't have the same reservations about care, even for his own son.

Iida was quiet as he stared at Midoriya's form. "I still haven't apologized to him," he murmured, his face etched with guilt.

Shinsou raised a brow as he pulled himself with one arm to lean onto the bed. "For what?" he grunted, ignoring the pain in his shoulder as he shifted uncomfortably.

Iida sighed as he stood up. He looked pale and a bit queasy, but he didn't mention it as he helped Shinsou quietly get into a more comfortable position. His lips were pursed in thought, and his brows were furrowed. "My brother, Ingenium, got attacked by the Hero Killer not too long ago. It seemed like forever ago, now. "I was so clouded by rage that... that I went after him myself. I wanted to—" He paused and swallowed thickly, averting his gaze as shame crawled over him. "I wanted to hurt him," he ended quietly.
Shinsou frowned before sighing. He patted the bigger male's arm, as he couldn't reach his shoulder at this height. "I get it. You have emotions, big deal. But now you know not to be stupid, and you won't do something like it again." He glanced toward the smaller boy, already asleep, and his stomach twisted in his gut. "And anyway, I don't think Midoriya is in a good place right now. Maybe it's best that you haven't yet had the time to apologize."

There. He managed to say it without addressing the elephant in the room.

Iida's eyes flashed as he recognized the hidden meaning, and he nodded. "Yes," he murmured, "I suppose you're right." He looked over to Todoroki, who was on the other side of the room. If he was in a lot of pain, he didn't show it as he fluffed up his pillow. "Todoroki, how did you and Midoriya find me anyway?"

Todoroki paused in his movements for a second, his eyes narrowing slightly. Fingers twitching, he glanced up to look between the two of them. He set the pillow off to the side and straightened. "Intuition. We both had a feeling."

Shinsou cocked his head to the side. "Cool, but cut the bullshit."

Iida stiffened from beside him, but he didn't say anything. He too seemed interested, if his body language had anything to say.

Todoroki stared at Shinsou coolly for a moment, but his eyes softened a moment later. Perhaps he was too tired to be angry—or maybe he was just as shaken up as the rest of them, no matter how calmly he was taking this. "That's not my secret to share, I'm afraid."

Shinsou frowned. "So it's Midoriya's."

Todoroki fell silent. Shinsou pursed his lips as he added another tally to the secrets Midoriya was keeping to himself.

Iida cleared his throat. "I think," he began softly, "we should have a conversation with him when he awakens."

Todoroki clenched his fists. "Only if he's comfortable," he responded icily.

"We just got attacked by his crazy father," Shinsou pointed out. "A father who is also responsible for hundreds of cases of genocide. I think we deserve some answers."

Todoroki opened his mouth to argue, but a knock on the door halted their argument almost immediately. A second later, the door opened, revealing the chief of the police force—Tsuragamae Kenji. He was followed in by Gran Torino and Manual.

"Todoroki Shouto, Iida Tenya, Shinsou Hitoshi—" Tsuragamae's eyes landed on Midoriya's sleeping form. "—and Midoriya Izuku." He tilted his head to the side. "I understand you all have had a ruff night, but we must discuss tonight's consequences. And perhaps it would be best to do it with all company conscious."

Shinsou cursed internally as he shifted himself to a more upright position. Of course he wouldn't catch a break. Of course the police force would want to talk to them about—about what happened tonight. Well, technically it was morning, not night, but that was beside the point. There was no escaping today, it seemed. Sleep was going to have to wait a bit longer.

"I would rather not waken him, sir," Iida stated politely. "I'm sure the three of us would happily relay to him everything you say, but Midoriya has been working alongside Endeavor and my friend,
Todoroki for over sixteen hours, maybe even longer. He is exhausted—"

"I understand that, Iida," Tsuragamae stated. "But I simply cannot let him be asleep during this time."

Shinsou hesitated as a heavy silence fell over them. When Iida finally made the first move toward Midoriya, Shinsou's hand flew up to grab onto his sleeve and hold him back.

"Midoriya isn't in a good mental state at the moment," Shinsou stated quietly. His voice was raw with honesty as he looked at the chief with tired eyes. "He just went through a panic attack, and seeing so many people around him probably won't help. It might be best to wait until he's gotten enough rest to approach him. At least then he'll have the energy to comprehend what you're trying to say."

While Shinsou was, admittedly, frustrated and angry with the boy for keeping this giant secret away from everyone—leading to this explosive encounter—he knew a bad state when he saw one. And Midoriya was definitely in said state: he had barely been able to hold himself together. Maybe it was only Midnight's grasp that had kept him from falling apart.

And it wasn't like Shinsou hated him or anything. No, he was sure that he and Midoriya were on rather good terms, despite only meeting up with one another a few times. Midoriya was nothing but kind to him, and he was gentle, too; despite the rough and almost aggressive intensity he faced Todoroki with in their fight at the sports festival, Midoriya was a really fluttery person. More often than not he would reach out to touch someone but steal his hand back, as if scared to make a move. It often left him awkwardly holding himself close, which Shinsou couldn't help but relate to. All the times he had shied away from touch after the numerous accounts of teasing and mocking, fake screeching and crying that "Oh my god, Shinsou's trying to control me again!" even though they all knew he couldn't do that with just touch, had led him into a solitary life. Even after being taken in by Yamada, and, by default, also Aizawa, it took him a very, very long time to be comfortable with physical contact.

And that brought him back to his initial point—while Shinsou was mad at Midoriya, he didn't hate him. Midoriya, although he knew very little about him, was like him in so many ways that it almost hurt. Thus Shinsou couldn't bear the thought of waking up Midoriya—not when he had had that familiar look in his eye, not when he was shaking head to toe, not when he was about to burst into tears. Not when he looked so dead on his feet.

But he still wanted answers. And he was going to get them. After the hell that all of them just went through, he was sure that he deserved it. It was the least that he could give him after this.

Tsuragamae looked between them for a second, expression mostly blank, before nodding. "Alright. I'll have one of my officers explain the situation to him later, then."

Shinsou frowned. The fact that he wasn't going to trust them with relaying the main ideas of the conversation about to take place slightly peeved him, but he shoved the feeling down. There was no telling what this man—dog?—had seen over the years. He could be speaking and making decisions from past experiences, not simply from the distrust in his heart. And so Shinsou kept his mouth clamped firmly shut as Tsuragamae spoke up again.

"First and foremost, I think it would be best to address the situation with the villains that attacked Hosu, if only for peace of mind." Tsuragamae looked pained for a second, but it disappeared not a moment later. "Masquerader, Horror's Dove, Vulture, Stain, and all the nomus still alive were all captured. Ignition, unfortunately, had escaped before we could pinpoint his location." Iida stiffened from beside him. Shinsou subconsciously balled his hands into fists.
Todoroki stood up, worry flashing across his face before disappearing. "My fa— Endeavor. Is he alive?"

Shinsou noted the slip-up, but no one in the room commented. Tsuragama tilted his head respectfully. "Endeavor was injured, and he suffered from many burns. He is in the emergency room right now, undergoing careful treatment. However, we are almost positive that he will live."

Todoroki nodded. His eyes were clouded over with cluttered emotions, some of which were too hard to make out. He rigidly sat back down onto his bed, his shoulders tense and hunched.

"Dual Steel was also injured, though he is recovering after surgery by now. He lost one of his horns as well, which should regrow in a few month’s time. Todoroki Shouto, I heard about your cauteryization—I must apologize that you had to do something like that, but you were very brave in this dire situation," Tsuragamae continued. "Edgeshot suffered from severe burns, much like Endeavor, but he is in recovery as well. All other heroes at the scene suffered from minor injuries, but nothing noteworthy." After a pause, he added, "Everyone is alive."

Shinsou let out a breath he didn't know he was holding.

Alive. That was... relieving. So relieving.

Iida straightened from beside him. "Tsuragama... I do suppose there will be consequences for our actions, won't there?"

Shinsou blinked. What...?

"Indeed," Tsuragamae said. "That is the main reason I came to speak with you. To snip it at the bud—Iida, Todoroki, Midoriya, Shinsou: you broke the law." Iida stiffened from beside him. "Going after a villain and using your quirks when you do not yet have your license to do so is a clear violation of our quirk regulation laws." Tsuragamae sighed heavily. "Iida and Todoroki, your fight with Vulture can be excused; Dual Steel has informed me that he gave you the right to use your abilities. Shinsou, I was told that you had directly disobeyed Gran Torino's orders and followed him. Therefore, you also used your quirk without permission."

Shinsou clenched his jaw as his eyes flashed with anger. However, Tsuragamae was speaking the truth, and he couldn't argue his point... but he did have an obvious contradiction laying in front of him. "If Todoroki and Iida had permission, then why are they in trouble—!"

"I am not trying to pick a bone with any of you. Please listen to me to the end." Iida placed a hand on Shinsou's shoulder to stop him from leaping up. Tsuragamae waited patiently, and he cleared his throat when it seemed that they settled down. "Todoroki and Iida are not in trouble for their fight with Vulture, but rather their fight with the Hero Killer: Stain. Midoriya is also in trouble for that, seeing as he too battled against the vigilante."

"So what you're saying is that we should have stopped using our quirks and let ourselves get killed?" Todoroki snapped back icily. "I contacted authorities. I left my friend to bring an injured hero toward medical help. I came back, and both of my friends were about to be murdered. I had no choice."

Tsuragamae was silent for a moment. "You speak nothing but the truth," he admitted, "but the both of you, Midoriya and Todoroki, went searching after Iida with purpose. Neither of you can claim self-defense when you were the two tracking him down."

Todoroki’s eyes hardened. "And that changes things how? I was saving people's lives. Is that suddenly illegal?"
"So the result is all that matters?" Tsuragamae shot back. "It doesn't matter that you could have potentially hurt someone in the process? It doesn't matter that you all could have died? It doesn't matter what happens, even if you broke the law?" At the silence that followed, the chief sighed. "I do understand. I am not dumb, nor am I oblivious. These rules are unfair, but they are put into place for a reason. It is as simple as that."

Shinsou frowned. "So what, we're all going to be charged with fines now? We're going to have a mark on our records?"

Tsuragamae closed his eyes. He sighed deeply again. "That depends entirely on your decisions."
Crossing his arms, the chief looked at them with dark eyes—a small, hidden, pleading glint was there as well, almost too small to see. "If you all agree to stay quiet about your offenses, we can say that Endeavor was the one who took out the Hero Killer; we can also maintain that Shinsou never used his quirk, but rather was fighting quirkless due to the nature of his real quirk."

Iida's brows were furrowed. "So our accomplishments would be erased," he said slowly.
"If that is what you want," Tsuragamae said. "Otherwise, you'll have a black mark on your record. You may be congratulated for the rest of your life, but your hero life will be essentially over. If you aren't kicked out of U.A., you will never be able to join an agency. You'd fall off the charts and into irrelevance as soon as you graduate."

A thick silence blanketed the room.

"It is true, however, that we cannot hide the fight that happened after the arrival of Ignition, Vulture, and Horror's Dove. The entire situation was broadcasted live. However, you can be pardoned for all actions that would hinder your hero career in turn for secrecy. That is my deal. That is the only deal I can provide."

Todoroki stared at Tsuragamae for a long period of time. He ducked his head and looked away. "Fine," he said firstly, his tone dull.
"A quick agreement on your part," Shinsou said dryly. "I wasn't expecting that. I thought you'd want to boost your appearance and pride at least a little."

Todoroki turned his back to the police officers and Shinsou as he adjusted the blankets on his bed. He glanced behind him. His dual-colored eyes were sharp but tired. They flickered to Iida for a microsecond. "Secrecy is better than the death of a friend," he said simply. "A small price to pay for a better world."

Tsuragamae nodded. "That's one. And you?"

Iida nodded stiffly. "Of course. I wouldn't deserve the recognition. Not after recklessly chasing after him myself."

The remaining pairs of eyes turned to Shinsou, who stared back defiantly. After a few seconds, he rolled his eyes. "Sure, yeah. Sounds great to me."

Tsuragamae nodded. "Thanks for your input, ruff. I know it must be as hard as bone to take this in, but don't let it affect you. I am sure that you will become fine heroes today. And we will always respect you here." His eyes softened as he stared at the sleeping form of Midoriya, who was curled up on his side and small as could be. "While I still will be sending an officer down here to explain the situation to Midoriya, don't feel too intimidated to tell him yourselves."

Iida chopped his hands through the air. "We will."
Tsuragamae nodded again, and he turned to leave when a sudden thought seemingly struck him. "Detective Tsukauchi will be coming in during the next few days for questioning. He's a nice man, so you have nothing to worry about. Good luck on your recovery, and sleep well."

The man-dog-person left the room and closed the door behind him. The three boys watched him go before sinking deeply into their respective beds. Shinsou sighed in contentment.

"Never has such a stiff mattress called to me before," he groaned, pulling the covers over himself. "I'm so exhausted."

Iida nodded absentmindedly as he slipped into his own bed, his injuries flaring up with pain. Not like he could complain, though—and especially not because he had caused his own injuries. While he could accept his own injuries, however, he could not forgive himself for causing his friends their own share of pain.

Ignoring the wave of self-pity that came over him, Iida let his sore and exhausted muscles finally relax. His eyelids, which were feeling more like lead every time they pressed together, fell heavily over his eyes. His head sunk into the pillow, so soft and gentle after hours upon hours of endless battle and fighting.

He fell asleep almost instantly. He dreamt of nothing.

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Midoriya was quiet when Iida woke up again. He was sitting criss-crossed on his bed, silently staring down at his hands. He looked just as tired as he had the previous night, and he shifted the covers noiselessly, as if scared of making a single sound.

(Iida tried not to think why he was scared of it. His imagination wasn't kind to him, however, and so he blinked away tears as he remembered Ignition's bright yellow eyes and the fire that licked his lips.)

Shinsou and Todoroki's beds were made and empty. Iida heard the previous night that Todoroki was going to be called earlier in the morning to check up on all of his injuries and to see if the surgery on his arms went smoothly. Shinsou might have already been pulled to talk with the police, but Iida couldn't be sure.

The room was quiet except for the rustling of the hospital sheets as Iida slipped out of bed. His injuries were on fire now, burning so much that he almost cried out in shock and fell back onto the comfortable mattress instead. But he gritted his teeth and bore through the painful seconds, taking in a few shaky breaths to help calm his nerves.

After walking (re: limping) to Midoriya's bed, he grunted as he let his body fall back down into a seated position on the mattress. The bed sunk down under his weight, and Midoriya glanced back up at him for a moment. His eyes, bloodshot and wary, scrutinized him for a moment.

"Midoriya..." Iida started, voice hoarse. His stomach growled silently at him, and Iida promised himself that he'd eat later.

"If you're going to apologize, please stop," Midoriya said, cutting Iida off. "I... It's true that I was super upset that you went off after Stain, but it's okay. As long as you promise that you won't do it again."

Staring at him for a long, hard moment, Iida finally released a sigh. "As much as I appreciate the sentiment, I would rather take responsibility than to ignore it entirely. What I did was wrong, and it
hurt you and Todoroki as a result. Not accepting that would just make me feel worse."

Silence fell over them again. For a moment, Midoriya didn't react, instead carefully wringing his hands together. Shoulders tense as a bowstring, his eyes darted up to look at his face before he (slowly) leaned against Iida's shoulder. "Okay," he mumbled.

Iida hesitated before bringing an arm to wrap around his shoulders, pulling him closer. "Thank you. I'm sorry for hurting your feelings and for causing you harm. And... I promise that I won't do anything of the like again."

Midoriya's smile was watery as he relaxed ever-so-slightly. It wasn't much, but as Iida pulled him flush to his side, it was enough to make him feel better.

Muffled slightly as he buried his face into Iida's shoulder, he spoke in a small voice. "I'm sorry about what happened as well."

Iida's brow furrowed. "What do you mean?"

Midoriya was quiet for a moment before responding. "Ignition. You know..." He gestured vaguely.

Iida sighed. "It wasn't your fault that he was there. I wish you'd told me about your relationship with him, but... I understand why you wouldn't." His frown deepened. "Just... you don't have to hide those secrets from me. From us."

Midoriya shuddered. "I was... scared that you'd hate me," he said, almost inaudible. "And nobody wants a hero whose father is one of the most terrifying villains in the world."

That was... actually frighteningly true. Even though Midoriya was probably the kindest, meekest, albeit determined (and reckless) person he knew, if word came out that he was related to a villain... well, they could kiss Midoriya's hero career away, especially since said villain was as infamous as he was. It'd be all over the media, making the headlines in bold lettering. And, had he not seen for himself how Midoriya struggled against Ignition and the absolute terror on his face upon seeing him, Iida might have agreed with the idea.

But he had seen Midoriya's panic, and he had been there when he burst into tears and cried. And Midoriya was nothing like his father, but the idea that he could—no, would be compared to him sent his skin crawling.

"My apologies," Iida said, "that hadn't occurred to me."

"Mm. 's fine."

The sound of a door creaking open cut their conversation short, and the two of them looked to see that Shinsou was stepping inside the room. His eyebrows raised high upon seeing the two.

"You're awake," he drawled. "I hadn't been expecting that." Running a hand through his wavy hair, he looked at Midoriya with a bored gaze with one eye closed. "Some detective wants to talk to you. He's down the hall, on the left."

Midoriya stiffened from beside him. The tenseness that eased from him came back tenfold, and he hesitated before slowly standing up. His footsteps were quiet as he shuffled past Shinsou, who watched him as he went. A moment of silence followed his leave.

"So," the purple-haired boy started, "what did you two talk about?"
Iida shrugged and then immediately regretted it as his shoulder flared up in pain. "Not much," he said between clenched teeth. "I apologized to him for going after Stain."

"And did he apologize to you?" Shinsou prodded, leaning against the wall with his uninjured side.

"For what?"

Shinsou rolled his eyes. "For keeping a secret about Ignition."

Iida took a second to let his comment roll around in his head before he politely responded, his and Midoriya's previous (and short) conversation ringing in his ears. "I do not believe that it was his secret to confide in either of us."

"Him keeping it hurt you," Shinsou pointed out.

"I doubt that I would've come out of this uninjured even with the knowledge that Ignition was Midoriya's father," Iida shot back. "Some secrets are too sensitive to talk about. I'm sure that Midoriya doesn't have the best memories of such, and I think you should respect that." Iida's brow furrowed. "Why are you so adamantly about it, anyway?"

Shinsou was silent for a moment as he toed the ground. "Honestly? That particular secret doesn't concern me," he said slowly. "I'm more bothered about the principle. If Midoriya is unwilling to reveal such secrets, who knows what else he could be hiding. It could get a lot of people hurt—including us. Again."

Iida… could understand that, even if he wished he didn't have to. "Understood. But Midoriya has been through some traumatic experiences. If he is to reveal anything about his history and what he's gone through, he should reveal such sensitive information to capable adults or his guardians, and any other people he feels comfortable with. We aren't entitled to hear his secrets."

Shinsou was quiet, his lips pursed into a thin line. An array of emotions crossed his eyes before he deflated, his shoulders sagging. The blunt persona he had put on was hidden away for a moment as he sunk into the bed across from Iida. "I guess you're right," he mumbled carefully.

Iida was glad that that was resolved before it could go any further. He laced his fingers together as Shinsou began to pull at his hospital gown uncomfortably. "Do you know what the detectives wanted from him?"

Shinsou shrugged. "I think they're just going to ask him standard questions." His eyes hardened for a second. "I hope they don't try to accuse him of being a villain due to association. I might have to have a word with them otherwise."

"I thought that you were against Midoriya."

"Whoever said that?"

"You were just—" Iida sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose, suddenly aware why he was suffering from a headache. Unaided by the help of his glasses, the world around him was blurry and unfocused, forcing him to squint even though he'd really rather not. "I'm not going to bother asking."

"Shame."

The door creaked open again, and Iida closed his mouth as he glanced up to see a head of red and white hair.
"If it isn't the Canadian flag."

"I'm starting to believe that you live to provoke," Todoroki replied stiffly as he slipped in, the door
softly closing behind him.

Shinsou tilted his head slightly in his direction, as if he was mocking a bow. "I do enjoy fulfilling my
duty."

Iida looked between the two of them, brows furrowed. "Don't tell me that you've already started a
feud with one another."

The two glanced at one another.

Todoroki turned away first, shouldering past Shinsou to sit back on his bed. "Of course not. I'm not
petty."

Shinsou snorted. "Okay, so not using the fire side of your quirk for most of your life because you
don't like your dad isn't petty? My, I must be pretty uneducated. Please, Todoroki, teach me the ways
of non-pettiness."

Iida felt like groaning and holding his head in his arms. "That's definitely a feud."

Todoroki rolled his eyes when Shinsou plopped himself beside him. The bed, reserved for Todoroki
the previous night, sunk beneath his weight.

An arm was thrown around Todoroki's shoulders, and Shinsou smiled up at him with a too-wide
grin. Met with a bitter glare, he looked to Iida with a glint in his eye. "Nah. We're the best of friends,
aren't we, Shouto?"

"That's Todoroki to you. Also, I don't think that putting your arm around me helps your shoulder
any."

Shinsou's grin grew to be even more disturbingly wide. "Oh trust me, the pain's totally worth it." It's
so great to see you get riled up with simple contact, went unsaid.

Iida sighed and rubbed his temples as Todoroki snarked back another comment. I take it back, they're
not acting like they have a feud. They're really just an old married couple fighting over nothing.

"Get your hands off of me."

"It's not like I like touching you either, Shouto."

"For the last time, it's Todoroki, not Shouto. And last time I checked, you hate physical contact even
more than I do."

Iida squinted at the sight before him. Todoroki could've easily shoved away Shinsou away by now.
Hell, he probably would've frozen anyone else if it came down to it. And Shinsou could have
controlled Todoroki by now as well, getting him to remain still and under his control.
Now that would really make Todoroki annoyed.

"Oh you're right, I despise it. But it's so funny to see you get mad, so I guess getting physical was
unnecessary."

"Why is it that you're only annoying now? When Iida was still asleep, at least you were being
respectful."
"Who needs respect when you can force it out of people with a few words?"

"That's beside the point."

"So what's the point?"

"The point is, you're being an annoying brat. What happened to that version of you when we had our talk?"

"It doesn't exist."

"... So a ghost took over Shinsou's body? Well, that explains a lot."

"Like what?"

"Well, the fact that you're radiating dumbass energy could be one."

"I'm offended."

"Then take me out already."

"Like, 'take you out with a gun' kind of take out, because you're a petty tsundere, or 'take me out on a date' kind of take out, because you're like a lonely dog that never goes away?"

"Surprise me."

Iida buried his face in his hands as the banter continued. *I stand corrected. They're acting like lovesick teens who take it as their one and only job in life to flirt as much as possible.*

"Wow, I didn't know the infamous Shouto could meme. I thought you lived under a rock."

"Then you assumed correctly."

"Can you just—" Iida gestured vaguely "—not?"

Todoroki blinked lazily, almost like a cat would. Beside him, Shinsou continued grinning deviously.

"Sorry," he drawled, "am I making you *uncomfortable*?"

Todoroki (gently) pushed Shinsou's arm off his shoulder. "No, but you're making *me* uncomfortable, so I think you should go head off to your own bed."

Snickering, Shinsou stood up. He brushed himself off of nonexistent dirt before shuffling over to his own bed. Iida watched his back.

"So..." he started slowly. "What kind of conversation did you two actually have?"

Todoroki's eye twitched. Shinsou softly cackled in the background.

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Tsukauchi watched the boy in front of him with careful eyes as he shuffled the papers in front of him. "Midoriya Izuku."

Said boy flinched as his name was called out. "Y-yes sir?" he squeaked out, shuffling his feet. Bags were still under his eyes, telling Tsukauchi that he hadn't slept well the previous night.
"One of our officers did come to your room this morning to explain the situation, correct?" he probed.

Midoriya's eyes darted around his face for a second, never quite holding still on one spot. "About the situation where I broke the quirk regulation laws...?"

Tsukauchi nodded. "Yes, that."

"A-ah." Midoriya tucked a strand of his hair behind his ear. "Yes, I agreed that we broke the law. Endeavor can say that he took down Stain if it means that they can all still be heroes."

Tsukauchi noted how he said that he said he *singularly* broke the law, and that "they" could all continue to the path of heroism. It was odd to exclude himself from that, seeing how he was trying to go down the career himself.

Unless he wasn't. Which was an issue Tsukauchi was about to address.

"Thank you," Tsukauchi said as he uncapped his pen. "I know it must have been hard to consider the possibility."

Midoriya frowned. "I... not exactly. I mean, Iida and Todoroki are going to save a lot of people when they grow up and become heroes, so... well, surely it couldn't mean much. It was one loss."

Tsukauchi smiled, even when his stomach sank to the ground. There it was again: Midoriya excluding himself from heroism. He didn't even seem to be consciously doing it, which didn't help matters, at all. And it was concerning, too, that he thought that Stain was just "one loss." Heroes from all over the country were both terrified and desperate to meet the Hero Killer. Had one of them defeated him, their popularity would have spiked incredibly. Whether or not they would keep said popularity was beside the point.

The fact that Midoriya brushed the vigilante off like he was nothing was worrying. It meant that Midoriya had faced much, much worse—perhaps multiple worsers, actually. If Ignition had really done that much damage to him, they would have to consider therapy.

Or, they'd consider therapy if Midoriya really was who he said he was—and if he was actually aiming to be a hero.

When they'd dug up Ignition's history—who was also known as Midoriya Hisashi, now—they were surprised to see that he did, in fact, have a son. A son that had died at a villain's hands. And the son's name?

Midoriya Izuku.

There was no way that that same son was sitting across from him and lying in his grave at the same time, corpse nothing more than a pile of bones.

The real Midoriya Izuku died at a villain's hands and was already dead when Endeavor arrived at the scene. He had no way to save him. There was no way.

Tsukauchi had to scold Endeavor as well. The man, even though he had been involved with the final takedown of Ignition's organization, had failed to tell the police about his suspicions. In fact, he was so tight-lipped that not even his own kids or wife knew about his childhood friendship with Hisashi. The blanch on Todoroki Shouto's face, the stutter in Todoroki Rei's voice over the phone, the utter confusion that filled Todoroki Fuyumi's eyes was enough to prove that. Yes, while Endeavor would always remember said relationship, it was as if all knowledge of it had disappeared off the face of the
planet.

The number two hero hadn't even blinked at Tsukauchi's scoldings, but he did seem a bit more humbled. Tsukauchi was glad; the fact that he withheld such information in the first place had caused so much more hurt and pain and destruction. Had he spoken up sooner, no doubt they would have been able to track down Ignition more quickly.

But now, the infamous villain had allied himself with the League of Villains, and had re-entered the stage in a blazing glory that injured several of Japan’s strongest heroes that fought at the scene. Hawks had been stationed on the other side of the country and couldn't make it in time. The only one who hadn't been injured was All Might, but even then, he stretched his time so thin that it had decreased by another half hour. There was only so much time before he couldn't use One for All anymore.

Tsukauchi reached into his vanilla folder, thick with papers and notes that he would use to remind himself of the situation. Carefully taking out a recorder, he placed it onto the table.

"Before we start, I'd like to have permission to record this interview, if that's okay with you," he explained.

Midoriya's confusion faded away, and he nodded. "Of course," he said hastily.

Tsukauchi noted how tense he was, and he smiled at the boy to ease his obvious stress. If the boy was too anxious, he could either shut down or refuse to answer any of his questions. By playing as nice as he could, Midoriya would hopefully open up to him and respond as truthfully as he could.

Pressing start on the recorder, he politely asked Midoriya to state his name and date of birth, followed up by the present date.

(Tsukauchi tried not to flinch when his quirk went off. Midoriya had lied on the former two questions.

Not good. Not good at all.)

Ignoring that possibility, instead writing it down on his clipboard, he looked up to see Midoriya's face pale and cheeks color simultaneously. Yeah, he was already getting worried. Time to do damage control.

"Thank you, Midoriya," he said as kindly as he could. "Now, let's start off simple. Do you know why Endeavor chose you for his internship?"

Midoriya blinked, and one of his brows furrowed. Wringing his hands for a second, he shook his head. "No, I don't. I thought that he did it because of the heat part of my quirk, or because of the fight Todoroki and I had at the Sports Festival..." Truth.

Tsukauchi nodded as he added a small note to himself on that. "A good assumption, but not quite on the dot, I'm afraid. Were you aware of the number two hero's and Ignition's past relationship?"

"Oh," Midoriya blurted out in a soft murmur, his eyes as wide as dinner plates. "No, I wasn't. Were they..." He cut himself off, as if too nervous to continue. When he finally did, Tsukauchi waiting patiently all the while, his voice was quiet and almost inaudible. "Were they really good friends? Or just colleagues...?"

"Friends," Tsukauchi said, adding another note about his comment. Another truth for the both of them, thank goodness. "Ever since early childhood."
"Ah. I see."

Tsukauchi nodded to himself. "Okay. I have a lot of questions for you, unfortunately. This may take a very long time, but we'll go bit by bit. I'd like to talk about Ignition first, and then about your situation with Inko and your temporary custody with Kayama Nemuri. Your teachers alerted me about the situation of your parents' neglect. Then we'll move on to you, and a few other questions I have in mind. Does that sound okay with you? Or would you rather divide this into several interviews?"

Midoriya seemed to clam up for a moment before he cleared his throat. "Let's just get this over with. I'd like to do it today, sir."

Perfect. Hopefully, Midoriya wouldn't freak out before they were done. "Great. For starters, could you please tell me about your relationship with Hisashi?"

Midoriya pursed his lips as his eyes gained a faraway look to them. Presumably coming up with an answer, he was quiet with a thoughtful expression. "We weren't particularly... close," he finally admitted. "He was gone a lot."

"Even before he left permanently from your residence?" Tsukauchi said, careful not to ask any questions that alerted Midoriya to him knowing more than he played off. Which meant no questions about dates, as much as he'd like to.

Midoriya rubbed the back of his neck. "Yes, even before he left permanently... though I wouldn't say that he really ever did."

"What do you mean?"

"Well..." Midoriya looked a little uncomfortable as he spoke. "A little after I was left to my own devices, he left a box at my doorstep."

Tsukauchi felt himself pause for a second in his writing before he continued. "What was inside?"

"Just another box," Midoriya replied nervously. "With contacts inside."

"Contacts? Like the kinds that you put in your eyes?"

"Yes, sir."

Tsukauchi looked hard at Midoriya's own eyes. "Do they have a meaning to them?"

Midoriya shook his head, paused, and then bit his lower lip. "Well... they're colored contacts. He said that he made them look like Inko's eye color. He said he liked them. "Ah, they also had this... weird function on them.""Explain."

"Well, I had gotten in a villain attack a few years ago..."

Tsukauchi listened as Midoriya went on to explain that a slime villain had pounced on him when he was unaware, and when he woke up from unconsciousness, it was as if he was looking through a heat sensor.

"I think they activate depending on a certain pattern I blink with?" Midoriya shrugged. "I don't know for sure. It would make sense since I hadn't panicked before with my contacts in."
Tsukauchi nodded anyway. "Do you think that the contacts could be giving Ignition live feed or stream of information with you wearing them?"

Midoriya blinked before paling. "I... hadn't thought about that," he said, suddenly green in the face. "It's fine," Tsukauchi reassured. "Are you wearing them now?"

At his nod and small 'yes', Tsukauchi felt his stomach squeeze.

"Hisashi's son? Yeah, I remember him. Had bright green eyes, just like his mother. I wish the kid was still alive. Maybe then Hisashi wouldn't have turned out the way he did."

There it was. Midoriya had just unknowingly confirmed his suspicions, or at least, confirmed them with words out of his own mouth.

Tsukauchi held back a sigh. "Why don't you take your contacts out now, then."

"A-ah. It might take me a while without a mirror," Midoriya said bashfully.

"That's fine."

The fact that these contacts had the ability to serve as heat sensors as well meant that Hisashi had connections. Connections with people who were technologically advanced at that. Even years after Ignition's organization was taken down, his connections and allies still remained (albeit fragmented). It took a while to track down all of his colleagues and serve them their due time in prison; if that was the case, it made sense that Ignition would still be able to create new pieces of technology and pass them to his son, even after his league was all but eradicated.

As he waited in silence, Tsukauchi glanced at his watch. It was nearing on noon; hopefully, they would be able to finish this interview within the next hour or so. It depended on whether or not they could break through all of Midoriya's barriers first.

Tsukauchi really, really was not looking forward to this conversation.

On the other side of the one-sided glass on the wall was Tsuragamae, Aizawa, and—finally—All Might. Midoriya didn't know that they were there, thank goodness; it would have made things infinitely more complicated.

When Tsukauchi finally regathered his thoughts, Midoriya was setting his contacts down on a tissue. It caught the detective off-guard when he saw pale coppery eyes looking back at him. Odd, and definitely something to get used to, but it didn't feel wrong.

Midoriya seemed a little shy, but the determined gleam in his eyes looked up at Tsukauchi. He'd have to hope that that determination would stick around a little longer.

"Let's get back on track. Your relationship with Hisashi?" Tsukauchi said, eyeing the contacts warily as Midoriya covered them with the tissue.

"Uh, yeah. Not very close. He'd do these things where he constantly asked whether or not I loved him, though. I think he liked having my attention? But I couldn't say for sure." Midoriya rubbed the side of his arm, looking away. "He was always trying to get me to fit this particular image, especially when he had some friends over..."
Tsukauchi tucked away that last bit of knowledge for later. "And what was he like?"

Midoriya paused there, too. "He wasn't very... mean, per se? He, uh, sometimes was a little aggressive. But he was very calm and collected when we listened to him. Uh, we being Inko and I. Um..." He seemed to wilt a little. "I don't really know that much about him, sorry. He was always a little distant. A bit out of it, you could say."

Tsukauchi noted that on his paper in front of him; if Hisashi truly was trying to make the kid in front of him out to be his son, then it would certainly take that into account. "How so?"

"Uh... he'd mutter a lot, and sometimes go on rambles about how things were going perfectly, and he'd get this look in his eye." Midoriya frowned. "Like he wasn't quite all... there. Usually when he got like that, he'd get a little snappy when Inko tried to talk to him. I can't really explain it, just that he'd sometimes stare at a wall for hours on end. He seemed very solemn then."

"Thank you," Tsukauchi said absentmindedly as he continued to write. "Has he had any contact with you after his leave beside the box mailed to your apartment?"

If there was any other way they could track down Ignition, they had to know.

Midoriya suddenly seemed very, very sheepish. "Oh, yeah. He, uh, called me once."

Tsukauchi raised an eyebrow. "He... called you."

"Yeah." Midoriya scratched his cheek nervously. "I was out of town. He asked me where I was going, so I assumed he put a tracker or something in it when he gave it to me. So I dropped it from the top of a building."

Tsukauchi blinked. "Well, that's certainly... effective."

"I didn't want there to be a chance of someone salvaging it," Midoriya confessed. "Plus, I was a little... frustrated with him. So that was my first idea. He wasn't too happy about that, though. He wasn't very nice when I saw him again."

"He showed up at your apartment?" Tsukauchi asked, trying his best to keep his surprise out of his voice.

Midoriya nodded. "Last time I saw him. I don't know where he went after. I think I was eleven or twelve when this happened so... a while ago."

Tsukauchi's hand was starting to cramp up, but he brushed it off. "All right. When Ignition was still a presence in your life—judging by your previous statements, at least—he brought some of his allies into the picture, yes?"

Midoriya shuffled in his chair. "Yeah. I don't remember a lot of them. I was eight or nine, so I wasn't old enough to really pay much attention to them. I always hid in my room."

"But you do remember some?"

Pale copper eyes flashed with something, though Tsukauchi couldn't say what it was for sure. "Um, Horror's Dove is his name, right? I remember seeing him there a few times. And there was the giant woman, the one who was German? I can't remember her name, but I think she was one of the villains the heroes took down?"

It didn't take a moment for the description to match up. "Vulture," he answered. "Her villain name is
Midoriya nodded, though he looked slightly distracted.

"Was there anyone else there?" the detective probed. "Anyone that you can remember?"

Midoriya hesitated as he brought a finger up to his chin. He squinted his eyes, as if trying to make out old memories from one another before shaking his head. "No," he said. "I'm sorry. All their faces blur together. I can't remember anyone else."

Li.

"Are you sure?" Tsukauchi questioned, pen hovering over his paper. The red ink glared back at him.

For a second, Tsukauchi was sure that suspicion flashed across Midoriya's face, but a blink showed him that his expression had smoothed out. He couldn't prove it even if it was true with how quickly it passed.

"There was another man there, now that you mention it," Midoriya said, cautious.

"Do you have any idea what he looks like?" Tsukauchi asked, hopeful. The sooner they could track down the few remaining allies of Ignition, the better.

"I have a name," Midoriya said. Tsukauchi paused, surprised. "Disaya. He's already dead, though."

"How?"

Midoriya frowned as he slumped forward. "Suicide. He was on the news."

"I see." Tsukauchi set his pen down on the table and leaned forward, resting his chin on folded hands. "Is there a reason why you remember him so well?" he asked softly.

"I'd rather not say," Midoriya said stiffly.

Tsukauchi pursed his lips. "I can't force you. But I'd like to know if he hurt you at all."

Midoriya glanced away. It was dead silent in the room. He was sure that the three men behind the glass wall were shifting.

"Not directly," Midoriya finally settled on, quiet. "Not... not directly," he repeated again, voice so soft that Tsukauchi was sure he was trying to reassure himself. Clearing his throat, Midoriya tried again. He still refused to look at Tsukauchi. "He, uh... He had an interest in minors."

Tsukauchi stiffened. (From behind the mirror, All Might blanched. Aizawa's eyes narrowed dangerously. Tsuragamae growled quietly under his breath.)

"He didn't get far at all with me," Midoriya attempted to amend. "Hisashi stopped him when he tried to—to—" Turning to the side and shaking slightly, Midoriya wrapped his arms around himself like he was trying to hug himself closer. "I-I'm sorry. I can't talk about this anymore."

Tsukauchi nodded as he picked his pen back up. On a note to the side, he made sure to mention future therapy sessions for the boy in front of him, alongside the name Disaya and the brief, limited explanation he was given.

"All right," Tsukauchi declared. "Next topic." Clearing his throat, he tapped his pen against the table. He had been planning to ask how Hisashi had treated him, but after that question, Midoriya definitely
wasn't up to doing that. His guard would definitely be up, so he had to tread carefully.

But none of these questions were particularly easy, either...

"Was there a specific reason why you didn't tell anyone about Ignition's true identity?" Tsukauchi asked. "I understand why you wouldn't have before U.A. Not everyone would respond so kindly, and I doubt that anyone would have believed you since you lived alone. But what about after you joined? Why didn't you say anything when your homeroom teacher found out about you living alone? Even your teachers admitted that they believed Hisashi was working with Ignition in some form or another. You could have spoken up then."

Midoriya was quiet for a moment. Tsukauchi let him think over his answer, even as he felt the urge to fidget came back tenfold. It didn’t matter if he was a detective or not, having unlimited patience was not his strong point. "There were... multiple reasons. I guess I was a little intimidated..." Midoriya raised a hand to his face, holding his cheek in his palm as he glanced away. "After Hisashi came back when... when I pulled that stunt with the phone call, I guess I was just so afraid that he'd just come back whenever he wanted."

Tsukauchi was prepared to stop the boy from speaking any further if he didn't want to—he looked miserable in all senses of the word. But Midoriya kept on talking, almost as if his mouth was on autopilot.

"I know it's kind of stupid and childish to think this way, but I always thought that he'd just... disappear out of my life?" Midoriya looked very small as he hunched his shoulders. "After he left, his burden just seemed to slowly disappear. I guess I just took that too far, and assumed that he wouldn't bother me anymore. And... well, if he stayed hidden in the background and never hurt anyone else again, I thought I'd just... never bring it up."

Tsukauchi felt his heart ache, even as he followed up with another question. "Why not?"

Midoriya's eyebrows raised. "Why didn't I want to bring it up?" At the detective's nod, he frowned. He seemed to contemplate something before speaking up. "I just wanted it to go away. I didn't want to remember it, and I didn't want anyone else to think less of me for who I've known."

Known. Not had a relation to.

As Tsukauchi scrambled to write everything that was being said, he heard Midoriya shuffling.

"I'm sorry," he quietly confessed. "I know that was selfish of me."

Tsukauchi shook his head. "It's not your fault, Midoriya. I think that it's true that you should have confided to someone, but your reasonings are solid. Anyone in your position would be scared to reveal that kind of secret. And anyway, apologizing now won't fix what's happened. I'm just here to make it better."

Midoriya nodded. He still looked miserable.

As Tsukauchi finished writing, he looked back up to the boy. "Are you up to answering a few more sensitive questions?"

Midoriya frowned. "I... don't know why you're asking me this anyway. Not to be rude or anything, I'd love to answer any questions, but I thought you'd only be asking me about the previous night's events..."

"Ignition was a very secretive person, I'm afraid," Tsukauchi said. "While it's not often we ask
questions about your relationships in such depth, at least with a single interviewee, we weren't able to dig up any information on his character from outside sources. The most we know is from Endeavor's accounts, which are dated, Inko, and your experiences. Otherwise, we'd have to extract said information from Ignition's colleagues, and they aren't known to be very truthful. At the moment, you're our best witness, excluding Inko; however, she admitted herself that she left for long periods of time, and so I'm asking you to back up her own accounts, and to fill in the holes and gaps."

Sure, as long as they put Ignition behind bars and solved the crime, that was their situation solved—so yes, it would be more reasonable and skip many of the "unnecessary" questions and go straight to the recounting of the crime. But Ignition was a character unsolved and, unless they knew more about him, was bound to disappear off the face of the earth until they could gather enough information against him. By knowing more about Ignition, it would hopefully make their search relatively easier.

But... Tsukauchi also had several other reasons.

The first was obvious; Midoriya needed some kind of therapy. Knowing the extent of the damage done to him, and what events triggered such harm, would help immensely. The second was less so; Tsukauchi wanted to know who this boy in front of him was. He wasn't Midoriya Izuku, or at least, not the real one. But they had no clue as to why this kid pretended that he was, or why Ignition obsessed over the idea of him being his real son.

By asking him all these questions, it made Midoriya relaxed—it made him assume that Tsukauchi thought they were related. That way, when the time came that he needed to reveal his hand, he at least had some truth of what happened before Midoriya shut down in front of him.

And there was no doubt about it. Midoriya was going to shut down, no questions asked; and if he didn't, he would be at the brink of it.

Some would say that he was luring the boy. And really, Tsukauchi couldn't blame them. But he, or rather, the police force had been desperate for decades to find out who this monster was. They'd do near anything to get a single lead, a single scrap of information off of him. And this was Tsukauchi's chance to finally give peace to the thousands of people who had been hurt in some way by Ignition's actions—whether it be directly or indirectly.

"I see," Midoriya replied. "I-I'll do my best, but..."

"We can skip any questions that you're not comfortable with." Tsukauchi offered.

"Yeah... that sounds good."

Be upfront. Be honest. Tsukauchi bit back a sigh as he shuffled his papers. "Inko. Did she treat you well?"

"Yes," Midoriya responded immediately. Truth. "Sometimes she'd leave for a couple of weeks, but she cared about me. She always tried to put distance between me and Hisashi."

"So she and Ignition weren't on good terms."

"Not particularly," Midoriya admitted. "They argued a lot."

"Did he ever hurt her?"

"When he was really, really angry, he'd sometimes grab her," Midoriya admitted. "But he was mostly verbal."
"Do you know why Inko waited to leave until that moment?" Tsukauuchi asked.

Midoriya shrugged. "I can't be for sure, but she seemed to stay out of Hisashi's way for the most part before I was in the picture. After that, I was often the spark for arguments."

"And do you know why she decided to leave that day specifically? Any triggering events or moments?"

Midoriya flinched. He opened his mouth to say something but paused. Closing his mouth with an audible click, his eyes revealed how conflicted he was about something.

"No," he finally answered. His voice was soft.

Truth.

Tsukauuchi couldn't help but let his lips quirk up a little at Midoriya's answer, even at the dark topic at hand. From what Aizawa said, the boy believed that he was the cause of his mother's disappearance. If he said that he didn't know now, and believed it enough to be his truth, that meant that he was changing. (And for the better, it seemed.)

"That's all right," Tsukauuchi reassured. The teen couldn't know all of the answers he wanted, anyway. "And Hisashi? Do you know why he left?"

"Well, Horror's Dove had just been captured... So I'm guessing he got scared he was going to be tracked down," Midoriya said quietly. "I don't really know much about his work, though. He never talked about what he and his organization did. I was oblivious to most of it."

Tsukauuchi nodded. "Of course." Tapping the end of his pen against the table, he hesitated. "Midoriya... how did Ignition treat you?"

Midoriya was silent for a second. "You're asking me if he's hurt me." It wasn't a question.

Tsukauuchi tilted his head in his direction. Midoriya stared at him as he leaned back to sit upright in his chair. "Why?"

"Why not?"

Midoriya pursed his lips. Tsukauuchi was sure that he would ask to skip the question when he spoke again. "Sometimes... when he wanted something from me, he'd grab my hands." Midoriya's voice was distant. "And he'd just... squeeze."

"Squeeze," Tsukauuchi repeated.

"Yes."

"Did he ever break or fracture your hands?" Tsukauuchi asked. It would explain the fidgeting that Midnight had warned him about. Apparently, Midoriya would often hold his hand to his chest or pick at the skin around his wrist.

"No," Midoriya said. "He usually only tried to... keep me in line, I guess. He didn't like to physically hurt me, I think."

Of course not. Not when he was so obsessed trying to...

"Okay," Tsukauuchi nodded to himself. "That's all I really want to know about them. I'm not the right person to talk about it, but there is also the question about who will get custody of you now that Inko
is back in the picture. While Inko has been gone for a long period of time in your life, Kayama isn't legally your guardian at the moment; Nedzu was able to pull strings in order to give her some guardianship rights, but she's still not technically your caretaker. Part of that will have to be your decision. I can't make that for you, but you'll be approached about the subject sooner rather than later."

Midoriya wrapped his arms around himself, but otherwise, he didn't say a word.

Tsukauchi cleared his throat. "Now, to last night's events. Could you please recount all of yesterday's events?"

Midoriya nodded. "Starting from when I woke up?"

"Starting from when you woke up."

Midoriya hummed. "I... well, Todoroki and I talked for a bit in the morning. We got dressed into our hero costumes before heading downstairs to eat. Todoroki told me that we'd be heading out for hero work in the city by seven in the morning."

"And did you make it out on time?" Tsukauchi asked.

"I can't remember. I think we were right on time, give or take a few minutes." Midoriya shrugged. "Most of the day was just taking out minor criminals. Endeavor would criticize us after, and then we'd move on. Around one or two pm we stopped to eat lunch and have a bathroom break, which lasted around half an hour, maybe less. Endeavor was looking for Stain, but he couldn't find him, when the Nomu came and attacked a building not too far away. He and Manual, who interned Iida, took it down."

"And then?"

Midoriya bit his lip. "Well, Endeavor told us to help with evacuation and then leave the city as soon as possible."

Tsukauchi flipped the page he was writing on to a new, clean slate. "But you didn't listen."

Guilt flashed through Midoriya's eyes. "When the Nomu came, I remembered the League of Villains. It was just like the one at USJ." His hand reached down to clasp his side unconsciously. "And then I remembered that Stain usually killed or maimed two or three heroes in each city. In Hosu, he'd only injured one. If the League of Villains attacked, it would be the best distraction available. Stain could easily kill someone else."

Tsukauchi hummed. "But how did you know where Stain and Iida were?"

"Stain usually attacks people in places with very little traffic or witnesses. Alleyways are one of his most common areas to target heroes. Todoroki and I looked down the alleys as we ran past. It was an educated guess," Midoriya replied.

"So that's how you knew to look for Iida?" Tsukauchi tried.

Midoriya looked back at him with a glint in his eye. "That's how we found him, yes," he countered. 

Truth.

Tsukauchi frowned but didn't object to the reply. Though he technically answered the question, something about that rubbed him the wrong way. Tsukauchi had asked if Stain's repetitive target area
had allowed him to know to look for Iida. Midoriya said that it's what caused him to find Iida.

So why was he looking in the first place? How did he know to look?

Tsukauchi considered asking him further questions, but he merely nodded as if he understood and rolled his hand. "Continue, please."

"Well, we found Iida after looking through the alleys. Todoroki used his ice powers to block Stain, if I remember correctly. Then Todoroki grabbed Native and left to drop him off by the ambulances," Midoriya said.

"Why did he leave you to do that?" Tsukauchi asked.

Midoriya's fist clenched. "That's what we planned when we were searching the alleyways."

Tsukauchi paused in his writing. "But how did you know that he'd be there if you were searching for Iida?"

Midoriya blinked. "I told Todoroki that if there were multiple people there, which was unlikely, that he had to go and save them."

"And there were multiple victims," Tsukauchi clarified.

"Yes."

Truth.

"And you told Todoroki this around or just before you arrived at the scene, correct?"

"Yes."

Lie.

Tsukauchi forced himself not to stutter to a halt in his writing, but he knew that his hand had gone rigid. His writing became more and more like chicken scratch as he tried not to burn a hole in his papers.

He... lied about the timing? But why? Out of all the questions he could have lied about, what difference would it have made? He could have just admitted that he came up with the plan when he and Todoroki were already at the scene. He wouldn't have to risk lying, and it's not like it would change anything—

Unless he didn't come up with the plan then, either. Unless he came up with the plan even before the attack happened.

Shit. Fuck. Shit fuck shit fuck shit fuck—

Did Midoriya have connections with the villains? It would make sense, being the "son" of Ignition. It would also line up with his earlier statements about him excluding himself from all the hero statements.

But that didn't seem right. Granted, he would have to look into it further, and there was a lot of evidence that supported it... but the itch under his skin told him no. And that intuition had saved him many times before. No, Midoriya being allies with villains didn't seem right. It was something else—they were missing a piece in the puzzle.
Or... was it that thing that All Might had mentioned?

"Okay," Tsukauchi said, trying to hide any wavering emotions behind a kind smile. "And then?"

Midoriya stared at him for a long period of time. His brow was beginning to furrow as if he was confused, but he continued anyway. "After Todoroki left, I kept Stain from hurting Iida. He cut one of my bands off, though, and he grazed me. I think when he ingests blood he can paralyze people for a period of time; after he licked his blade, I was frozen. I collapsed to the floor and... well, everything gets a little fuzzy afterward."

Tsukauchi raised a brow. "The other victims didn't mention feeling any amnesia or fuzziness."

"I don't think it was really Stain's quirk," Midoriya confessed. "Or, if it was, it was only a contributor."

"Explain."

Midoriya uncomfortably pulled at his hospital gown. He was frowning, as if he was struggling to find and say his words. "The day before Stain's attack... I suffered from auditory deprivation."

Truth.

"I don't know the cause of it, but I think it may have to do with my quirk acting up?" Midoriya's brows were drawn over his eyes. "At the end, the heat part of my Chain Conjuring just burst into a ray. It didn't use to do that before."

Tsukauchi leaned back until his spine hit the back of his chair. "This deprivation of your senses—how many times did it happen that day?"

"It happened twice," Midoriya said. "The first time I didn't even notice. It only lasted about a minute or so anyway." The boy frowned and began to rub at his left wrist. "The second time was a lot worse. Todoroki had to help me through it."

"So you think that that sensory deprivation was linked to what happened with your quirk," Tsukauchi summarized.

Midoriya shrugged. "I mean, maybe? It felt like that at first, like all my senses were being sucked out of me. But then I could see things, it was just a huge... disconnect from my body. I couldn't remember most of what happened that night even if I tried."

"Tell me what you do remember."

Midoriya’s hand reached up to tug at his hair, and he looked down at the table between the two of them with a scrunched up face. He looked so miserable as he squeezed his eyes shut that Tsukauchi almost told him that he didn't have to try to remember.

"I remember the sky," he said, sounding strained. "And a figure in the air. And... it was cold? And then I remember hearing All Might's laugh, and Inko too... I think I got put down and was texting Kayama, but I can't say for sure. Uh... and then I talked with someone... Shinsou? Or was it Inko?"

Inko. Not Mom.

"And there was another guy there in bright yellow..." Midoriya's frown deepened. "I remember hearing a bunch of muffled stuff, and then Kayama suddenly screamed. Uh, after that things cleared up a bit. I remember Hisashi was there, and then he- he—" Midoriya took in a deep, shuddering
breath. Quieter, he said, "My quirk went off without my trying. Kayama was there and then Hisashi went on a monologue and then he disappeared... And that's all I remember."

It wasn't much, but it was something. On top of that, it confirmed everyone else's stories, even if there were a few holes in the story left to fill in.

"Thank you, Midoriya." Setting his pen on the table, he rolled his shoulders. "We're almost done, now. I just have a few questions myself, and something I thought would prove to be interesting to you."

Midoriya seemed relieved. "Yes, sir?"

Tsukauchi mentally braced himself for the inevitable that was about to come. Opening the manilla folder in front of him, he pulled out two very, very similar papers. The paper made a soft noise from the friction as he slid it across the table.

Midoriya took both into his hands, eyebrows raised.

"The paper in your left hand is a blood test that we gathered from your stay in the hospital after the USJ attack," Tsukauchi explained. "On the right is a blood test we took last night."

Tsukauchi leaned forward, resting his chin on interlaced fingers. His friendly composure washed away, even though he desperately wished to keep it on.

This was the moment that would prove whether or not he'd get through this interview without getting shut down. Or, perhaps, now more of an interrogation rather than an interview.

Midoriya was staring at the papers with wide eyes. His hands were shaking ever-so-slightly.

"It's quite an interesting aspect of your quirk, Midoriya," Tsukauchi said. "Since the attack on USJ, your quirk factor has warped in several different places. Your genes too were warped, changed to better suit your needs." Tsukauchi frowned. "As of right now, we believe that your quirk is quite more versatile than you'd led us to believe."

"I—" Midoriya started, but he stopped himself short, dumbfounded.

Tsukauchi picked his one-sided conversation right back up. "Your quirk, Chain Conjuring, allows you to summon chains and control them as long as you have skin contact with them. However, those who tried to dissect why your quirk so-called "malfunctioned" yesterday found a pattern in your quirk."

If he didn't do this right, he might as well say goodbye to Midoriya's cooperation. Being too forceful would shut him down. Not being forceful enough would make him lie.

"According to hero Thirteen, you'd used your quirk during a villain attack once. You could barely summon two chains. During USJ, you summoned a few more, but not more than that at one time. You were reported by Aizawa to not have used your quirk between those two times at all, or infrequent enough to not make a difference. He also reported to you having despised your Chain Conjuring quirk, but by the Sports Festival, such hate all but disappeared from view." Tsukauchi narrowed his eyes. "And not only that, you managed to create enough chains to make an apparition of a monster. Hundreds of them, if not thousands."

Midoriya was looking green in the face.

"During the Sports Festival, you also revealed the heat effect to your quirk. Yesterday, you didn't
even need to transfer the heat through your chains—instead it was a ray of condensed heat." Tsukauchi stared down the boy in front of him. "Your quirk isn't simply Chain Conjuring. No quirk I've ever seen evolves over time. And yet, that is exactly what yours does. Subtly adjusting to fit your needs every time you use it—after using it at USJ and the beginning of the Sports Festival, and whatever training you had in between, you were able to stimulate your quirk into quietly and unnoticeably tuning in with your body and usage. The heat effect changed as well, but it tuned in a different way. Enough so that you could consider it an entirely different quirk by now."

Tsukauchi folded his arms on the table. "On top of that, further inspection into the changes led the doctors to believe that your quirk—almost like a mind of its own, so desperate to get you to use it after ignoring it for so long—forces your brain to release more endorphins. The influx of them would make you feel happy without even realizing it, overshadowing the distaste or hate you had for your quirk before."

"I-I swear, I didn't know—" Midoriya choked out.

Truth.

"Perhaps not," Tsukauchi said. "But that doesn't mean your quirk isn't more than you say it is. Not only does it run like it has its own conscious, you also failed to mention your 'stress dreams,' as All Might put it."

Tsukauchi didn't come to this interview unprepared. He'd done his research, and he needed to get to the truth.

Midoriya froze, mouth opening and closing like a fish.

"The ability to see into the future when stressed... and to see past visions or people when emotional," Tsukauchi recited. "Last time I checked, that has nothing to do with Chain Conjuring." His eyes narrowed. "Or is your quirk even really that? You can summon chains, manipulate and transfer heat, and you have dreams about past and future events depending on the kind of situation you're in. How do I know that they aren't entirely separate quirks?"

"I-It's not like that—"

"But it is, isn't it?" Tsukauchi raised a brow. "We tested your blood, kid. Comparing your DNA to Midoriya Inko's and Midoriya Hisashi's was a piece of cake. You're not his son. You're not Midoriya Izuku."

Silence. A pin could have been dropped on the other side of the country. They'd have heard it.

"Do you want to be a villain, Midoriya?" Tsukauchi asked. Better to be upfront than put it off.

"No," Midoriya said, voice so strained and soft he could barely hear it.

Truth.

"Are you a villain or vigilante?"

"No."

Truth.

"Are you a spy for any villains or vigilantes?"
"No."

Truth.

"Have you met any villain before Ignition?"

"No."

Lie.

Tsukauchi blinked. And then his eyes trailed over to the side of Midoriya's neck, revealed to the world without his scarf. Burnt and scarred skin stared back at him.

"Are you related to any villain?"

"No."

Lie.

Tsukauchi looked back up into Midoriya's eyes. They were tearing up.

An unknown background. Several missing years before meeting Ignition. His belief that his treatment at home wasn't bad. His silence. His refusal to come forward with any information.

Seemingly multiple quirks.

Everything at once clicked together. Tsukauchi swallowed the lump in his throat. "Be honest with me, Midoriya. Are your parents villains?"

Midoriya blanched. His eyes, only tearing up before, were now swimming with tears. "Detective..."

"Midoriya," Tsukauchi said, firm but not mean. "Be honest with me."

Silence.

Silence.

Silence.

"No."

Truth.

"Aunts and uncles?"

Midoriya pressed his lips together and didn't say a word.

"Grandparents?" Tsukauchi tried, but he knew that Midoriya wouldn't say anything.

Silence.

Tsukauchi sighed before standing up. The legs of his chair screeched as it slid across the floor, and he grabbed his manila folder and pen. A more hardened detective would have continued pushing for details, but Tsukauchi considered this enough. This interrogation was over.

He got way more than he wanted or needed, anyway.
Leaving through the door, he let it softly shut behind him. He'd have to run blood tests against any known villains they had. It would take months, but maybe they could narrow it down according to the similarity in quirks...

*Seemingly multiple quirks.*

Perhaps... they could start there. "Tamakawa Sansa," Tsukauchi called. The young man with the cat head glanced over to him. "I want you to stay with Midoriya while I talk with the others and set something up. Don't ask him any questions. I'll be back as soon as I can."

Tamakawa nodded curtly before heading into the room. Hopefully, his appearance would help calm down Midoriya. Hopefully. He couldn't be for sure.

Sighing, he gripped his manila folder before stepping into the room behind the one-sided mirror. Aizawa's head snapped toward him, his face pulled into a scowl. All Might was ashen white.

"Therapy," he said bluntly. "My judgment is that he needs therapy as soon as you can provide it." A pause. "And if he wants to live with Inko again, try to convince him to let Midnight have custody. I think she's better for his health anyway."

=====

Midoriya's eyes were red-rimmed when he left the front of the hospital. He didn't even get to say goodbye to Iida, Todoroki, and Shinsou before he was ushered out of the building. It was also so rushed that he wasn't able to retrieve his contacts—not that it would have been likely for him to get them back, anyway. Tamakawa mentioned that they would look into the tech and try to find any information from them.

"You have no reason for being here," one of the doctors had explained. "You were barely hurt, and you seem fine now. But do tell us if your quirk acts up again, yeah?"

All Might was driving him home. Midoriya should have been excited. He just felt the gaping hole in his chest. The interview had been emotionally taxing, and sometimes his breath shuddered and he felt like he was going to choke on the lump in his throat. He never did. He wasn't quite sure whether or not to be happy about that.

The silence was tense and awkward. All Might (or, Yagi now) had tried to play music, but when some of the more raunchy songs came up... well, he shut it off with an annoyed sigh.

As they stopped at a red light, Yagi glanced at the young boy. He was staring out the window uncomfortably, bags obvious in the light streaming in through the glass. They reflected off his coppery irises—which proved to be quite disconcerting.

"Midoriya?" Yagi began, tapping the wheel of his car. "What kind of hero do you even want to be, exactly?"

Apparently, not the right question. Midoriya looked miserable. "I doubt I can be one at this point."

"That's not what I asked, though," Yagi said. "I asked you what you want to be. I'm asking you what makes you want to be a hero."

Midoriya was quiet for a moment. Yagi wondered if the boy would even bother answering. After the previous interview, he didn't seem very open to answering even more questions. "I don't know," he finally admitted.
Yagi hummed. "Well, maybe that's a start." Midoriya jolted beside him, and he continued as the stoplight turned green. "Are you a hero for your own gains? Are you a hero for the name Midoriya Izuku? Are you a hero to protect society? Or are you a hero to save every person that makes that up? Are you a hero for the real name you hold?"

Midoriya was silently staring at the side of Yagi's head. "Tsukauchi told you."

Yagi smiled. "Yes. And I think no less of you as a person, Midoriya." He tilted his head. "But you are at U.A. to become a hero, are you not? So become the hero you want to be." His smile turned soft. "That is the only advice I can provide you, Midoriya. That is all I can help you with. And that is, unfortunately, all you can do as well to prove everyone else wrong. It's there—I know your heroic spirit is there, hidden underneath all those layers. You just have to find it."

"Find... it?"

"Yep." Yagi shot the boy a grin. "Find your own hero. Find yourself."

Midoriya stared at him with wide eyes and lips barely parted. And then he melted back into his seat, looking ahead at the street in front of them. And then:

"Thanks, All Might. And... I'll try."

Yagi smiled softly. The silence wasn't so overbearing after that.

=====

Seventeen-year-old Daizō was still in a cell, still chained up, still very, very, very done with the world.

His version of Asagiri and Ghost were still watching over past Midoriya, arguing about pointless things.

And Kimoto Nana, Daizō's younger sister, was nowhere to be found.

(All of that was about to change.)

=====

A girl with skin like the moon and eyes like the stars and hair like the sun was sitting in an alleyway, listening in as a group of boys and girls left the arcade. She tilted her head in order to hear them.

"—kidding, the level with the rooftop chasing is so hard! I couldn't beat it!"

"Yeah, but it was so fun, don't you think?"

"Haha, I'd play that game all day."

Game?

Kimoto Nana smiled.

_Hm. Rooftop chasing, huh? Now that sounds like fun..._ I wonder if Daizō would like to play something like that?
Midoriya said goodbye to Yagi as he dropped him off by Kayama's apartment. Waving to him softly, he closed the car's door behind him. Yagi drove off soon after, and Midoriya hesitated as he stood out in the open.

He felt... really guilty. He should've told Kayama what she was getting into before she took him under her wing. But he had been so scared, and he hadn't even dreamt that Hisashi would come back.

And yet, here he was.

A yawn threatened to split Midoriya's face in two as he held a hand over his mouth. It seemed that no matter how much sleep he got, he would still remain exhausted. Rubbing at his still-swollen eyes tiredly, he pushed himself to go inside Kayama's apartment.

The door wasn't locked when he pulled at the handle, which surprised him. Years of hero work had ingrained that habit into Kayama, so unless someone else came inside the home, she had probably left it unlocked on purpose. Maybe the police told her that he'd be arriving soon.

As he quietly opened the door and sneaked inside (an old habit that he couldn't bring himself to lose) he slipped his shoes off at the front door. The placemat in the front had a warm English “Welcome!” written on it. Midoriya was pretty sure that she mentioned getting it as a birthday gift from Present Mic.

There were soft murmurs further inside the home. Midoriya frowned before padding down the hallway, on high alert as the voices were joined by soft clinking.

Did Kayama get her tea set out? That's odd, she usually grabs the cups that are metal, not ceramic. The metal ones have funny patterns or pictures on them—like the one she reserves for Aizawa, which has cat ears and whiskers on it. Don't those cups make a deeper sound than that?

The bigger question was who, actually. It must be somebody important if Kayama brushed the dust off the ceramic set and used them.

Upon softly peering around the corner, his eyes widened.

Oh. The tea set... suddenly made sense.

Kayama noticed him first. Being longer in the hero game meant that she noticed the smallest of movements and details out of the corner of her eye. The newbie hero across from her did not have the same kind of training or experience.

The R-rated hero stood up so fast that the legs of her chair made a sharp screeching sound. Her cup fell to the table as she burst forward, and Midoriya didn't have any time to react before he was wrapped into a warm embrace.

Oh. Okay. Uh, Kayama was being touchy-feely. Not that he minded, any! He was just... not prepared. At all. In fact, he was more prepared for her to be angry at him for keeping secrets and the whole Hisashi incident.

Not that he was really complaining now.

After a moment of hesitation, he wrapped his own arms around her middle. She squeezed him tightly, so hard that he almost couldn't breathe for a second, before releasing him from her vice grip. Midoriya blinked up at her as she brushed his hair out of his eyes. She smiled.
"You need a haircut," she said, her voice wobbly.

It broke his heart to hear the hitch there, and guilt gripped his chest until he felt like he would just drop dead from a heart attack. "I'm sorry."

Kayama waved him off with one hand as she brushed at her eyes with manicured fingernails. "You're fine, you're fine." She took in a deep breath before shooting him a watery smile. "I'm just glad you're alright, that's all."

"It's okay, I'm not hurt," Midoriya reassured. He leaned into her touch as she brushed a lock of hair behind her ear.

"Thank god," she whispered. She ran her hand through his hair again before her face colored. Clearing her throat, she looked over her shoulder with a slightly hardened gaze. "Ah, my apologies for the interruption, Midoriya-san."

Midoriya blinked at his(?) own name being called before he remembered the third person in the room. Glancing over to see Inko sitting there quietly, he hunched his shoulders. As short and frail-looking as she was, the fact that she was here at all was incredibly intimidating for him.

"It's quite fine," Inko said politely. She had a small, sad smile on her face. "You're merely showing care for someone who's important to you. I don't think it's fair for me to judge you based on that. If anything, it proves you're quite caring and considerate."

Kayama's smile was venomous. "Please, don't be so overdramatic. It's what any person would do, really. Your compliments, while appreciative, aren't necessary."

Inko closed her eyes and took a sip from her tea. "Of course," she said after a moment of silence. The cup was cradled in her hands as her fingernails gently tapped the sides. "My sincerest apologies."

Midoriya glanced between the two women, eyes wide.

"I'm not the right person to talk about it, but there is also the question about who will get custody of you now that Inko is back in the picture."

Ah. So his two moms weren't on good terms.

Had they been... passive-aggressively arguing this entire time?

"Sit down, sit down," Kayama ushered. "I'll get you some tea."

Inko watched him with gentle green eyes as Kayama grabbed the teapot and bustled into the kitchen. She turned to him and shot him a soft smile as the sounds of clinking could be heard.

"I was hoping that I'd get to speak with you in private for a moment, Izuku." She wasn't looking at him in the eye, and she seemed almost nervous if the flittering of her gaze and the tapping of her fingernails were any indicators.

"I hate to sound so crude," came from the kitchen, "but I'm afraid I'm going to have to object to such a proposition."

"You'd object to anything I said."

"Amusing, but not quite."
Inko's lips were curved into a smile as she leaned back into her chair. Crossing her legs, the cup was raised to her lips before she spoke. "Oh really? And what would you not object to?"

"If you got your dirty claws out of my son's life," Kayama said stiffly. She re-entered the living room, teacup in hand. She gently sat it onto the table beside her own spot, and Midoriya glanced worriedly at Inko before sitting in the chair next to Kayama's.

He was sure that a blush was riding high on his cheeks, most likely from the "son" part. In a weak attempt to hide it, he brought the teacup to his mouth and took a long sip. It was hot, and it burned his tongue, but it was better than just sitting there in awkward silence. Kayama had already added some of the sugar, which meant that it wasn't as bitter as he'd thought it would be—in fact, it was just right.

Huh. Kayama must've paid attention to how much sugar he liked in his tea.

That was... nice.

Hiding once again behind his cup as another rush of heat crawled up his face and ears, he watched with tired eyes as Inko shrugged. "I suppose that is quite true." Placing the cup on the table, Inko smiled coolly at Kayama. "But I think it's unfair to say that Izuku can't talk to me privately just because of your opinions."

Kayama frowned. After a moment of contemplation, she opened her mouth to say something.

"Kayama," Midoriya started, and then immediately flinched back when she glanced to him. Her gaze was still cutting. "I—" Lips frozen as the words struggled to come out, he gripped at his clothes. (Luckily, he wasn't in his hospital gown anymore. They had found his stuff at Endeavor's place. His briefcase with all the tech was being transported directly to U.A.'s dorms, while the other cases were being brought here. It was according to his own directions and preference, which had been seconded by Kayama via phone call.)

"I'm sorry," he repeated. "But... Inko's right. I'd like to talk to her alone." Biting his lower lip, he glanced warily at Kayama's expression, which revealed nothing. "I have some... personal questions."

The hero was silent for a moment as she tilted her cup from side to side, the dark liquid inside coming dangerously close to spilling over the edge. Midoriya was worried for a second that he'd made her mad, that she would tell him no and... and...

What would she do if he angered her?

Kayama sighed. “Alright,” she said. She sounded defeated as she stood up. “But don’t lay a finger on him.”

“I won’t,” Inko promised. “You have my permission to kill me if I do.”

Kayama didn’t humor her comment as she looked over her shoulder at Midoriya. He looked back at her, and attempted a small smile that was bound to break in a few seconds.

“We won’t be long,” Inko added, noticing her hesitation.

The slender woman disappeared down through the doorway and into the hall, presumably taking refuge in her own bedroom. Midoriya felt a slight pang of guilt as he realized that he had practically told her to go away after she received him with open arms.

“So,” Inko started, expression turning serious as she folded her arms, “I’m sure you have questions...
for me. I meant it when I said that we would be quick. It wouldn’t be nice to keep Midnight waiting in her own home.”

“Right,” Midoriya agreed, slightly distracted. He was still staring at the empty doorway. Inko waited for a moment before clearing her throat. “Do you normally have your contacts out?”

Midoriya blinked as her question registered, and he frowned. “Oh. No, the police wanted to check them for any signs of trackers or other evidence.”

Inko tilted her head. “Why not?”

A shrug followed her question. “I… preferred it, I guess.”

“Because they were green?”

“No. Because they reminded me of you.” Midoriya tapped the side of his cup, and he looked into the tea with a frown. “I’m sorry. I know that you probably aren’t comfortable with me saying that. You never liked it when Hisashi tried to make me look more similar to you.”

Inko hummed contemplatively. “Actually, I was more upset that he was trying to make you something you weren’t. Whether or not he looked like me wasn’t my concern.” Her hands wrapped tightly around her own cup again, and she took a long sip. “Frankly, I cared more about you and your wants than your image.”

“If you cared so much, then why did you leave?” Midoriya blurted. He felt his face grow pale a second later. He hadn’t meant to say that, nor was he trying to sound so… rude about it, either.

Inko fell silent, much like Kayama had before. She stared at the wall with a distant gaze. “My reasonings were childish, selfish, and immature. It might be better to not hear it at all.”

“It has to be better than nothing,” Midoriya pleaded. “For the longest time, I thought I was the reason for the longest time.”

Guilt flashed across Inko’s eyes. “Of course you weren’t.”

“Then what was it?” Midoriya tried again.

Inko pursed her lips. Silence fell over the two of them. It was a long and uncomfortable one, and Midoriya was willing to break the quiet in any way he could. Too bad he didn’t know what to say.

“I left,” Inko started slowly, “because I had this… image, in my head. After you asked me if you could help people, it was like a— a spark that I needed to push me forward.” She frowned. “I had been planning for a while to just… leave. Just get up and go away, never to be seen again. But then you came into the picture, and I just couldn’t bear the thought of leaving you.”

Another long sip of tea followed her words. Midoriya patiently waited. “But when you talked about helping people, I thought, ‘Well, what if I was the one to help you?’” She snorted. “Obviously, I was blind to the truth. But at the time, I was overcome with this idea that I’d become a hero. I’d learn to fight, to protect myself, to be able to protect you… and then I’d come back and save you, too.”

Inko shook her head. “Like I said, it was a childish and selfish image. Not only did it have enough holes in it to be comparable to swiss cheese, but I treated you like something to save. I treated you like an object—something that would never age, never try to save itself, and never aim for something better.” Inko looked up at him from her teacup. “Which I apologize for. And which I will continue to
apologize for for the rest of my life. I should have contacted authorities, or even put you in someone else’s care. Instead, I was so selfish to try to keep you to myself. In that way, I am no better than Hisashi.”

Her eyes softened. “However, I do still care about you, Izuku. I hope that I’ll continue to learn to be a better person. Maybe one day I’ll be able to forgive myself for my mistakes. Maybe I’ll even be a good hero, you know?”

Midoriya stared at her for a long time. His eyes were oddly wet again, but he ignored it. “I think you’re a good one already,” he murmured.

Inko exhaled sharply through her nose. “If you say so.” As another silence fell over them, she began to tap on the side of her cup. “Uh… if you have any questions for me, about Hisashi and all that, I’d be happy to answer them. It’s… the least I can do.”

Midoriya bit his lower lip. “Thank you,” he finally said after a pause, “but I’m going to have to pass for now. Maybe another day? But… I don’t know, I feel like we’re not that close anymore to talk about Hisashi. I still care about you greatly,” he amended, seeing the slightly pained look on Inko’s face, “but it’s been so long… you know. Things change.” He gestured to himself.

Inko nodded. “Of course,” she said quietly.

Midoriya crossed his arms as another awkward silence fell over them. It was… a little odd, but too many years had passed for their relationship to bounce back immediately.

“I do have a question for you, though,” Inko said quietly. “About Kayama. What’s it like, living with her?”

Midoriya blinked. “Like… everything?”

“Everything,” Inko echoed.

Midoriya’s eyes brightened. He couldn’t help it. His spine straightened as he immediately delved into a ramble about how Kayama and him had marathons on famous movies, how they would cook together while debating classroom topics, how Kayama had bought them matching hoodies that was just the size he wanted, how she and him would sometimes fall asleep on the couch together watching corny TV shows, how Kayama went out of her way to learn how to bake so she could surprise him one day with cupcakes—

By the time he finally stopped, his throat was sore and his voice was strangled. Inko looked at him warmly though, her lips curled into a smile.

After a moment of silence as his last words rang in the air, Inko still staring at him, he felt his ears heat up.

“So the R-Rated hero has a soft spot,” she murmured. “Interesting.” Brushing her bangs out of her eyes, she smiled widely at him. “Well, I suppose that’s all I really wanted to know.”

“Huh?”

“Don’t worry about it,” Inko said, waving her hand. “The police did talk to you about custody issues though, right?”

Midoriya blinked. “Oh,” he said, growing smaller. “Yeah.”
“Don’t be so sad,” Inko briefly chastised. “I was just going to say…” She paused, frowned, and then pushed forward. “Pick whoever makes you the happiest, Izuku. And even if that means you’ll be under Kayama’s guardianship, I want you to know that I’ll still be happy. Because I’m proud of you, and I just want what’s best for you.”

There was a lot of hugging after that. And maybe a couple of tears. They were both criers, it seemed.

=====

“You?” Aizawa raised an eyebrow. “We have a therapist at the school who’s qualified for this work. Why on earth would you want to be Midoriya’s therapist?”

All Might, who was sitting beside the younger man, coughed awkwardly. “What he’s trying to say, Principal Nedzu, is that you can often scare people with your… personality! Perhaps it would be best to leave Hound Dog to this?”

Principal Nedzu, the one, the only, the bear-mouse-rodent-creature-thing, smiled politely. “Oh, but I’ve already read up on plenty of resources.” Aizawa watched as the rat poured himself more tea, and a chill went down his spine. “Presuming I can pack in a few more study days, I can get the right qualifications for being a therapist.”

“Whether or not you’re one legally does not apply to this situation,” Aizawa said. “Midoriya’s experiences need to be dealt with care and skill and someone with tangible experience.”

“I know,” Nedzu chirped. “Which is exactly why I say that I do it.” At Aizawa’s glare, he shot the man a smile. “Oh deary me. I understand your protectiveness over the boy, really, but I can be trusted. And I’d appreciate it if you didn’t doubt my skill.”

The hidden threat there was, without a doubt, probably one of the most terrifying experiences in either of the two men’s lives.

“Not that I would doubt it, Nedzu,” All Might assured, “but what happens if your… therapeutic sessions with Midoriya only prove to make it worse?”

“At the first signs of my intervention being harmful, I will transfer him to Hound Dog,” Nedzu said. “Of course, that’s under the impression he chooses me at all. I will let him go to our respective sessions. He can make his decision then for who he’d like to trust his feelings with.”

Aizawa growled under his breath. “Midoriya—”

“Has been severely tortured, hurt, and emotionally broken many times over,” Nedzu clipped with an unusual iciness. “I have gone through quite a bit myself, Aizawa. I am no stranger to trauma.”

Nedzu was good at arguing. It was all he seemed to do nowadays, and Aizawa and All Might left his office with little more than they gained from it. It was too bad, really. Aizawa was an interesting character to debate with. For someone who claimed to be so heartless, he really was a fluffy teddy bear.

Being a therapist wasn’t something he’d considered, but it certainly wasn’t impossible. He’d done his research. (As in, he’d memorized every believable article on the internet, had read through seven more textbooks, and had watched about twelve different lectures today kind of research. If he did it every day for a week, maybe he could be prepared enough.)

And if Midoriya chose Hound Dog instead of him?
Hm.

Nedzu glanced with beady eyes over the folder on his desk. He could barely make out the words with his room steadily growing darker, but he didn’t need to see it again. The image had already been burned into his brain merely ten seconds after Tsukauchi personally delivered the folder. The office had grown silent, then. Nedzu had no words, no discussion with the detective.

**Midoriya Izuku(?)**

*Eighty-nine percent DNA match with second tester. See full graph for details...*

Nedzu hid the file in the middle of his stack of papers in one of his drawers. With a smile, he locked it.

Tsukauchi would tell him that there were no coincidences. There was no way that Nedzu was given the information he now had, and then randomly decided to take up the responsibility of caring for Midoriya that granted Nedzu much of his personal information.

Coincidence? Well, of course it was.

Nedzu sipped his tea, his coal eyes twinkling.

(Nedzu was right. He was always right. Coincidences did not exist.)

Chapter End Notes

yay therapy

HAPPY EARLY BIRTHDAY LUMII I HOPE YOU ENJOYED THIS A LITTLE

uhhh,,, I'm sick. Like, sicker than a dog. I keep getting sicker and I'm just tired and sick and sick and... sick?? Sick. Sick? Sick?? Sick.

Excuse my half-working brain.

Uh,,,, therapy is nice. don't @ me cause I'm giving nedzu love, shush, I like him too much

I honestly have no idea what to say. Oh! Happy Early Birthday Lumii!!! (Wait, did I say that in the beginning notes, I did didn't I u g h)
Chapter Summary

One of the signs, old and torn up and about to fall apart, was a warning about illegal dumping. The other, obviously standing the wear of time better than the other—or perhaps it wasn’t as mistreated—said Dagobah Beach in thick lettering.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys, I'm so so so sorry that this chapter is so late. I had such a busy life, I barely had any time just to sit down and breathe. So many busy things going on—terrible connections, packed weekend after weekend, lows with some friends, and so many late nights to finish all my assignments and get some chunk of stuff done. It took me more than a month to respond to some of your comments. My apologies.

First of all, I just wanted to say this— thank you. Thank you guys, so so much, for your comments, for your kudos, just for reading this. Thanks to all of you who've subscribed, bookmarked, or silently read this. Thanks to all of those who have put several hours away to read this calculated word vomit of a fic, and even more hours for those who've written reviews that I can't help but just reread all the time. Thanks to all those who are living in a constant rush with college, work, or just day-to-day life, and yet still take your limited time to sit down and read when I update or to catch up after you've been bombarded with exams and homework and just life in general.

And, most of all, thanks to my wholesome (cursed) discord family who's so full of love and uwus and care (and knives), who's spent hours talking with me and dealing with my spastic keysmashing and hyperactive self. Thanks to all of you, who's so sweet and kind (and who puts up with my terrible rambling habits) and for greeting each new person like a new family member who's come to see us again. Lots of love. <3

(No, there's no specific reason why I'm doing this. I'm not about to die. Indefinite's still going on strong, and it won't end that soon. Nobody asked. I just remembered this and thought it would be nice to let you guys now that I care about you all. Don't panic please.)

Traitor Theory:
Shinsou: III
Kaminari: IIIIIII
Sero: IIIIIII
Mineta: III
Iida: I
Bakugo: II
Kirishima: I
Monoma: I

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Midoriya awoke to the sound of a TV running softly in the background and a thick blanket wrapped tightly around him. The light from the sun filtered into the room through the gap in curtain covered windows—a wonderful wake-up call, in his opinion. Better than being yelled at by his alarm clock, at the very least.

Midoriya grunted as he blinked his bleary eyes open. He was about to sit up when he spotted the familiar, curled up figure on his chest.

It was Juni.

Midoriya felt his lips quirk up as he saw the two dark eyes looking up at him. Untangling one hand from his blanket, he brought a finger up to run it over the top of Juni’s head.

“Hi,” he murmured. Juni continued to stare at him blankly. Probably upset with him, he mused. Before he could get a chance to apologize, remedying the situation with a long, sticky hug, fingers started combing through his hair. He stiffened in surprise, and a glance behind him revealed dark blue hair and eyes. Kayama was leaning over the arm of her own chair, which sat beside the couch he was resting on.

“Hi,” Kayama said. “Good to see you’re still alive.”

“Huh?” Midoriya replied, blinking dumbly.

Kayama snickered. “You’ve been sleeping for thirteen hours, kid. I thought the movies last night killed you.”

Midoriya blinked again before memories of the two movies he and Kayama had watched the previous night came flooding back to him. They were halfway through the third before he couldn’t remember anything else… so he had presumably fallen asleep.

Oh gosh. Hopefully he hadn’t fallen asleep on her.

“Oops,” he said sheepishly.
“Oops,” Kayama echoed. She pushed herself back into an upright position and shot him a smile. “Don’t blame you for sleeping that long though, all things considered. It’s been a rough couple of days for you.”

Midoriya hummed in confirmation as he tried to escape the burrito he had been wrapped in. He had just gotten his second arm untangled when Kayama stood up from the chair, stretching her back with a satisfied grunt.

“So,” Kayama started as she padded through the living room and into the hallway. She swung herself around using the lip of the doorway (a habit that Midoriya had noted after spending a few weeks with her) and smiled back at him. “What’s up with the eye color? I’ve been meaning to ask for a while.”

Staring at her for a moment, his brow furrowed in confusion before it registered. “Oh. Because it’s not green?”

“Yeah. You tryin’ out a new look or somethin’?”

Midoriya awkwardly rubbed the back of his head. “No, actually.” He glanced at Juni as if she could help him out and was sorely disappointed. “Uh, this is my natural eye color. I just usually wore colored contacts.”

Kayama blinked. “Oh.” Then, after a moment of awkward silence, she said, “Is there a reason you’re not wearing them now…?”

“The police took them in as evidence,” Midoriya murmured. His smile cracked at the thought, and Kayama watched as he hunched his shoulders, as if he was trying to hold himself closer. Fingers pulling at the loose threads in his covers, which were still wrapped tightly around his waist, he watched with half-hearted interest as they came undone.

Kayama was silent and still. Then, without warning, she marched forward, picked up Juni (who promptly gave her the stink eye as Kayama placed her on her head), and wrapped her arms around Midoriya. The boy let out a surprised yelp as she pulled him up and over her shoulder firefighter style.

“You should’ve told me,” Kayama huffed as she stalked down and toward the kitchen. “Having contacts in for so long must’ve hurt your eyes. You shouldn’t have had to wear them all day, kid.”
“A-ah, it didn’t actually hurt that badly—” Midoriya stuttered, before shrieking as Kayama dumped him further backward over her shoulder. (He would vehemently deny that he ever made such a high-pitched sound.) Now practically hanging upside-down—and only being held up by Kayama’s hands, which were gripping his ankles—he watched as the floorboards swung beneath him.

Kayama scoffed lightheartedly from above him. “Well, it still hurt, didn’t it?” she called. “You don’t need much more reason than that.”

Midoriya fell silent as her words tried to register. Just because… it hurt a little?

“No then,” Kayama said with finality, thankfully ending the topic then and there, “what’s your plan for today?”

“My plan?” Midoriya questioned, and then shrieked as Kayama let one of his feet go. Dangling even further, he tried to twist his body upward as Kayama (seemingly unperturbed) continued speaking in the background.

“Oh yeah. The Hirojis, your old gymnastics teacher and their daughter, called yesterday. They wanted to catch up a bit, spend the day with you.” Kayama hummed to herself as she began to slowly walk to the kitchen. Midoriya tried not to screech as he swung from side to side. “Ah, we should probably stop by U.A., since most of your clothes are still there. Oh, and that cafe that you like? Maybe we should stop there as well, y’know, just to chillax for a bit.”

Midoriya grunted as he placed his palms against the floor, pushing himself up higher so he could wrap his knees around Kayama’s shoulders. With another huff of air he pulled his torso upward so his chest was touching his thighs. Squirming slightly and pushing his legs further over her shoulders, he sighed in relief as he ended up sitting comfortably.

Wow. Kayama was… taller than he thought. Heck, he looked tall now. When was the last time he sat on someone’s shoulders to look taller? Had he done it with his biological mother, once? Or maybe his biological father?

He… couldn’t remember.

“Ah,” he said, his voice high-pitched as he tried to ward off the strange, sudden sadness that had overtaken him. It wasn’t as if he remembered either of them anyway, or at least well enough to
sufficiently care, but... “Aren’t my suitcases from Endeavor’s agency coming over sometime today? I can just use the clothes from there, right?” He rested his arms on Kayama’s head lightly, making sure not to put too much pressure on her neck. Juni, hidden happily in-between his arms, perked up slightly. “Though it would be nice to see Hiroji and Aika again. And to go to the cafe as well.”

“Then that’s what we’ll do!” Kayama chirped as she moved reflexively through the kitchen, automatically reaching for different supplies and pans without looking. “Any specials for breakfast that you want?”

“No thanks,” Midoriya murmured, and he burst into giggles with a soft yelp as she spun in several tight circles across the kitchen floor, unfazed by his weight.

“Great! I have a surprise planned for you then.”

Midoriya raised an eyebrow even though he knew she couldn’t see it. “You do realize that I can see everything you do or make from up here, right?”

“Shush,” Kayama ordered. She turned the knobs on the stove without looking (Midoriya wondered if it was going to be one of those days they almost burn the house down) and placed several pans on their respective cooktops. “It’s called imagination. And if you refuse to use that little brain of yours, I’m going to blindfold you and tickle you until you die.”

“I feel threatened,” Midoriya blandly stated as Kayama began to search through their—her refrigerator.

Because it was her refrigerator. And her kitchen. And her home. Not theirs.

“I feel like we’re on one of those terrible comedy cooking shows,” Kayama noted as she began to chop up some vegetables. Midoriya felt a drop of sweat roll down the back of his neck when he realized that he didn’t even notice her picking up a knife.

 Heck, where had she even gotten it from?

Kayama continued from her previous train of thought, completely unaware of the turmoil happening above her. “It’s like, ‘Cooking with the Smiths, Homestyle’ but instead it’s ‘Cooking with Momnight, Sonzuku, and the Goddess Slug, Let’s-Not-Catch-Our-Home-On-Fire-Style.’” She
paused in her cutting, and her face grew pale as if a thought just occurred to her. “Izuku, please don’t burn our house down when you cook by yourself.”


Okay. That was okay. He could get used to that. Yeah.

“I think between the two of us, you’re the more likely to catch things on fire, Mom,” he joked.

Juni twisted around slowly. She had that look in her eye, like she had just stumbled across something she dearly liked. After so long without her, it was a bit of an odd sight to see—it was almost as if he was learning her expressions all over again, and that one befuddled him so much that he was left staring at her with wide eyes.

Had he said something off-putting? He couldn’t remember. Something was weird, and he had that feeling on his tongue that he often got when he tried to pronounce an unfamiliar word.

Oh boy. What did he say this time?

Kayama was frozen for a moment before she cleared her throat. “I mean… you’re not wrong,” she admitted unabashedly. She threw the knife in her hand directly upward, and Midoriya screeched as he frantically caught it so no one would get hurt, dammit Kayama you had one job—

“Hey hey hey,” Kayama chirped, “why don’t you climb down from your high perch and help me cook, hm? The only one who deserves that position is Juni, thank you very much.”

Midoriya rolled his eyes playfully before hopping carefully off of her shoulders. Years of gymnastic practices and lessons ingrained into his head and muscles let him land lightly on the balls of his feet. Rubbing the pad of his thumb over the handle of the knife, he snatched the vegetable from Kayama’s hand.

“Thank you,” he sing-songed.

“Brat,” Kayama muttered under her breath, and Midoriya laughed.
Just as he was about to bring the blade down, Kayama gently bopped him with her side. “Wash your hands first, kiddo.”

Midoriya stared at her blankly—she hadn’t washed her hands either, after all—but he sighed melodramatically and twisted around toward the sink anyway. (Kayama had sworn the appliance was from before the manifestation of quirks with how dysfunctional it was, though Midoriya was less believing.) After a second of grappling with the handles and knobs, he watched as water began to pour from the rusted spout.

After a moment of silence, letting his hands run under the warm liquid, Kayama cleared her throat.

“So,” she started, her voice slightly high-pitched, “what did you and Inko talk about yesterday?”

Midoriya blinked as he shut the sink off. “Uh…”

Right. He had totally forgotten to tell her about his conversation with Inko. Which, now that he thought about it, was incredibly… disrespectful, almost? Kayama had been taking care of him for a long time now and he had practically kicked her out of the room so he and Inko could speak privately. Considering everything she’d done for him, it was a selfish move; she had every right to stay, especially since it was her— their own home.

Dang. He was still going to have to get used to that, apparently.

He licked his lips. “Well… our conversation was a little short,” he admitted carefully, wiping his hands dry with a small towel. “Inko had offered to talk about Hisashi and her, and explain their circumstances and everything, but I guess I refused. I didn’t feel comfortable hearing about it. Plus, I’m not as close to Inko as I was or I’d like to be. It didn’t feel right, and I’d have felt like I was intruding, so I said no.”

Kayama hummed as he sidled up next to her again, and she handed him the knife. “I think that’s great,” she admitted. “Which might sound calloused, but… I’m proud of you for standing up for your own health, kid.” She ruffled his hair.

Even despite how easily Kayama threw her compliments at him, he always felt a flutter of happiness in his chest. “Thanks,” he said quietly, cheeks pink. After a moment of hesitation, he steeled himself and continued on. “Uh… she also talked about custody issues…”
Silence descended upon them. Midoriya was sure he said the wrong thing for a moment, and Kayama’s eyes had a faraway, solemn look to them. “Oh really?” she asked faintly.

Nodding, Midoriya did his best to stay engaged in the conversation while not cutting his fingers off. It wasn’t usually this hard to multitask, but cooking had always been a quiet pastime for him after a long day. One which was shared by Juni, who was often silent herself.

“Yeah,” he confirmed. After a moment of quiet waiting, wondering if he should drop the conversation, he slowly breached the subject with a cautious tone. “She told me not to worry too much about it. Just to choose whoever made me happiest.” And then, after another moment of hesitation, he confessed, “I’m kind of glad that she didn’t try to convince me to stay with her. I don’t know what I’d do if I was trapped like that.”

“So you don’t want to stay with her?” Kayama asked, voice hopeful.

Ah, of course she wouldn’t want him to go live with Inko. Not like he couldn’t blame her, anyway, but it still slightly hurt. Sure, Inko hadn’t made the best decisions, but she still cared for him and his overall wellbeing. There was still the whole debate about whether or not he should cut her out of her life—as toxic people should be, Kayama pointed out—but Midoriya wasn’t sure she was so toxic as to mislead. She hadn’t actively tried to hurt him so far, and she did respect his boundaries and issues when they were both younger and less wise. On top of that, there was rarely ever hesitation when she comforted him during low moments—and she was good at it, too.

So, he understood Kayama, but… there was still a large, vulnerable, and raw part of him that Inko knew like the back of her hand and soothed. A part of him they both shared. Trauma connected people, and while not in the best and most healthy of ways, it certainly survived throughout the years of silence between them.

And living with her didn’t seem bad at all, or at least in theory. It wasn’t necessarily that she was a bad mother figure, it was just… he didn’t see her like that, especially after so much time. But he clearly felt some connection with her, otherwise he wouldn’t be so bothered about it. And it was bothering him. It was like mice were chewing holes in his stomach the longer he didn’t address it. Why did he want to live with her anyway? Why couldn’t he just let go?

“I…” Lips pursed, he glanced away from Kayama’s gaze. “I think I still need a little bit to think over it.” He just— he wasn’t ready. He didn’t want to say goodbye to her so soon, not after all of this had happened.
“Of course,” Kayama said. There was no hiding the slight disappointment in her tone, but it was gentle and soft. “Don’t stress yourself over it too much, okay?”

She placed a hand on his shoulder and leaned over, hesitating for a moment, before pressing a soft kiss to the side of his head. He could barely feel her lips graze the area just above his ears, where his still-tangled hair had been pinned back to keep it out of his face. But it was there, and it made him freeze for a moment.

Just a moment, though.

A small smile tugged at his lips, and he leaned lightly into her side. As always, she was warm against his side, and she hummed a soft tune for the rest of the morning.

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“I just realized something.”

“Hm?”

“Well, if both of you wanted custody over me… couldn’t you just get married? And sign a contract to share your assets?”

“I— what? I… oh my god please get this image out of my head.”

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Midoriya pulled at the ends of his scarf nervously, trying to ease the butterflies in his stomach. Not that he was doing a very good job at it, but it was the thought that counted. Resting on his shoulder was Juni, who absolutely refused to leave his side after he returned. Which made sense, but was also slightly illogical. He hadn’t even been gone for more than three days—but perhaps, to a slug, it seemed a lot longer.

It wasn’t like he had planned to stress her out, despite all the annoyed glares he had gotten from her all morning. If anything, he had expected the internships to be a relatively calm experience. Or, at
least, as calm as you could get while hero-ing.

And as much as he loved Juni, she could get a little too protective at times. There was no doubt in his mind that she would use her quirk if he was ever in danger, which caused a multitude of other problems. First, he wouldn’t learn as much, or how to work independently, and second, he’d have to explain to Endeavor why he had a slug on him.

And that… wouldn’t have blown over well. At all.

(He’d also left Juni behind with Kayama because the two had a rivalry. They weren’t exactly subtle about it, and he could see from the corner of his eye when they parted daggers at one another. Maybe they were vying for his attention? He couldn’t tell, but they clearly needed to work out some of their own differences and become friends, because he wasn’t sure what would happen if they got into a full-blown fight.

Also, the media would be drooling over that news. “R-Rated Hero fights slug, causing insane collateral damage.”

Yeah… better to force them to get over themselves.)

“Are you nervous?”

Midoriya jolted out of his thoughts, and he glanced to his side. Kayama’s arm was linked with his, and she bumped shoulders with him lightly. “Uh… just a little, yeah.”

Kayama hummed. After a moment of silence, her eyes clouded over as she thought to herself, she eventually smiled. “I can see why you would be,” she said carefully. “And it’s okay to be scared if you are. But don’t worry yourself out over it. I’ve seen the way Hiroji and his daughter look at you. They consider you family. They won’t do anything that would make you uncomfortable.”

The words were said gently, as if she wasn’t sure of what she was saying herself. Maybe she wasn’t sure why he was nervous, and so she took a shot in the dark and said whatever she thought would help.

And… well, she hit the mark, for the most part.
Leaning heavily into her side, he hummed. “Do you consider us to be family too?” he tried, voice quiet.

Kayama snorted. “Of course I do. Wouldn’t think of anything else, kid.”

Midoriya couldn’t help but preen as she ran a hand through his hair. (Maybe he was getting a little too attached to her. Maybe he shouldn’t be so happy when she did the littlest of things to show she cared about him. But he was bad at this, bad at walking along the line of distance and dependency. He couldn’t really tell if he was too emotionally reliant on her, or if this was normal, if healthy relationships worked this way, so he smiled and tried to keep his want in check.)

Time seemed to whiz by as they remained silent, and before long they had arrived at Hiroji’s doorstep. Kayama glanced down at him, silently asking him if he was okay. Like she had asked, he hadn’t worried himself into freaking out, but his stomach still twisted and churned. He hadn’t seen the two since… well, since before the Sports Festival, probably.

Kayama leaned forward and knocked on the door with her fist, the sounds resounding loud and heavy. Midoriya swallowed thickly.

There was a moment of silence—quiet and undisturbed—until, finally, the lock turned and the door was opened. A familiar face peeked out.

Aika.

She had dark bags underneath her eyes, and she looked like she hadn’t slept in a long while. Her dark hair was piled up on her head, pulled into a messily-made bun.

Yawning, she shot them a sleeping smile. “Hey guys,” she said, her voice thick from sleep. “Good to see that you’re finally here. Dad’s been waiting for you.”

“Has he?” Kayama said smoothly. “Well, I’m glad. It’s been forever since we’ve seen one another.”

Midoriya remained quiet, even as Aika ushered them inside. Unlike last time, all their curtains were pulled close, so it was dimmer in the first room than it had been the last time. For a second, Midoriya
was sure that the three of them would be stuck in an awkward silence until Aika cleared her throat.

“Dad!” she yelled, “Izuku and Midnight are here!”

Kayama slowly slipped her arm from Midoriya’s as the man’s footsteps neared. The loss of warmth was almost disappointing, but also relieving. He was still working on the prolonged contact part.

Before he could overthink the gesture, Midoriya was welcomed with another warm and gentle embrace that he didn’t fail to reciprocate. The man smelled of cookies—perhaps he was baking again. Maybe he hadn’t burned the cookies this time?

The second the man let him go—his dark eyes staring at him gently—he was pounced by the older girl.

“Dad Dad Dad,” Aika said, grabbing onto Midoriya’s hand tightly, “can we go to my room for a second?”

Hiroji laughed and rubbed the back of his head. “Only if Izuku is alright with it, Aika.” There was an odd tenseness to his shoulders that definitely hadn’t been there the last time they saw him. Hiroji looked at Kayama next as he continued. “And with Midnight as well.”

A small smile crept up Kayama’s face. “Like I said, you can call me Nemuri if you’d like. And it’s all up to Izuku.”

Midoriya wanted to stay with Hiroji a bit more, and he was nervous to not be with Kayama… but she was right. These people were like his family. They’d known him since he was eleven and twelve. He’d be just fine.

“Of course, it’s fine by me,” he said, squeezing Aika’s hand. She squeezed back.

“Good,” she said. “Now let’s go.”

Midoriya huffed as she began to drag him toward the staircase. Hiroji called after them. “Don’t overwhelm him, Aika!”
“I won’t!”

Midoriya was hauled, expression blank even as Aika began to manhandle him into getting up the stairs. It seemed like he was used to it, though, because he didn’t even put up a fight as she finally pushed him into her room, grinning all the while.

Kayama watched after her with a hawk-like gaze until the door was slammed shut. “Is she normally like that?”

“Yes,” Hiroji said, still smiling. “But I think she’s just extra excited to spend time with Izuku. It’s been so long, after all.”

“I see. Should I be worried?”

“Nope,” Hiroji said, shoving his hands into his pockets. After a moment to glance back up the staircase, he sidled closer to the heroine. He looked a little tired, but his eyes had brightened and the smile still hung on his lips. “Anyway, care for a drink?”

Kayama crossed her arms. “Sure. What do you have?”

Hiroji hummed as he silently walked past her and into the kitchen. “We probably have everything under the sun. Is there a specific kind? Juices, water, something alcoholic—”

“That, please.”

Hiroji snorted as he opened one of his cabinets, eyes trailing over the different bottles inside. “Rough couple of days, huh?” His voice was slightly muffled as he spoke, head buried inside the cabinets. Kayama slipped into the kitchen, leaning against the counter comfortably. “Well, hate to break it to you—” He pulled himself back, a wine bottle in hand. “—but I’m not much of an alcohol drinker. So you’re going to have to deal with the lightest wine I could ever bring to the table.”

Kayama smiled. “That’s fine. I’m not much of a big drinker anyway.”
“Really?” Even though he sounded surprised, his jaw didn’t drop to the floor like some of Kayama’s old friends did when she mentioned it. He sounded more curious than anything as he grabbed two glasses with his other hand. “How come? I always thought the opposite, to be frank.”

“Personal preference,” Kayama immediately said. “But after all the times I had to go into a bar and seduce a criminal into submission, I guess the image of me being a heavy drinker stuck around some.”

“Into submission, huh?” Hiroji smiled as he handed her a glass, and she took it with two careful hands. “I’ve heard your methods can be quite convincing, and nonetheless sadistic.”

Kayama shrugged and took a tiny sip from her glass. “It’s worked well for the past decade or so, so I don’t see why not continue so. Lust never changes, it seems.”

“Interesting,” Hiroji murmured. As a lull in the conversation followed, he cleared his throat. “You know, you have some pretty thick skin to deal with all the media. Your age seems to be a clear indicator of your ability to do hero work.”

Kayama groaned and rolled her eyes. A fingernail of hers tapped the side of the glass, and Hiroji duly noted that it looked as if she had bitten on it recently. Probably due to all the stress. “God, like I don’t hear enough about that. ’Cause aging for me doesn’t equate to more hero experience like it does for others.”

“I hear that,” Hiroji said quietly. “I was a police officer once. Used to be in one of the most controversial squads before I retired. Media was on my back for about a month before I disappeared.”

A glint appeared in Kayama’s eye as she clicked her tongue. “Oh really? And which one was that? I’m quite familiar with the police, for the most part, and I’ve heard more vague references of notorious figures than should be physically possible.”

“You probably wouldn’t know them.” Hiroji looked slightly smaller now, even though he was a head above Kayama. “Parasite, that one hero who was trashed by the media and had his hero license removed a decade ago? Killed my entire squad by freak accident except for me and my captain.” (Hiroji followed this with a few choice words he wouldn’t dare say around Aika.)

want to punch the hero community and then the media right after.”

Hiroji snorted into his glass. “That’d be a death sentence.”

“But it’d be *something,*” Kayama said, patting his arm. “It’s like they care more about the revenue than the actual people nowadays. But,” she said sharply, setting her glass down, “that’s not really the point of why you wanted to talk to me, right?”

Hiroji took another sip of his own drink, smile slightly pulling at his lips. “You saw right through me.”

“I see through people for a living, Chikara.”

“And I hide things for a living, Nemuri.” Hiroji continued smiling, unperturbed by Kayama’s stare. “Yet you still could see that.”

“It helps that I know you well enough.”

“Does it now? Even though we’ve only met once before and barely spoke to one another?”

Kayama’s brow furrowed. “You’re distancing yourself from the point again. Why did you even call the two of us over, anyway? What on earth did you want to talk about?”

Hiroji sighed into his drink before placing the glass down. Perhaps it was a figment of Kayama’s imagination, but the tenseness in his shoulders was coming back tenfold.

Without looking, Hiroji leaned back and reached for a book sitting innocently on the other end of the counter. After a bit of swiping, his hands knocked into it, and he grabbed it with slightly shaking hands.

The book was leatherbound and inconspicuous in any way you looked at it. Looking at the open side of the book showed that the pages were thick and laminated.
A photo album then, perhaps.

“I brought you over here because of the news a couple of days ago.” Hiroji opened the front cover, eyes trailing over the first page before he began flipping through them. “Ignition. His real name is Midoriya Hisashi, isn’t it?”

Kayama froze. “I’m sorry?”

Hiroji paused on a page in the album, eyes frozen on a single picture. After a moment of silence, his lips pursed, he balanced the album in the crook of his arm and pulled the picture out.

“I told you. My squad was eliminated entirely except for me and my captain.” He slammed the book shut and placed it gently on the counter. “And my captain was fierce. He loved his squad as much as he loved his family, and when it happened, he resigned.” Hiroji held the picture out to Kayama.

She stared at him with a blank expression, bordering on cold and closed off. Though she was clearly hesitant, she reached out and took it. Her eyes grazed over the faces of each person there.

“This was your squad,” she said carefully, quietly.

“Yes.” Hiroji leaned over, putting Kayama on edge as he pointed to the smiling man in the middle. “Recognize him?”

Kayama looked up to his face, eyes swimming with uncertainty. “He looks exactly like Ignition.”

“Probably because he is,” Hiroji said quietly. “He was my captain. And I told you, he was a fierce man. Revenge sounded pretty sweet to him, especially after what happened to his son.”

“His son?” Kayama asked, eyebrow raised. She looked back down at the picture, and her eyes widened. The man was holding a boy in his arms, who looked creepily like…

“Hisashi’s son died due to a villain attack,” Hiroji said. “His name was Izuku. Sweetest boy in the world. Which is why it concerns me that there’s a Midoriya Izuku in my daughter’s room who is very much alive, with an obsessive ‘father’ who’s become Ignition. The years in-between don’t add
up. And I have no idea how it got from point A to point B.”

Kayama frowned. “And this matters, because?”

“Because the boy upstairs either is or isn’t who he says he is. And I don’t know which I prefer,” Hiroji said honestly. “If Izuku really is the real one, then Hisashi would have had to keep him frozen in time before reviving him. Otherwise Izuku would be several years older than he is now, since Hisashi’s real son died over two decades ago.” Hiroji picked up his glass and began to turn it side to side, leaning more heavily on the counter behind him. “And if he’s not the real Izuku, then I have no idea where he came from, or why he’s as traumatized as he is.”

Kayama was silent as she absorbed the information, and she stared at the picture. The young boy with green hair and freckles and equally green eyes with yellow flecks stared back at her, smile wide and brilliant.

*Well, fuck.*

“I’m going to need another drink for this,” Kayama said bluntly, picking her glass back up and downing it.

Hiroji snorted. “I don’t think any amount of alcohol could help you here.”

“Try me, pretty boy.”

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Aika sounded nervous the entire time they were chatting, which was odd—she was never usually this nervous.

Midoriya watched her carefully as she spoke, her hair falling in front of her face every once in a while. She seemed to avoid taking her hair out and retying it, though. Another weird sign, since before she would do it every three minutes. A bad habit, as her father had stated, since she wouldn’t have had anything to do with her hands.
“—and the Sports Festival was awesome, I had no idea you could even do that dude! Heck, I’m surprised that Todoroki managed to even win that battle since you were on his tail for like forever—”

She was avoiding eye contact with him now. Despite how she was stuttering over her words, she wouldn’t stop rambling, and the constant wringing of her hands wasn’t helping.

“Aika,” he finally interrupted, his brows drawn, “are you alright?”

The chatter cut immediately, and silence fell over the both of them. Aika’s eyes, full of pain, stared down at him.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” she finally said. “I’m doing better.”

Midoriya frowned. “Okay. We don’t have to. But if you do, we can just get it over with. It won’t hurt to talk about it and move on, right?”

“It’s not that simple.”

“It is if we make it that way.”

Aika sighed before collapsing onto the floor, her arms tucked over her chest. She stared at the ceiling for a minute or two.

“You promise that we won’t dwell on it?”

Midoriya grunted as he stood up from her bed to lie down next to her. “Of course.”

If there was anything worse than sitting in silence, waiting for one of your best friends to spill their troubles out to you, Midoriya would like to know. He wasn’t sure if he was even equipped to handle her emotional baggage along with his own.

That didn’t mean he couldn’t at least try, though.
“My quirk,” Aika started slowly, “is a replica of my mother’s.”

Midoriya tilted his head to the side, quietly waiting for her to continue.

“I don’t remember my mother very well. Dad and my mother had a fling, and I was a result of that fling. When it ended, Dad didn’t know I existed and my mother liked it that way.” Her eyes were sad. “My dad managed to find out though, on one of his missions. My mother was caught up in it and when he discovered me, he freaked. But eventually I ended up in his custody after a lot of shit hit the fan. Because her quirk was so detrimental to her own health, she ended up in a psych ward.”

Aika sharply sat up, and she hugged her knees. “She was a good person, it’s just—her quirk was too much over a long period of time. And it’s the same for me.” She placed her chin on her knees, and her hair fell in her face again. “I used to take the highest quirk suppressants allowed, and my quirk would still shine through. Eventually I managed to wean myself off of it, but it’s getting worse again. And I don’t want to end up like my mother. Dad’s already been through enough, and honestly, I’m already overly dependent on him. Most kids my age have moved out of their parents’ homes and gone to live their lives, and I want to, but my quirk’s been getting in the way and I feel like I’m trapped.” She glanced over to Midoriya, who had sat up as well. “If that makes sense.”

Midoriya was quiet for a while as he ran his feet back and forth over the carpet. “Would you like advice or would you rather just vent?” His frown deepened. “And if I may ask, what is your quirk anyway?”

Aika sighed. “Advice would be nice, I think, but I do have one out. I’m just not sure if the person will take my offer.” She began to run her finger through the threads, creating little patterns only she could see. “It’s called Faerie Whisperer. It’s like a little voice in the back of my head. It gives me warnings and whatnot, but our doctor said it’s also manipulative. It just wants a host that’s strong enough to carry it without it dying, and chances are, I wouldn’t live if I were up against a really powerful villain. It’s why it keeps talking to me, trying to get me to push everyone away and manipulate others into protecting me even though I don’t need it. Which is stupid, because I want to help kids, you know? And I don’t want to be a manipulative bastard when being around youths.”

Midoriya leaned heavily against her. “Would it help if you had someone to talk to about this?”

Aika pursed her lips. She had a plan, an idea—Midoriya could see that in her eyes. She was just hesitant to reveal it, and it showed. Resorting to biting her lower lip, Aika avoided his gaze.
“I want to give it away, Izu. To someone who’s powerful enough that my quirk won’t destroy them from the inside out. And I do know them, but…”

Midoriya felt like ice had been poured down his back. He stiffened, and instinctively, his chain quirk curled underneath his skin, ready to pounce.

The only one who could do that… was All for One, right?

Paling, Midoriya felt his hands begin to shake. No, no. Aika would never resort to villain influence. Hell, she’d never even talk to villains if she had to. Hiroji had taught her to never interact with them, and she had taken that advice to heart. She would never. She would never—

“I know you can accept and give quirks, Izuku,” Aika said quietly, still not looking at him. “My quirk told me, since it hates change as well. I’m surprised you haven’t taken full advantage of it, but I haven’t told anyone. It’s not my business.” She looked back at him, hand raised slightly. “But please… you’re the only one I know who could take it. Please.”

Midoriya stared at her with wide eyes as she outstretched her hand.

It was the first quirk ever offered to him, not forced. And Midoriya… didn’t know how to feel about that.

Aika waited patiently with a bated breath and pleading eyes.

It was his choice. He could refuse. He didn’t have to say yes, he realized.

Midoriya swallowed nervously. He was sure he was shaking, but he took her hand anyway.

He said, lips trembling, “Of course.”

Aika gave him a small, sad smile.

====
Quirk — Recipience: The ability to receive quirks with the original owner's full consent; can GIVE quirks received, but only back to their original owner.

Warning: Consent can still be achieved forcefully through torture, as seen by example three. QUIRKS MAY spontaneousLY EVOLVE UNDER STRESS—DO NOT IRruTATE OWNER UNDER EVOLUTION PERIOD. MAY RESULT IN HUgE BACKLASH.

Quirks Received:

#1: (XXX, Seiya): Time Manipulation—can manipulate time at will on both objects and self; stress can cause it to activate; will sometimes replace dreams with visions

#2: (Asagiri, Maiko): Chain Conjuring—with skin contact, can summon chains; also controls their movements until contact is relinquished

#3: (Disaya, XXX): Heat Conductor—can release heat from the bottom of feet and palms hands up to 2,400 degrees Celsius; can distribute how hot it gets on objects freely can manipulate heat freely

#4: (XXX, XXX): Pain Concentration—naturally lowers the amount of pain the user goes through

#5: (Hiroji, Aika): Faerie Whisperer—will hear messages in inner ear canal, often warnings; the more wind and shadows present, the more frequent and clear the messages are; user can sometimes control what they wish to hear

*Note: One quirk that had been received was a vaulting-type quirk from the user's cat. This quirk was given back to its owner after an incident with the family.

*Note: Quirks #4 and #5 will both come in duplicates. Second versions of them will be stored until they will be transferred again in owner’s time loop.

===== the good kids
yaomom: okay so… Iida. Midoriya. Are you guys alright?

I taped a car together: hm??? something happen??

I taped a car together: oh shite something did happen dude holy hell

Rockruff: huh?

Rockruff: oh dudedeeded

Rockruff: you guys faces IGNITION? jesus are you guys okay? How hurt are you?

Kirby: OH MY GOSH ARE YOU GUYS ALRIGHT

yaomom: I can’t say for sure. The news reports are saying that four U.A. kids were involved, including Iida, Midoriya, Todoroki, and someone named Shinsou.

Rockruff: oh my god shinsou was there too?

Kirby: whos shinsou?

I taped a car together: he’s the brainwashing dude. From general ed

yaomom: Indeed, that’s him.

Kirby: ahhhh oh my gosh I hope everyone’s alright >-<

Rockruff: there were a bunch of heroes there though, right? Ignition is scary and all, but I’m sure they were fine
I taped a car together: dude, ignition is, like, Endeavor-level strength.

Rockruff: f u c k

Kirby: ahhhh stop you’re making me worried

Kirby: plus none of them are responding hnghhhh

yaomom: I can contact Todoroki if you’d all like. I’m not sure he would respond, however.

I taped a car together: you have todo’s #? Since when bish I need answers

yaomom: For a while, now. He gave it to me in case I ever needed to contact him for emergencies or whatever. I have the entire class’ numbers since I’m president.

Rockruff: does mido have everyone’s numbers too then? Since he’s vice prez i mean

yaomom: I shared them with him, yes. But no, he said he wouldn’t use them unless I was unable to myself.

Kirby: ok that’s great and all but back to the topic at hand

Kirby: could you add Todoroni here now

yaomom: Mhm.

yaomom has added Todoroki Shouto to the chat
Todoroki Shouto: ?

Todoroki Shouto: Who is this.

Todoroki Shouto: Ok.

Todoroki Shouto: I’m guessing Iida is Iida. But who’s lurker bean?

Rockruff: oh, that’s mido. He can be shy when talking here

Todoroki Shouto: Oh okay.

Todoroki Shouto: So… what did you want from me?

Kirby: we just want to know if everything’s alright. >-< we heard the news
Todoroki Shouto: Oh.

Todoroki Shouto: We’re alive.

I taped a car together: THATS NOT HELPFUL DUDE

Todoroki Shouto: oh

Todoroki Shouto: Well, we’re pretty exhausted. Most of us have been up for more than 14 hours, and me and Midoriya have been up for 19 straight doing hero work and patrols.

Todoroki Shouto: Midoriya wasn’t so much injured as he was shaken. Ignition had this weird thing with him though. Kept on trying to take him away.

Todoroki Shouto: Iida lost a lot of blood, he got stabbed several times. But he’s fine now.

Todoroki Shouto: Shinsou got burned by Ignition on his shoulder really badly. He took the hit for me. It was pretty rough, he can barely move without being in intense pain.

Todoroki Shouto: I had a few knives stuck in my arm and I had a couple of bruises here and there, but it was fine. The blades were small.

Rockruff: DUDE WTF

Rockruff: THATS NOT “FINE” DUDE YOU GOT STABBED

Todoroki Shouto: If it makes you feel better, I didn’t even notice it after a while.

I taped a car together: NO THAT DOESN’T HELP THAT JUST MAKES IT WORSE
yaomom: Todoroki... please take care of yourself.

Kirby: Todoroki you’re a terrible role model oml.

Kirby: f**king sELF CARE DUDE

Todoroki Shouto: ?

yaomom: Don't even bother, Uraraka. Any attempts would be useless.

Iidad: Indeed.

Rockruff: IIDA YOU'RE ALIVE

Iidad: Yes, I'm alive.

Todoroki Shouto: ?

Todoroki Shouto: I just told you that all of us were alive.

I taped a car together: iida babe, is mido ok??

Todoroki Shouto: I-

Iidad: He is quite alright, I believe.

Lurker bean: Babe?? Sero, you’re not cheating on me are you? :/
yaomom: Oh my.

Rockruff: seroooooo you just outed yourselffffffffff

Kirby: rly sero? Ive been planning the wedding for the past two months now so itll be perfect, and you just had to go and get an affair, huh? >:(

Todoroki Shouto: Marriage? What? Affair?

Lurker bean: :(((((((

I taped a car together: I swear its not what it looks like mido

I taped a car together: I love you the most

Lurker bean: It’s okay if you want to be w/ Iida. I’ll just have Todoroki instead.

Todoroki Shouto: Hold up, slow down, wtf’s going on

Kirby: romance, todo. Romance.

yaomom: I thought we were all family, though. Isn’t that, perhaps, quite repulsive?

Rockruff: she has a point dudes

Rockruff: I mean I love yall but your all my family
Kirby: :/ no marriages then, right?

Lurker bean: guys, this is izuku’s friend, why is he now all of a sudden crying

Iidad: Izuku has friends outside of U.A.?

Rockruff: OOF

I taped a car together: DUDE IIDA YOU CANT JUST SAY THAT LMAO

yaomom: Oh, it’s nice to meet you, Izuku’s friend. And we were talking about how we’re all family—well, after affairs and marriage.

yaomom: If he was emotional ten minutes before, it’s Sero’s fault.

Lurker bean: hahaha that’d do it

Lurker bean: fucking emotional fuck

Lurker bean: why do you always cry when people mention being your family

Lurker bean: also add me you bootiful hooman I got to meet these other bootiful hoomans

Rockruff has changed the chat name from the good kids to bootiful hoomans

Iidad: I- what?

I taped a car together: poor mido whoever his friend is has him whipped
Lurker bean: nah, he just loves me too much :)

Lurker bean: ahhh what the heck I’m sorry she stole my phone >-<

yaomom: :)

yaomom: Perhaps it would be best to add her into the group chat. She seems like she wanted in.

Lurker bean: Well, I mean,,,

Kirby: please please please I’d love to meet her

Lurker bean: hnghh drgyuiojpyuiojpk

Lurker bean has added Hiroji Aika to the chat

Hiroji Aiko has changed their name to Mido’s Mom friend

yaomom: Hm. Interesting choice of name, especially since I consider that my title.

Lurker bean: wha-

Lurker bean: pls no juni and kayama are already at one another’s throats

Rockruff: wait really???

Rockruff: also lmao no I’m mido’s mom friend >:)
Kirby: lets be honest at this point we all are mido’s mom friend. He cant take care of himself for shit and hes a reckless boi

I taped a car together: oof isnt that the truth

Lurker bean: I-

Lurker bean: you know what? Im calling an intervention.

Todoroki Shouto: No, I’M calling an intervention.

Iidad: Todoroki, you literally have no right to say that.

Iidad: I’M calling an intervention for ALL of you.

Lurker bean: >>>

Lurker bean: say that to my face dad, knowing what you did these past few days

Mido’s Mom friend: damn guys here I am, thinking that Izu’s the only chaotic mess in UA and yet his whole class is made up of kids barely keeping themselves together lol

Mido’s Mom friend: then again when I was your guys’ age I was the same way so I can’t really talk

Kirby: wait wait how old are you??

Mido’s Mom friend: :))) thats my secret to know, not yours.
Lurker bean: she’s 19

Mido’s Mom friend: BISH

Mido’s Mom friend: Okay, that’s it, you wanna reveal my secrets? Well my dad was your instructor since you were like eleven or smthing and I’ve been your friend not long after so get ready for a lot of embarrassing stories

Lurker bean: oh god please no

yaomom: I have my own fair share of stories too, Izuku. :) I’ve known you almost as long as your instructor.

yaomom: Some of them are quite entertaining.

Kirby: pls yes I need to hear these with my own eyes

I taped a car together: MY BODY IS READYYYYYYYY

Todoroki Shouto: I’m curious as well, to be fair.

Lurker bean: PLEASE DONT DO THIS TO MEEEEEE

Rockruff: :D

Mido’s Mom friend: good

Mido’s Mom friend: ok so the first one I remember was when Midos birthday first came around…
“You should stay for dinner.”

Kayama looked up from the file opened in front of her. Staring at Hiroji, she took a sip from her glass, which had been refilled multiple times.

“How come?” she asked, raising her eyebrow.

Hiroji shrugged. “I’d enjoy your company.”

There was a moment of silence. Kayama placed the glass on the counter. There was a hard edge in her eye as she glanced Hiroji up and down.

“Allright,” she finally said, the words spoken slowly. “I’d love to.”

Hiroji’s face lit up. Kayama’s lips tilted upward when she saw it.

=====

Daizō was staring at the ceiling, making yet another figure out of the nonexistent shapes there, when he heard the faint chimes. They were always the ones that alerted him of company—or meal times, which would be odd if it was. He was pretty sure it wasn’t one o’clock yet, and that was usually when they gave him his lunch…

Well, assuming they hadn’t forgotten.

Huffing, he sat himself up into a crouch when the collar around his neck pulled taught, sending him into a coughing fit.

Dang. He hadn’t given himself enough slack again. But that’s what he got when he decided to lay in the middle of the room, he supposed.
Cursing all his binds for the twentieth time this morning alone he shuffled back until he had enough give to stand up comfortably. By that time, the translucent barrier separating him from the hallway dissolved temporarily, and the small figure stepped in. It reappeared behind… her.

Ah. She looked familiar. Too bad he couldn’t remember her name.

She had dark blue hair that curled around her like a shield, contrasting starkly against her paper-white skin. The only obvious feature about her that he could recognize, unfortunately. Daizō was aware that she was a part of the council… probably. Probably? Probably. It was hard to keep up with everyone at the moment. Too many names and faces to not be overwhelmed, at the moment.

“Hello, Kimoto,” the girl (Teen? Woman? He couldn’t tell.) said softly. Her eyes wouldn’t stay in one place, and they darted around the dim room in an attempt not to look at him. Which he didn’t blame her for. He couldn’t remember the last time he’s had a shower.

“You know me,” Daizō settled for, seeing how he had no idea what he was supposed to say.

The woman (was she really that old?) nodded sharply, hands practically shaking as she clutched at her skirt. “I was wondering if you’d give me a chance to speak with you, Kimoto.” She licked her lips, her shoulders hunching up as her voice cracked. “You may not remember me, but I’m Ray. From the council. I was there when… when you were taken away.”

Daizō squinted his eyes slightly, trying to decode the picture in front of him. He couldn’t tell if she was shy or self-conscious or guilty or a combination of those things. Or maybe he was the problem, seeing how he looked like a dead man walking. Honestly there was no way to tell, so with a little hesitance he tried to test the waters.

“Imprisoned, you mean,” he said slowly, a small frown pulling at his lips.

Ray flinched, tucking her long hair behind one ear. She looked tired. “Ye—yes, I suppose there’s no denying that truth…”

She looked… uncomfortable. Very uncomfortable, standing there, in his cell, obvious tears held at bay, and a nervous cloud hovering around her.

Dang. He felt bad, even though he knew he shouldn’t—look at where pity got him. But it’s not like he could really help it, so he sighed and pulled himself into the corner of the room, slipping down
into small sitting position. He patted the area in front of him.

“Sit. You look like you’re going to pass out if you stand much longer.”

Ray stared at him with a distrustful something burning deep in her eyes, and her hands twitched by her sides. It took a second before she finally crumbled, and she stiffly moved forward. As she finally crouched down before falling into a seated position, he spoke up again.

“My apologies for the lack of tea,” he chirped, eyes glinting slightly. “Had I had the materials, I would be working on that right now, but the only thing I have is an old cup of orange juice.” He gestured vaguely over to the empty tray sitting near the entrance.

Ray’s brow furrowed. “Why are you suddenly acting so nice?”

Daizō leaned back against the wall and crossed his arms. “My apologies, was I too rude before for your liking?”

“It’s not that. Morrison’s worse. But you’re just… so different.” Ray was avoiding his gaze again. “I don’t know why you couldn’t act like you are now during our meetings. You might have more respect.”

“False,” Daizō said. “I tried that for the first few months and it got me nowhere. Excuse me if I was a little irritated. I was put in charge of helping the council after quite a series of events, and it was a position I never wanted. I was planning on only being there when required when I realized that a majority of you hadn’t actually seen other time travelers outside the council, except when on the balconies of your mansions, and excuse me if I didn’t trust that you had the average person’s ideals at heart.”

Ray flinched. “If you really never wanted it, you could always ask your friend to do so for you. The council would listen to him any day.”

“My friend?” Daizō murmured, eyebrow raised slightly.

Ray pursed her lips. “Midoriya Izuku.”

Ah. Right, they believed that Kimoto Daizō and Midoriya Izuku were two entirely different people.
And the council loved Midoriya while they hated him.

The irony.

“It’s not that simple,” Daizō admitted softly. “I’m sure you know that. Otherwise, he would already be here.”

Ray sighed heavily. “Of course it’s not that simple. But you have to understand, Midoriya was the only reason why some of the council members were kept in check or in line. The idea that he’d go after them if they didn’t stick to the rules was enough fear to last one a lifetime.” Ray shrugged and picked at the fabric of her skirt. “When some started to realize that Midoriya just… wasn’t there, and wouldn’t be there, it loosened up the binds a bit. Unfortunately, some of us came to the conclusion that we should do as we please and what best suits our needs.”

“Except you guys are permanently living on another reality that follows the timeline,” Daizō cut in sharply. “Even if you fucked up time up there, you would be relatively unharmed here. You know this, and you want to initiate your experiments on the timeline. That’s not how it works. But since it doesn’t hurt you, you don’t see a problem with it.”

“That’s not the reason why most of us let this happen.” Ray gestured to his cuffs. “We had other reasons.”

“Like?”

“A loss of faith,” Ray said simply. “At first, the council was busy and happy because they had something to work hard at. Now we’re forced to be complacent after so long, and it doesn’t sit right with a lot of people. Why be complacent when we can better ourselves? But there’s nothing to work on here—”

“Also false,” Daizō said icily. “Don’t even pretend like there isn’t corruption in our departments. Those who do it for the mere prestige or power aren’t exactly subtle. Others just want to reside here because they know it means that they’ll live longer. On top of that, you know as well as I do that time travelers need to be moderated at all times. People with time-related quirks are given a choice to never use their quirk unless in dire situations in exchange for freedom from the society of time travelers. Those who willingly decide to use their quirk on a day-to-day basis have to be checked out twenty-four seven to make sure they won’t mess up the delicate balance—they sign themselves up to be watched under a microscope. You know this takes time and effort, and it’s inefficient at best now. There are a million and two things you could do to improve that, rather than create more problems like Morrison would like to.”
Ray tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. “I’m aware. And I’m not happy with it.”

“You let it happen,” Daizō pointed out.

“Indeed I did,” Ray said. “But at least I’m doing my best to reverse it.” Her eyes hardened as if she was steeling herself, though her body betrayed her as it trembled. “I’m about to do something very dramatic and stupid, so you have to trust me.”

Daizō blinked. “Wha—?”

The next second the girl was pulling at his collar down and shoving her face near his. “Cameras,” she whispered softly, her minty breath rolling over the lower half of his face. His eyes were wide as she rolled her jaw and something metal stuck out between her teeth.

“Oh, that is gross,” he murmured. Her ears burned bright red, but she stared him down threateningly.

“Dake ih.”

Daizō frowned but took the end of the key between his teeth. With a grimace and a wince, he used his tongue to put it into his own mouth.

Ew.

“It’s for your locks. The key works for all of them,” Ray rushed hurriedly, stumbling over her words some. “A good friend of yours— she’s about to become active in five minutes. She’s gonna help you get out of here. Consider this repayment.”

Daizō glanced over her shoulder, watching as two familiar guards—one male with shimmering spots on his skin and a female with silvery wisps flowing off her tongue—pass. “They’re going to find out it’s you,” he stammered around the metal piece in his mouth. “It won’t take long for them to put it together.”
“Fine,” she said sharply. It was odd coming from her mouth. Ray seemed to be incredibly shy every other time he’d seen her. “Then you better not fail at this, Kimoto.” She huffed, the pinkness still riding high on her cheeks. Most likely it had been from embarrassment. Her words that followed came out in a panicked speed run, and Ray didn’t bother to slow down even as she slipped up. “The council managed to create a knock-off version of Ghost’s powers, but they’re limited at best. They can touch people and can mess around with the timeline some, but it’s very constrained and specific. We’re sending groups of these specially-trained time travelers with those knock-off powers back to Midoriya’s time. I can’t say when specifically, but I overheard that it’s around the time that your two friends are stationed at now. Morrison’s gone nuts, told them that he wanted Midoriya to be retrieved to be put on some pedestal. I think all this time in this reality’s made him go mad.”

“Good to know,” Daizō breathed, voice tight and airy.

Ray sighed before shooting up to her feet. She twisted sharply on her heel, shoulders tense as she entered the code for the entrance to his cell. It dissipated again.

Ray paused.

“News’ll get out,” she said clearly. “So don’t come back here picking a fight, you hear me?”

“Of course not,” Daizō hurriedly replied.

Ray glanced at him from over her shoulder, her steeled stare breaking down for a second. The scared, timid woman from before was there again. But she blinked and her armor was back up, blocking her feelings from sight. The next second she was out of the door, her light footsteps echoing in the marble hallway that connected to his cell.

The boy in the cell across from her was staring at him with wide eyes, mouth opened slightly.

Daizō sighed. “Hey, uh, mind if you keep quiet about that?”

The boy blinked.

Ah well. That was about as much confirmation as they were gonna get.
Daizō griped to himself internally as he twisted the key around in his mouth, ignoring its sharp edges. Oh, damn. He was screwed. He was so, totally, absolutely screwed. Ray had said that ‘she’—who was she, though? How could he trust what he was being told?—was going to be “active” in five minutes.

Daizō had no idea what the hell active meant, but it was something and it was going to be bad.

Not to mention that Ray had said “five minutes” four and a half minutes ago. Which meant he had about thirty seconds give or take before he was royally screwed over.

Oh fuck. Oh fuck.

Although he was screaming internally, Daizō made sure to retain a calm and blank face on the outside. If anyone were to look carefully enough, however, they’d see self-destruction in his eyes as he panicked.

As he spit out the key into his hands, working it out of the camera’s view, his eyes began to roam across the hallway. He couldn’t hear any footsteps, other than the familiar ones of a pair of guards—which was reasonable. They were merely doing their rounds for the one thousandth and fifty-second time.

Oh boy. Their poor unlucky souls.

As the last seconds ticked by, Daizō unlocked each of his cuffs. With his heavy breathing—again, he was indeed panicking just slightly at the moment—picking up the pace as the guards moved closer, he threw the last of the chains off of himself. The collar went soon after, and the metal links rattled noisily against one another as they swung into the wall they were hung from.

*Hm... you were quick.*

Daizō flinched as the light and airy voice whispered in the back of his head. A small giggle followed the soft words, echoing in his mind and ricocheting over and over again. His ears rang uncomfortably, but it was oddly familiar.

Yes... yes, he recognized that voice. It had been years since they last met, but he remembered her.
“Nana?” he murmured under his breath, eyes wide. His breath was caught in his throat.

There was a soft mumble of her voice drifting in the air, only for him to hear. In and out her voice faded, almost like a radio with bad reception. A blank fuzziness crept up in his ears.

_Sorry! It’s a little hard to do this._

A small burst of laughter.

_I’m not technically able to go into the time-based realm, but I suppose I can make an exception for you. Now, my brother, ready to play a game?_

“A game,” he muttered softly, still stuck in a crouch. He was frozen to the spot, still and tense and ready for it all to be some trick—ready for the walls to come crashing down and for all his vulnerable spots to be revealed.

_A game indeed, Echo. That is your hero name, isn’t it?_

“Yes.”

_How cool, Echo! Well, I ought to warn you, the barrier keeping you trapped is about to be removed and shut down. Ray’s awesome, isn’t she?_

Daizō’s stomach dropped down to his feet. He had a really bad feeling about this.

_In approximately ten seconds, the guards will round the corner. That’s when the barrier will drop. Have fun beating them, okay! And no worries, I’ll lead you out of the building when you’re done beating them up!_

“No to be offensive,” Daizō said, voice tight with apprehension even as he cracked his knuckles, “but I don’t think I trust you that much.”
Oh, but of course you don’t. That’s all part of the game, Echo! Now play! Have fun! Hehehe!

He was right. He was royally screwed.

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“Maybe give a guy a little more warning before you decide to lead them through several hallways literally filled with guards!?” Daizō shouted, bile burning in the back of his throat as he sprinted down the narrow corridors. He was already panting as several shots rang out from behind him, the extremely enhanced projectiles burying in (and cracking) the polished walls.

Oh hell, that was gonna cost a lot to repair.

Sorry! Nana chanted, though she didn’t sound sorry at all. Daizō shuddered as her voice rumbled from deep in his eardrums and throughout his body.

That was a weird sentence to say. Ouch.

Daizō cursed again as he turned a corner, finding himself in yet another long hallway. This one didn’t have any offshoots to go into though, which sucked—it left him temporarily wide open without any cover.

Drawing the gun he had stashed on his waist (taking them from the unconscious bodies of the first two guards had been almost laughably easy) and twisting his upper body around, he pulled the trigger in rapid fire.

Of course, it wasn’t like he was actually going to hurt them or anything. The most he’d do was slow the guards down. Their suits were made of almost indestructible material. Even their own bullets couldn’t penetrate it, which was probably the point at hand, now that he thought about it. Chances were that some prisoner might take their guns and shoot at them, and that’s exactly what he was doing now. The suit’s only weakness was extremely high temperatures.

And yes, those first guards walking past his cell when the barrier fell were the unlucky few to test that hypothesis of his. They were alive and mostly unharmed, but he was sure that it was a nasty surprise for them.
Bullets ricocheted through the hallway as Daizō emptied his own gun, frantically pulling the trigger even as it clicked hollowly, discharging nothing.

*Left!* Nana cheered, and Daizō swore.

He threw the gun to the ground and took a sharp left, wincing as a huge rain of bullets hit the wall at the end of hallway, tearing it to shreds. If only he could use one of his damn quirks without coming off as extremely suspicious, or worse, revealing that he was, in fact, someone else they revered.

Oh boy. He’d rather die at this point then have everyone staring at him like that, hoping that he could wave his wand and fix all their problems. Like what the hell, he was a human almost-adult, not a pixie fairy, get your facts straight.

*Right!*

Daizō cursed as he pulled himself into a hard right, almost tripping over his own feet. (Almost wasn’t quite the accurate word for it. Absolutely would be more accurate, and he did indeed trip over his own feet, forcing himself to scrabble with his hands and feet to get down the small offshoot.) He pulled himself back to his two feet and sprinted again, even as the voices yelling after him grew louder.

“Could you give me a little more time before you call out the directions?” Daizō said, voice cracking in several places as he followed the offshoot down further.

*Awww, but why? It’s so funny to see you struggle. Plus, you look like a little rabbit when you get on all fours like that.*

“You’re weird as hell.”

*Pot, meet kettle.*

“Now where the heck did you hear that saying?”
Daizō opened his mouth, ready to retort, when he left the small confines of the twisting hallway and entered the room it opened into. He stared with wide eyes and an open mouth, his throat growing dry. It was an office, with a dark, polished oak desk with files upon files stacked on its surface. Large windows let an ocean of warm light fall and gracefully spill over the clean floors. Tapestries hung along the walls, some bright and colorful, almost blindingly so, and others were worn down and made up of mourning grays and blues.

But that? That didn’t matter. What really mattered was the fact that this was *Morrison’s* room—otherwise known as the bastard at the head of the council—and he was very, very much cornered.

The yells and sharp commands from the guards chasing him grew louder, as did the panic settling in his chest.

“Nana?” Daizō pulled at his hair as his eyes scanned the room. Hiding probably wasn’t an option, at least not a permanent one, but if he could hide in plain sight and then strike the guards from behind, he might have a chance to run away. “Why the ever-loving heck did you put me into a corner like this?”

*Oops, sorry!*

She didn’t *sound* sorry at all!

*Must’ve chosen the wrong hallway. My bad. Ah well, guess you’ll have to go out the window, right?*

Daizō squinted as he turned back to the wide casement, gears turning. “You were planning that all along, weren’t you?” he accused, huffing sharply as he shot forward. “You just wanted to play another one of your games.”

*You have so little faith in me…*

“Sorry, was I *supposed* to have *any* ?” He scrambled to turn the locks on the windows, and with a grunt he slid the window open. A blast of warm air hit him, and he peered outside, a soft breeze blowing the bangs out of his face.
Ah, fuck.

*It seems that the only way to safety is that building over there. It’s not too far away though!*

Daizō’s eyebrow twitched when he saw the rooftop. That… could not have been a coincidence. It was a leap away, and he could easily hop from one rooftop to the next, though each was a little higher than he’d like them to be.

A sharp yell was heard behind him, and Daizō cursed under his breath. Right, right, now wasn’t the time to be whining and crying about how your sister decided to troll you and mess with your head. Right now he was being chased by a bunch of crazy people and he needed to get out before he was, most probably, killed.

Cursing his sister to hell—she was a demon child, it was her natural habitat, okay?—he stepped over and onto the ledge of the window, balancing himself carefully. He just… had to jump. Yeah.

God, Aika and Maiko would get a kick out of this, certainly. Or maybe Maiko would be terrified to the bone as well. Though he had never been able to prove it, he was pretty sure that she was terrified of heights.

Inhaling sharply, ignoring the nerves twitching underneath his skin, he pushed himself off the ledge and tucked into a roll. His stomach twisted as he felt himself go airborne for way too many seconds before his body crashed onto the roof of the other building. The air was knocked out of him, and for a few seconds he struggled to determine what was up and down and what was left or right—but, after a shake of his head, he pulled himself into a crouch.

Okay. That was the hardest part done. He stood to his feet, still breathing heavily as he turned around to face the window he just escaped from. After that jump, he really, really needed a breather—

Oh. Oh heck no.

Standing in the opening he made for himself was none other than Morrison, his face bright red and fists clenched. “Guards!” he roared behind his shoulder, “after him!”
Oh heck no.

It seems as if we have to go. I’d pick the roof off to the right...

“Yeah,” Daizō breathed out, pale in the face, “I think so too.”

With a yelp, he dodged a sudden blast aimed at his feet and sprinted off to the side. His heart was thudding painfully in his chest as he ran closer and closer to the edge. At least now he had a running start for this jump, and he bit back a small scream as he leaped right off the edge.

Asui would be proud of him.

Sparks of pain shot down his legs as he landed the jump, his knees protesting every way except vocally. He paused for a second as he stumbled, trying to regain his footing. But the others weren’t waiting for him, and with a curse under his breath, he started sprinting again.

He jumped to the next rooftop, and then another. His legs and feet were already killing him, as were his knees, but he bore through it just fine. A drop of sweat ran down the side of his face as he miscalculated a jump, falling just slightly short. He lost all his breath as he slammed into the side of the wall, arms just coming up to catch his fall on the edge of the building. He hacked as he pulled himself to his feet, giving him enough time to see the four people chasing behind him. There was a significant amount of space between them at the moment, but if Daizō didn’t keep an eye on where he was, there was no doubt that they’d catch up.

Left. Oh, oh, wait, maybe we should take a right instead… oh, but weren’t we supposed to keep remaining forward though…?

Daizō hissed. “Nana, I’m running out of buildings to jump onto.” He was about to get to the busier side of this little reality of theirs, where huge roads divided almost every building. It was both good news and bad news, considering that it meant his roof-hopping was about to end. He’d have to jump into the crowd and potentially involve them, which was another disaster all on its own. But it also meant that he was starting to recognize some of the buildings. He was getting close to the station where he could finally warp out of here—

Daizō, sprinting so fast that he cleared three rooftops in the span of fifteen seconds—one of which that had an annoying steel-wire fence—almost barrelled into a figure that appeared in a wisp of smoke. Putting on the metaphorical brakes, Daizō tripped on his own feet and fell to his hands and
knees. Knowing his luck, he’d probably skinned his palms.

The wisp of smoke curled outward before forming into a solid, revealing a young teen. An airheaded one, to be exact, with a grin too wide for his face and a few knives held between his fingers. The blades glinted in the sunlight.

“Man,” he crooned, “what a pleasure it is to see you.”

Daizō fell backward as the smoke grew closer to him, and he held a hand over his mouth as he attempted to crawl further away. All of the people here had time-related quirks, and they were all equally and terrifyingly dangerous. Unfortunately, this meant quite a few of them were probably unstable as well, if the teen in front of him had anything to show. They had to be around the same age, and if not he would be even younger than Daizō himself—yet the snake-like eyes that peered down at him had no hint of human compassion, chilling him to the bone.

Fuck. Now he remembered why he had to act like an asshole with a stick up his behind. If he didn’t act confident then these creepheads would definitely target him.

Cursing, Daizō tried to scramble to his feet. He glanced behind him—yes, the other four guards were gaining on him. From the corner of his eye, he noticed that there were several curious newtimers passing by, and one of them pointed up to where he and the boy opposite where standing.

Great. Now he had extra attention on him.

“Good job,” a cool voice said from behind him. “I wasn’t expecting you to actually track him down.”

Daizō twisted around, face even paler. The man standing there was the teenager’s exact opposite. His expression was blank, and a cold, icy expression was burned deep into his gaze.

“Eh, you don’t have any faith in me,” the smoky teen said, grin bared.

The man didn’t respond. Nana was silent in Daizō’s head. For the first time since he had broken out of his cell, he wished she wasn’t.
“Hey, hey, hey,” the teen with the too-wide smile said, an aggressive tone tilting his voice. “Where the heck do you think you’re lookin’?”

Daizō realized too late that he was speaking to him, and he jolted away from the both of them as the teen took a threatening step forward. The smoke around his feet whispered threateningly, and it shifted and moved sharply.

“Don’t you know what my quirk is?” the teen continued, the man with the cold stare remaining silent. “Take one step back and my smoke will freeze your body in time in a permanent stasis. Yours would be totally at my will to cut up in any way I liked—”

“Boy,” the cold man interjected sharply, “shut up.”

The smoke stilled. The teen’s smile faded, and his eyes turned dark. “I’m sorry?” he asked sweetly, too sweetly.

Daizō stared between the two of them, cursed to himself, and then reached for the quirk bubbling beneath his skin. As the man’s scowl deepened, and the teen bared his teeth, he lowered his eyes.

He was still learning how to use this quirk—so complex, so full of little strange contradictories and pains. With a wince and a pounding in his head—he couldn’t mess this up, he couldn’t show them what his quirk really was, he couldn’t show them who he really was—he watched as the smoke around the boy froze.

With a concentration that would definitely make Maiko happy, he pushed the smoke down. The teen froze, eyebrows raised in surprise and mouth ajar in confusion when Daizō shot forward. Still making sure to hold his breath, his fist reared back and knocked the teen directly in the face. He went rolling to the edge of the roof, groaning all the while.

Daizō glanced at the man with the icy stare, eyes narrowed, before he shot off the side of the roof and onto the neighboring one. Behind him, he heard the shouts and frustrated yells of the guards who most likely just arrived.

He didn’t look back as he continued sprinting. From the corner of his eye, as he put more distance between himself and the man with the cool stare, he saw a woman resting comfortably in a makeshift cloud. She had a red bow drawn taught with golden additions and designs. Daizō cursed again.
He probably had the entire council up against him, now. God dammit.

To his left he noticed an old man sitting criss-crossed on the rooftop, his dark purple eyes staring holes at his back as the charm at his waist glowed.

Too many people. There were too many people after him, too many people staring. As he rolled across another rooftop, the space above him was taken by a woman with a scarf pulled up over her nose, jewels tinkling as she ran on thin air. She had oddly-shaped daggers, one in each hand, and a cloth was wrapped around her head, hiding dark curls. On the spot to his right was a man with glowing markings all over his arms and face, and a strange potion sat in his hand. There was someone a far distance ahead of him with dark birds sitting along their body, birds that seemed to be frozen in action.

Too. Many. People.

An arrow was shot and hit the ground just in front of him, and he stumbled. He felt the air get kicked out of him by an invisible force, and then the woman above him dropped down directly in front of him, daggers swirling threateningly. And then another arrow was thrown at him, one aimed for his head, and he ducked underneath it. He avoided the potion thrown at his back, and it hit the woman who walked on air instead. And Daizō kept running, his breath coming out in short gasps as he stumbled over his own feet, as his legs burned and his arms ached and as he dodged projectile after projectile.

Somewhere along the line the man with the cold stare ended up in front of him, his dark eyes unimpressed with the shaking and trembling body in front of him. From his foot sprouted a wave of ice that encompassed him all the way to his chin.

And damn, was that cold.

“The colder I can make things,” the man explained, “the faster time goes for me. Relatively, of course.”

Daizō didn’t remember what he said after, that, because everything was fuzzy and everything was moving way too fast for his own good. The woman with the bow dropped beside the cold icy man, and then the one with the birds accompanied him on his other side. Then there was the potions one, and then the old man, and then—
It was… distorted. Unfocused. The details slipped away from him, like he was trying to hold water and yet it kept slipping from his fingers. He remembered a soft ache in his bones and then heat, a flare in his stomach that spread to the tips of his fingers and toes and then the utter relief from the freezing pain and then the drop of sweat that poured down his face and neck and the tightness of his airways and the yells and the ringing of his ears and the pulse that rammed through his body like a timed shock and the quickening of his breaths and there in the distance he could hear laughing, laughing, and strangely it sounded like his own —

When everything clicked back together again, he was on a totally different rooftop. He blinked and turned around, and saw the one he had been on before.

There was a hole there. An empty, gaping hole that released pathetic streams of smoke. A crowd was gathered in front of it. Several unconscious bodies were laying on the ground, in the rubble, or were buried in the wall of the neighboring buildings. The only small item remaining of the building was covered in ash, and it was sitting right next to the man with the frozen birds all over him. The sculpture of the crow had a small sign tied around it, and carved into it said “My name is POSITIVE, and I’m running for 2020 presidency!”—whatever that meant.

I thought you could use a little help, my dear brother! The voice that whispered in his ear was soft and gleeful and sounded so, so innocent.

Daizō stared a little bit longer, growing nauseous just at the sight in front of him. His stomach churned uncomfortably.

He… didn’t know what kind of mindfuckery she just did to him, but whatever it was, it couldn’t have been good.

Daizō turned, heaved up what little lunch he ate, and then continued running and jumping, running and jumping, Nana’s voice rang in his ears.

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“So…” Ghost watched as Kayama and Midoriya left their home, arms interlocked. “You think Nana actually went to go help Daizō? Or nah.”

Asagiri groaned. “Doubt it.” She had her head in her hands. Technically, it was her turn to take a nap.
and rest, but it was incredibly hard to do so considering they were sitting on a roof. Concrete was not a comfortable bed, despite what cavemen might have said.

Ghost shrugged his jacket off as he began to sweat even further. It was blazing outside, and black coats weren’t the best outfit to have to blend in or to evade a heatstroke. “Well, the only way I could ever think of going to save him ourselves was if our past selves came back into the picture…”

Asagiri huffed as she leaned against the chain link fence, hair whipping around her face with the light breeze. “I don’t even remember when you show back up, you cryptid.”

Clicking his tongue, Ghost shrugged as he started to tie his coat around his waist. “I pop up right at the end of the training camp disaster.”

“Oh really?” Asagiri crossed her arms and looked at him with one bored eye, the other closed from exhaustion. “My past self is already here, technically. Has been since the Sports Festival. I’m just lying low for now.” She looked over her shoulder and through the fence to the streets below. It almost made her woozy looking at it, seeing how far up they were, but heights were her only fear and like hell she would show it.

Screw fear. She would beat it into the ground if she had to.

“I do remember that, now that I think about it.” Ghost stretched his arms high above his head with a satisfying pop in his back. “But when do you actually show up show up?”

“You just repeated the same thing twice.”

“As if I’ve gotten enough sleep to function.”

Asagiri sighed heavily. “I make my appearance before the training camp… in my own way, I guess. I don’t really get into U.A.’s eye until the actual attack. Wait, no, that’s a lie—I do kind of do some weird stuff a few days before it happens, but they never really figure out it’s me…” Asagiri began to devolve into muttering the further she talked—at least, until Ghost stopped trying to make sense of what she was saying.

He rolled his shoulder into circular motions, stretching out his feet and legs to get rid of the pins and tingles. After sitting so long in the same position, his limbs had fallen asleep, and he had been too
lazy to actually move them.

“What are you doing?” Asagiri called.

Ghost froze, giving her a blank stare. “Oh, I don’t know, it’s not like the person we’re meant to be protecting left the building and now I have to follow him or anything.”

Asagiri groaned. “Dang it, you’re going to make me jump across rooftops again, aren’t you?”

“Oh please god no.”

The voice was wheezy and out of breath, but familiar nonetheless. The hairs on the back of Asagiri’s neck stood on end, and she whipped around, hand on her belt threateningly. She had eight knives on her person and three guns, and she swore to god if any lame-ass bitch tried to go after her she’d put a few holes in them—

“D-Daizō?”

Asagiri blinked, her hand freezing over her holster, because yes, that was indeed Daizō, and yes, he was alright.

What in bloody carnation of fucking hell?

“Language,” Daizō wheezed, his hands on his knees as he panted heavily. Sweat was dripping down his face, and Asagiri noticed that his sleeves were frozen solid while the rest of his body was legitimately steaming. Some black gloop clung to his clothes, dripping slowly to the ground.

“How could you tell I was cursing?” Asagiri asked, still tense. Maybe this was just someone who was pretending to be Daizō, and he really was reading her mind. She really couldn’t tell. “That was all internal.”

Ghost snorted behind her. “Nah, it really wasn’t hun.”
Asagiri flipped him the bird behind her back as she drew a small dagger from her belt, twisting it carefully between her fingers. “You better have a really good story to convince me that you’re the real deal.”

Daizō stared at her before falling to the ground face-first. “I give up,” he said. “Go on without me.”

Asagiri and Ghost glanced at one another, suspicion clearly evident in their gazes. Ghost shrugged, though he still looked slightly tense. Clearly he wasn’t going to be any help.

“When did I meet you again for the first time here?” Asagiri finally asked. Ghost tilted his head, considering the question silently.

Daizō groaned into the roof before looking up, rubbing his eyes. “By the river,” he slurred. “In the forest. Though I wouldn’t really say that we met, it was more like you popping up and then disappearing again for who knows how long.”

Asagiri rolled her eyes. “Yep, that’s Daizō.”

Ghost was smiling widely. “Oh boy, I haven’t heard this story yet. What kind of local cryptid act was Maiko apart of this time?”

Asagiri was frowning when she shuffled over to the boy, and she crouched down to pull him up and over her shoulder. He grunted weakly. “Was I really that bad?”

“Yes,” came from the both of them. Asagiri pouted.

“Well, at least I can beat you all in a hopping roofs game.” She patted Daizō’s back when he groaned. “No worries, I’ll grab my sleeping bag, and you can have that when we finally stop.”

Daizō sighed in relief. “Thank god for sleep.”

Thank god for sleep, indeed.
Nana hummed as she sat crisscrossed beside her brother’s limp form. Ghost and Asagiri, who had gotten into yet another argument, hadn’t noticed her yet. Their bickering filled the otherwise silent area as she twirled a golden-orange lock of her own hair around her finger.

“Well, what are we supposed to do now? He’s back, and we’ve still got a huge group of whackos in the time dimension. And if what he’s said about them having some version of your powers is true—”

“A version which is much weaker, mind you.”

“That doesn’t matter, Ghost! They still have it! Who knows what kind of damage that could do to the timeline!?”

“But they won’t damage it. My powers specifically are built around me being able to manipulate the timeline and do whatever I want without damaging it. I could stand in front of our little Midoriya and Kayama down there in my underwear and it wouldn’t matter much. They might change shit up, certainly, and not for the better, but they won’t destroy the world as we know it.”

“And we can’t let them—”

“Well, why not? I understand that them taking and kidnapping our younger version of Midoriya isn’t a pleasant idea, but we would be hypocritical to stop it. Our job is only to make sure that the timeline doesn’t crash and that no time travelers do the wrong thing.”

“And they’re obviously doing the wrong thing.”

“Obviously, yes, but they have the support of the entire council and the people behind them. What are we to say that we know best? What are we to say that we should stop them when they’re technically not out of bounds?”

“The entire plan, Ghost, years and years ago was to have All for One out of the picture. If he doesn’t die or get captured because Midoriya isn’t there to do anything—”
“Then what?”

“Then the entire world hits the fan! We can’t let All for One gain back his strength! We can’t let him take over the world again!”

“But that’s your pet project, Maiko. That has nothing to do with the time traveler organization. If anything, that actually goes against protocol. They only let it go because Midoriya was the one to help take him down.”

“Well why the heck are they so obsessed with him anyway?”

“They needed someone to look up to. Midoriya was the obvious choice. They follow him religiously without any realization that they’re doing it. They have no idea what Midoriya actually believes, they just want a figure that can lead them in the right direction, since they’ve lost all sense of it themselves.”

“This is bullshit.”

Nana giggled lightly, holding a hand over her mouth as she did. Ah, it was so good to hear them argue with one another again. It was a constant, never-ending cycle, the two of them, and they were like a broken record that continuously played on repeat. The two of them didn’t hear her then either. She didn’t mind being in the background. It was fun, watching the two of them.

At first, she’d been a little annoyed that they’d called her in to get her help, but… I mean, look at the funky little group of theirs. It was so amusing. She almost wanted to stay with them for even longer.

Oh, and maybe she could tease her brother more if she did! She wasn’t the closest with him, not at all—she didn’t even make it to the top ten. This had to have been the second time they met. The first time they met was only two years ago, when she was ten. He didn’t even know she existed at the time, since she wasn’t born until after he had been taken by their Aunt Maiko. But! He was still very fun to play with. Very responsive, too. A few of her other friends never even talked. They just stared at her with dark, scared eyes.

Ah well. There was no use lamenting the past. For now, she was happy. And maybe, one day, she’d even be able to fight some of those stupid bastards that laid a hand on Daizō. Oh, how happy she would be if she could play with them. They didn’t touch her stuff.
No, she wouldn’t be gentle. Not at all.

=====

Nedzu took a sip of his tea, the liquid hot on his tongue. Aizawa’s cup was still sitting in front of him, filled to the brim but untouched. By now it was probably cold and bitter. It suited the teacher, really.

“You were the one who wanted to talk with me,” Aizawa drawled, eyes tired. “It’d be nice if you could get to the point.”

Nedzu’s nose twitched. “Ah, Aizawa; impatient as ever, are we?”

The man seemed tense. Nedzu wasn’t surprised. Usually he rambled on and on about any given topic before getting to the actual point. Though aware of this, Nedzu never changed no matter how many complaints were shared. There was no point trying to, really, and he could get away with it since he was the principal.

But today, he had been deathly silent. And that more than anything else sent warning bells off in Aizawa’s head. Nedzu could tell by the look in his eyes, as much as he tried to hide it under several layers of apathy.

“You asked for my presence for confidential reasons, so I came,” Aizawa said blandly. “I didn’t ask for your tea.”

Nedzu placed his cup down on the coffee table between them. “Ah, I see you’re still on the fence about my involvement of your student’s health.”

Aizawa frowned. “I’m not petty.”

“But you’re certainly protective,” Nedzu said, smile still firmly in place. “No matter how much you deny it, you love your class. I’m sure if the Ignition event went any other way that night, you would show it much more clearly.”
“But it didn’t,” Aizawa said, voice cutting.

But if it had happened as I thought it would, you would be clutching onto one of your students as they cried over their friend’s death.

“Perhaps not,” Nedzu conceded. “It’s such a shame, really.”

“Why did you bring me here?” Aizawa asked instead.

“Because I decided I’d be honest with you, Aizawa.” Nedzu refilled his cup of tea, and he watched as the steam rose from the surface. “I do believe that you’d want to have this information. Unfortunately, I cannot put my faith into anyone else with this aside from you. The only other one I trust is All Might, and I’m afraid that he wouldn’t receive this news very well.”

“And you couldn’t get to the point immediately because?” Aizawa asked, eyebrow raised.

Nedzu’s smile flicked downward for a moment. “Because,” he said, his voice still cheery despite its dark undertone, “if anyone were to be listening in on us, they’d grow bored quite soon. They wouldn’t waste more time on us if we were only having tea and speaking of nothing of importance.”

Aizawa was silent for a moment. “You’re that concerned about this secret, huh?”

More than you’d ever be capable of knowing, he thought internally. “You’re just as wary as I am known to be, Aizawa. Suspicion can’t help but dictate our every move. The only difference between us is that I am less likely to be empathetic and grow emotional bonds than you are.”

“You sound confident.” Aizawa’s stare was boring through him. “Are you so sure about that?”

“Quite,” Nedzu said. He took a sip of his tea, letting his eyes fall close. “Now then, since I know I’ve wasted quite enough of your time, why don’t we get started, yes?”

Aizawa muttered something that strangely sounded like ‘finally.’
Nedzu took another long sip of his tea, trying to gauge Aizawa’s mood. When he set the cup down, he spoke again. None of his usual cheer clung to his words. “When an acquaintance of mine—a detective—was interviewing your student, he managed to make quite the connection.” Nedzu gestured with one paw to the manilla folders in front of him. “He ran a DNA test with the person he had in mind, and it came back positive.”

Aizawa’s eyes grew stormy. “And who was it?”

“That would require some history, Aizawa,” Nedzu said.

“That’s why I’m here, isn’t it?”

Nedzu tilted his head. “Perhaps.” Nedzu clasped his hands and held them in his lap. “All Might had an enemy, once. His greatest one. This enemy of his very nearly killed him. It’s why he’s not as infallible as he used to be.”

Aizawa raised a brow but didn’t say anything.

“Unfortunately, the villain, as terrible as he was, had family. Family we were not aware of.” Nedzu leaned forward, ears flicking slightly. “I’m sure you could put the puzzle together, Aizawa, assuming you set your mind to it.”

The look he received in return was harsh but well deserved. “Midoriya is a descendant of this villain, who was All Might’s enemy.” Aizawa’s voice was clipped. “And that’s bad because?”

Nedzu’s smile widened. Of course the man wouldn’t care about family relations. It was exactly why he could trust him with this information.

It was too bad, really, how little he knew about the villain and how dangerous he really was. Maybe his opinion might change a little.

“Because this villain might want Midoriya back,” Nedzu chirped. “And seeing how traumatized your student is, I wouldn’t be too quick to brush off the fact that this villain may have hurt him as well.”
Aizawa scowled. “You’re not going to be his therapist.”

“So you say.”

“I know what I’m saying and it’s true.” Aizawa’s hand twitched.

“It’s an educated guess,” Nedzu corrected. “But that is beside the point of our conversation. Make this out to be an order as the principal, Aizawa, but your first priority is to the safety of Midoriya and to keep his distance from that villain.”

“And if he wants to be with that villain?” Aizawa asked. “What then?”

Nedzu sighed. He finished his cup of his tea before placing it back in front of him. He didn’t bother to refill it. “I will address that concern should the time come, Aizawa.”

Aizawa levelled a glare at him. “You’re not telling the full truth.”

Nedzu smiled, his coal eyes glittering menacingly. He stood up from his spot on the couch and brushed down the front of his suit. With a tone of finality, he said, “Consider this meeting over, colleague of mine.”

The manilla folder on his desk remained untouched. Nedzu left it on the coffee table, open and ready for Aizawa to explore should he deem it worth his time and effort.

The teacher didn’t. He stood up, hesitated, and then left the room.

Nedzu sighed before settling himself back down. With a smile, he poured himself another cup of tea, humming all the while.

=====

There was already a pounding ache in Midoriya’s head by the time he left Aika and Hiroji’s home. Had he not had the pain throbbing through his skull, he might have noticed the strange, soft looks
that Kayama and Hiroji were sharing.

Aika didn’t notice them either, seeing how excited and off-the-walls she was. Midoriya hadn’t seen her so alive since he first met her, and it was almost a relief. It’d been too long since that happy-go-lucky attitude had made its welcome entrance.

Kayama and him walked back home, night having already fallen. Midoriya yawned into his hand, jaw aching. What he really wanted was to have a moment of peace to sleep—though he knew full well he’d wake up in the morning with a small fever and a cold. And that was something he was definitely not looking forward to.

Kayama was quiet by his side, gentle in all senses of the word. Her hair had been pulled into a thick bun, a few strands having fallen out. It was odd, since Kayama was naturally immaculate in her appearance. She didn’t even have to try that hard to do it—it had been pressed into her since she started her hero career that looking on point was a necessity. Thus it was a habit more than anything else, one that she now broke, even if in the slightest show.

Hm. Maybe she had had a stressful talk with Hiroji or something. That was the only thing that came to mind as to why she’d show signs of breaking those small habits she’d had for decades.

Kayama sighed melodramatically and bumped shoulders with him. “You’re thinking too loudly.”

“Can you hear what I’m saying, then?” Midoriya asked. From the top of his shoulder, Juni perked up. Midoriya had a feeling that if she didn’t move so slowly she’d be wagging her tail.

Kayama snorted. “Don’t act smart with me, kid.”

“Why not?”

“Because it may or may not be considered rude to other people.” Kayama’s hand suddenly latched out to grab his arm tightly, and she pulled him away from a dark brooding man passing by and closer to her.

Midoriya hummed. “Well, you don’t really care too much about rude qualities as long as it’s not obnoxious.”
“And if I said that you are being obnoxious?” Kayama said, a teasing lilt to her voice assuring Midoriya that she was joking.

He shrugged helplessly. “Sucks to be you then.”

Kayama shook her head and sighed. There was nothing else that she added, and so they remained in silence together until they arrived home. The streets were dark, and the phone in his pocket finally stopped buzzing with notifications from his friends’ texts. Kayama ushered him up to bed immediately. She kissed his forehead and bade him goodnight, telling him he could come to her room if he needed anything. He nodded, and she left him to his own devices.

That was how he found himself at twelve in the morning, laying on his back, hands over his stomach. The headache was easing away into a dull throb.

His blinds were open, letting the city lights illuminate his bedroom. They cast dark shadows along the corners of his walls and across the floor. Swallowing up the pictures hanging on his walls, his and Kayama’s faces disappeared from view.

For some reason, there was a lump in his throat that refused to go away. His fingers itched to play the piano even though he well knew that it wasn’t there. So he continued to stare at his ceiling, listening as cars passed through the streets outside. There was a strange tranquility that came with it, even as his gut continued to grow heavier. His room looked like it was getting smaller and smaller, closing in—almost to the point where the shadows overtook every speck of light that crept inside.

It was odd to say the least, to feel trapped here. He’d always felt calm and safe in the apartment, not so much because it was like home, but rather because Kayama was there. Her presence, always there and hovering like a warm blanket, now seemed like it was out to choke him. He didn’t know why. Just a few hours ago he’d wanted to latch onto her like a koala bear and never let her go, but…

Midoriya sat up as the crawling under his skin grew more unbearable. His breaths weren’t calm or even, and he shuddered as held his head tightly between his knees.

He needed fresh air, space, anything other than the room that was getting too cramped and tight for him to breathe. Throwing himself off his bed, he padded over to his window, undoing the locks and pushing it open. A wave of cool air hit his face, and he leaned his upper torso out for the breeze to make contact with. The sweat on the back of his neck cooled, and he sighed in relief as he rested his head on his hands.
The city was much different at night. A whole new world, open with millions of possibilities.

Midoriya watched from the corner of his little haven as everything moved at a snail’s pace. Time was just… so slow.

He didn’t think about it. It didn’t even occur to him to think twice—he wasn’t quite sure why. Maybe he was just so desperate to leave his room, which had always been his safe spot. But he turned around and grabbed a pair of socks and shoes, yanked them on, and then pulled himself out of the window. The drop to the ground below was nothing, and he closed the window behind him.

Space, he reassured himself. He buried his hands into his hoodie’s pocket, curling them as a wave of relief came over him. The suffocating feeling at the back of his throat eased some. I just need some space.

He was still wearing the clothes he had been wearing earlier that day, too tired and lazy to get undressed in the first place. After licking his lips nervously, he pulled the hood of his jacket over his head. His steps out of the alleyway and into the street were tentative and slow. No more sprinting frantically. No more screaming till his lungs hurt. No more evading the smoke and the fire and the fighting until his entire body wanted to grow limp.

Just walking. That was all he was going to do. Just walk and clear his head.

His breaths had settled down by the time he passed the first two blocks. Heavy in his pocket, his phone bounced with his steps. There was no buzz of Kayama calling him, however. There was no ringtone or alarmed text messages. Just him.

Just… him. Him and walking on the street, passing by a lot of other hims and hers and thems.

He wasn’t going to be Midoriya Izuku right now. Not Hisashi’s little treasure. And he wasn’t going to be Kimoto Daizō, nor Maiko’s little puppet. One day, he’d change the meanings of those names. One day they’d mean something more dear to him. Izuku would, someday, remind himself of Uraraka’s bright eyes and Yaoyorozu’s gentle smiles and Kayama’s soft kisses. Daizō, someday, would no longer mean secrets and lies, but a future.

Someday.
Tonight, though, he was… Echo. He was his chosen hero name. That was what he wanted to be, more than anything else.

*Find your own hero. Find yourself.*

He still wasn’t sure what that meant for him. But he told Yagi that he was going to try, and he meant it, and so he let himself get carried with the crowds past shops and storefronts and arcades and business offices. Every last one he looked at, and every last one he would have passed.

But as he was making his way down a street, he noticed a young woman with bags under her eyes and her hair frayed in an alleyway. There was a door propped wide open for her, open to the back of a homely-looking restaurant, and the woman was picking up box after box—presumably holding new ingredients. There were still whole stacks left behind, and the woman’s knees were shaking.

Midoriya stopped. He wouldn’t have normally. Any other day he would have passed, wishing the woman good luck in his head. But tonight he was going to try something new. Tonight he was trying to clear his head and walk and do something that didn’t make him feel suffocated.

He just… wanted to relieve the weight on his shoulders for once.

He glanced down the streets, waiting for it to be relatively clear before he crossed them. The woman was just coming back for another load when he landed on the sidewalk, and she looked up at him with suspicious eyes.

No, he was no expert at this. He was no hero, not now, and he wasn’t ever planning on becoming one. But he was *trying*, and so he held his hands up as a sign of friendliness, perhaps. “May I help you, ma’am?”

A flash of pain radiated in her eyes. “I’m sorry, but if you came to help in exchange for ingredients, I can’t accept that. And we’re too busy right now to give you any sort of free meal, so I’m afraid—”

“That’s okay,” Midoriya interjected gently. He hadn’t even realized that kids with struggling families would ask for odd jobs in exchange for those kinds of things. “I don’t need anything. I’d just like to help you. You looked like you were struggling a little bit.”
The woman raised a brow, her dark skin shining in the lamppost nearby from sweat. The ugly green apron tied around her front was starting to come undone. She was quiet for a bit before she spoke again. “You’re one of those U.A. kids, aren’t you? From the Sports Festival?”

Midoriya nodded. He still kept his hands up in the air, palms flat where she could see them.

The woman sighed, her shoulders drooping. “Oh, alright.”

Midoriya smiled. She gestured towards a few of the heavier boxes, and he picked them up with ease. He thanked all his old fighting instructors for helping him build what strength he had as he followed her into the restaurant. He placed them where she ordered him to in the back storage room, which, although slightly cluttered, was organized to the best it could be in the limited space.

The woman was rough around the edges, but when the last of the boxes were piled in half an hour later, she huffed sharply and gave him a crooked smile. “Thanks kid,” she said, and he knew she meant it.

She hung up her apron in the corner and patted his shoulder, indicating that their time was over. They both left the way they had come, and she smiled at him again before hobbling off in one direction. He realized, sadly, that she had brought nothing with her. She had no keys, no phone, no anything to bring to work with her and back home.

Midoriya took a deep breath, held it, and released it. As he turned to walk in the opposite direction, he noticed that his feet felt just the slightest bit lighter. And it wasn’t much, but it was something. A small chip in a very, very large picture.

He continued walking. The night was getting colder, and he could see his breath in front of his face. The farther away he got from home, the easier it was to move faster. The easier it was to breathe.

Somewhere along the line, when the trickle of people slowed, and the streets cleared, his body transitioned into a jog. He watched as the city blurred around him, quietly passing by, leaving without saying their goodbyes. Harsh lights from neon signs left his vision blurry and fuzzy, but it passed every time. The air was sharp and cold as he broke into a faster run, and then a sprint, and his chest heaved. His legs pounded across the cement, sending jolts up his legs that were starting to settle into mild throbs.

The space he needed just seemed to grow larger and larger with each step. There was a gaping hole
in his chest as he searched for something—*anything*, really. He pushed himself harder, faster as he continued to run straight forward, and his muscles were straining. He was going to push himself to his limit at this point, and then he’d really be in trouble—

Midoriya stopped in his tracks as he ended up in a corner. He was panting, hair sticking to the back of his neck and forehead. The words on the sign in front of him blurred for a second, and it was too dark to see that well. Blinking rapidly, he squinted his eyes.

One of the signs, old and torn up and about to fall apart, was a warning about illegal dumping. The other, obviously standing the wear of time better than the other—or perhaps it wasn’t as mistreated—said *Dagobah Beach* in thick lettering.

Midoriya was still breathing heavily, but he peered past the entrance and over to the site. He was met with more garbage and waste than sand. The air, tinged with salt and a soft breeze, welcomed him in slowly. Small, soft sounds of the sand shifting seemed to cut through the silence as he walked along it. The waves in the background gently rose and crept up the beach.

His breaths came out in clouds of cold air. A small chill rested underneath his skin.

*I don’t know what I’m doing here.*

Midoriya sighed. He was alone again. He was alone, far from home, and he had no idea what was wrong with him or why he was out in the middle of the night doing who-knows-what in an attempt to relieve the pain in his chest.

He fell back and sat heavily on a broken refrigerator. He put his head in his hands, the lump in his throat back. It made it hard to breathe. Too hard to breathe.

*Find yourself,* he reminded himself shakily. *Find the hero in you. Find your own hero. Find what kind of person you want to be.*

Midoriya released a shaky breath. It was weird, now, to try something of his own accord that didn’t relate to the goals of others. It was weird that he was sitting here, biting his nails, trying to find something that would make him *him*. It was so weird, so out of place and unnatural. It was like trying to find motivation—it was small, and fleeting, and you didn’t know where you were aiming until you hit the jackpot.
Midoriya looked back over his hands. He stared around himself, at all the trash and the clutter and the mess that stretched along the beach. Twisting around, he saw two large storage enclosures for the garbage that clearly made its way onto the beach. It was open, ready for use for anyone who would take it.

Midoriya frowned as he contemplated quietly. And then, standing back up, he pulled off his jacket and tied it around his waist. The breeze was cool against his skin, sending goosebumps up and down his arms.

No quirks. Not Seiya’s and his time travel, not Disaya’s and his heat manipulation, not Maiko’s and her chain conjuring. Not even his own. It didn’t matter how much progress he made. It didn’t matter that he could probably clear this beach in a few weeks with the help of their quirks. It was just him.

Just him, with his bare hands, trying to find out what kind of person he wanted to be. That was all he wanted. He just wanted to find out who he wanted to be without other people telling him. That… wasn’t too much to ask for, right? He just… he was just sick and tired of it. Sick and tired of it all, really.

Midoriya sucked in a deep breath and held it, counting the seconds. It didn’t make the thoughts go away, but it pushed them down so they weren’t as unbearable. Quietly, he let it go and paced in front of one of the piles. He reached forward and placed his hands on a small broken microwave. His hands paused there.

If he moved it, that was that. It was his commitment to try and clear the beach. That would be that.

He swallowed thickly and pulled the microwave free from the rubble. It was heavier than it looked, but not so much that it was unbearable. He balanced it on his thigh before grabbing two broken remotes that were crammed underneath a tarp. The fewer trips he had to make back and forth, the better. Placing them on top of the microwave, he began his short trek to the enclosures. The microwave was dumped inside shortly after, accompanied only by a few scurrying mice and a putrid smell.

His next trip had him carrying large boxes that created small cuts on his elbows. The one after that had him balancing huge tires on his shoulders. And the one after that had him dragging a cabinet with all of its drawers missing. Then he was bent over, picking up a handful of nails one by one, trying to make sure he didn’t cut himself (and failing).

He was sweating, his arms were burning, his legs felt like jelly, and his hands were sore and biting in pain. But it was mindless work, doing this, and he could feel the cavity in his chest ease. It was like
filling a hole with stuffing and hoping it would suffice… but it would have to do, for now.

For now. Until he could do better. Until he could find something else to permanently fill it.

It was mindless work. Had he already said that? He did everything over and over again until he was laying on the sand, the grains in his clothes and his hair and his socks and shoes. He was struggling, and it was so odd to struggle for something he wanted… something he wanted for himself. It was almost cathartic, to the point that he felt a well of disappointment in his chest when the beginnings of sunrise began to light up the sky.

He was sweating, and he was tired, and he was sore. He plopped back down on the refrigerator. His hands ached as he held them limp in his lap.

He watched the sun rise. Stars began their game of hide and seek and slowly disappeared. Reds and pinks and oranges began to light up the horizon, and it was like someone poured paint over a canvas. The water glittered as the tide rolled back, and a few birds began to cry as they looked for an early meal.

He had no idea what he was doing. He was grasping at straws, hoping to hit the gold mine of motivation. If only he could know when he found it—maybe it’d make things easier. Instead, he sat alone on the beach, exhausted.

He hadn’t made much progress. He didn’t know if this was going to lead him to be the person he’d wanted to be. There were too many uncertainties, too many unknown factors.

But tonight meant something. And it was a start. A start that he promised the number one hero, and a start that had been delayed for too long. Everyone had to start somewhere. Midoriya just hoped that this was his starting line.

Midoriya stood up. His legs were shaking. Home sounded like… home again. Like his safe haven. And he really missed it right now. He missed his bed, and Juni, and Kayama.

He turned to leave the beach and return back to their apartment. He left deep footprints behind.

And maybe he would find out in a few weeks that he was going about this the wrong way. But doing these small things… well, he realized he’d much rather help the little people than save the
entire world, hero or no. It was something that made him happy.

Maiko would be disappointed in him. But he thought, just this once, he deserved to chase this happiness.

Just this once.

Chapter End Notes

HAPPY BIRTHDAY RED SPARROW, LUMII (so sorry I got your birthday wrong), TRIFO, AND MONTHERS! And, since we're coming up on it and I know I won't release anything on time, HAPPY EARLY B-DAY SERA! I know that I'm late to the party and I should've gotten this chapter out sooner, but I've been soooo busy. I hope you can forgive me; if it makes you feel better, I missed my birthday too. Lots of love and gifts. <3

I'd also like to apologize if the quality of this chapter's off—I'm still trying to get back into writing. I hope the quantity is enough to excuse my absence. The format has also changed slightly due to the fact that I'm using a different site to write on, so I hope you can ignore the weird jumps or sudden change. :) I did try my best.

I'd also like to apologize that I will most likely not update until after the next few weeks. I am stretched thinner than a wire and it's extremely hard to do anything, lest write a chapter. I have around a 4 or 5 hour exam coming up. Also, responding to your comments may not happen, but I promise you, I'll read them three times over and respond with a smiley face or a heart or something. If you guys have questions I might respond to them in a rushed or clipped manner, and I may not ramble on like I usually do—don't think I'm mad at you or anything, I'm not, it's just for speed purposes. Love you all.

Also, last minute thanks to my beta readers, Platy and Ro (veterans at this point) and Serarris, a new feller (not really they're like a sister to me) who also looked over it. You're all amazing. Thank you for sticking around for my 3 am bs! <3<3<3 All of my love and applause goes to you three amazing people.
I am... doing my best. To be more confident in my writing and to accept that there are indeed a whole lot of people who read this and enjoy it. So I decided to upload without asking anyone to look over it and to not try and let the perfectionist side of me win. So I hope that I'll update more often for the fun of it, and I'll try to make these last few arcs as enjoyable as possible.

I'm sorry to all of you who I didn't reply to! Know that your comments made me smile really hard, but life hit me in the face again—or, rather, my exams did. So it was a little tough, but I got through it. To those still in the middle of exam highs, STUDY and SELF CARE! Take care of yourselves!

Also, here's my tumblr. I have nothing on it and I'm bumbling about the platform so please help me?
Have my discord too!

A small (long) review to get you through the chapter:

- Daizō escaped with the help of a woman named Ray. She warned him that Morrison had managed to replicate Ghost's powers into a group of specially-trained time travelers. (Morrison was the leader of the infamous council that jailed Daizō for contradicting views; this happened shortly after a group of two hundred or so time travelers attacked present!Midoriya's time, lead by a woman named Ahane whose whereabouts the time of the attack were unknown. She exposed the council for corrupt policies, such as experimenting on her own brother for Ghost's powers.) This group has gone back in time, though they aren't sure when exactly they'll land. Kimoto Nana decided to help Ray in Daizō's escape, and now she's joined the trio of time travelers.

- Midoriya has undergone Momnight Love and Appreciation and Fluff. More at eight tonight.
- Midoriya and Kayama both left for Midoriya's old gymnastic teacher's home, where Kayama and Hiroji discussed Midoriya's past and Hiroji's old relationship with Midoriya Hisashi before he became Ignition. Hiroji's daughter, Aika, gave Midoriya her quirk, Faerie Whisperer. He now has two copies of said quirk. (Assuming he goes into the loop, he will pass on one version of that quirk onto his past self, just as Daizō did for him.)

- Midoriya decided to randomly go out in the middle of the night and clean up Dagobah Beach. Don't ask him why—he just wanted to.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Commander Robin was many things, but kind was not one of them.

He watched with cold eyes as Morrison stood in his office. Although he was one of the leading figures of the council, and therefore the Society of Time itself, Commander Robin had no respect for him. At all.

Commander Robin was the head of the militant Departments—the Department of Time Regulation being the biggest one, while the Department of War and the Department of Penal Institution following not far behind in numbers and strength. His influence spread farther than those he had tight control over, spreading to every information-gathering Department that existed as well as the Department of Technological and Scientific Advancement. Those fuckers wouldn’t exist if it wasn’t for his men and women who used and tested their work, and though those departments weren’t technically his, they might as well have been.

Though not as strongly, he also had power and swayed the Departments that were known for being less-than-heroic. Undercover work, assassinations, spies, infiltrations, you named it—those departments also relied heavily on him and his decisions to make their own.

In other words, he was an authoritative bastard and trying to undermine his power was useless. Especially if it was someone like Morrison of all people trying to do so, the bitch.

And Commander Robin was not a fucking moron. He knew that the council was trying to ‘shake stuff up’, which was a nice way of saying that they were goddamn idiots trying to change events in the timeline cause they felt like it. Most likely because they had been sitting on the council for so long that they’d grown bored of doing the same shit over and over again.

So they had probably came to the conclusion that their rule was useless, and that they needed to do something worthwhile. Too bad that none of them had actually been on the front lines of battle,
hadn’t seen first hand what trying to mess with the timeline meant. People, friends, family died when you fucked with time’s natural flow.

But these bitches had never been in battle themselves, and they didn’t know jack shit. Being progressive was all fine and dandy, as long as it didn’t mean fucking with your universe to the point that you could destroy it.

So, for all that he disagreed with some of Kimoto Daizō’s ideas, he could officially say that he was siding with the kid. At least he had enough damn common sense to not fucking mess with shit that shouldn’t be messed with. And for all that the kid grated on him, his position in the Department of Time Travel Regulation was impeccable, and his escape from the cell he was put in was hilarious. Damn, could the kid run.

Oh yes, he managed to snatch that video footage. When he said his influence ran deep, it ran deep. The council had no hope of removing his roots—he was far too ingrained and respected.

Such a shame for those fuckers.

“Alright,” Morrison said, though Commander Robin wasn’t even quite sure what he was agreeing to. He looked like he just sucked on a sour lemon though, so whatever Commander Robin told him before had pissed him off.

The corner of his lips twitched upward faintly before he forced it back down. It didn’t matter how much influence he had or how much he hated most of the council’s guts, they were still technically his superiors.

Technically. Sure, they had technically all the power to fire him and replace him with someone they could puppet around, but good fucking luck if you wanted to try.

“Also,” Morrison started, “have you seen your daughter recently? Ray has missed quite a few… important discussions we must catch her up on.”

Commander Robinson stared him down, eyes boring into him with unadulterated hatred. “No,” he bit out. When Morrison opened his mouth again to speak, Commander Robin cut him off. “Good day, Mister Morrison.”
“Commander—”

“I said —” he spit, “good day, Mister Morrison.”

Morrison’s face soured even further, if that was possible. He frowned before turning away, and he left Commander Robin’s office, slamming the door behind him.

Commander Robin remained standing, shoulders straight and towering at his full height. For a minute, he stayed like that, still as a statue.

Finally, he sat down in his leather chair. He propped his legs on his desk.

“So,” he asked the empty air, “where were we?”

For a second, silence reigned. And then, out from beneath his desk crawled Ray, her eyes hardened and her gaze sharp. She brushed the dust from her new outfit. No longer was she wearing her dress, but instead one of her father’s right-hand man’s uniforms.

“From what I remember, we were planning a coup d’etat,” she said icily. She played with the cuff of her sleeve. “Quick and easy.”

Commander Robin grinned. “Ah,” he said. “Good ol’ rebellion.”

His smile was all sharp teeth.

He crawled in through the window of his bedroom as the day began, sand still buried deep in his pockets and every crevice imaginable. Midoriya’s room seemed softer in the daylight, and unlike the night before, where everything seemed to be closing in on him, he felt like he could live forever in there.

Juni was sitting at the foot of his bed, and he picked her up and placed her on his shoulder. She seemed slightly disgruntled at being moved so early in the morning when she had been resting, but
upon seeing who moved her, she adjusted herself without too many glares.

Midoriya quietly padded across the floor. Bone-deep exhausted settled in as the day officially begun—he was already beginning to regret staying up all night moving trash.

With a glance over his shoulder, he opened his bedroom door, which led out into the hallway. It didn’t look like Kayama was awake yet as her own door was closed, so Midoriya crept his way down to the lower floor. He began to untie his shoes, his nose already crinkling when he noticed the amount of sand in his socks and between his toes.

God, it was everywhere.

He was just setting his shoes down in the front hallway, next to Kayama’s own pair, when he heard someone clear their throat.

Aw—

Midoriya freezed for moment before he glanced behind him, and his stomach dropped down to his feet.

—shit.

Kayama stood there, arms crossed and gaze cold.

“So,” Kayama started, and Midoriya just began to notice the tired rings under her eyes and the way they were puffy and red, “you were gone. All night. And you decide to just…” She waved her hand vaguely, as if that filled in the gaps. She didn’t even sound angry or frustrated, just—disappointed.

It was like a stab to the gut.

“I decided to check up on you last night, and how do you think I reacted when I saw your bed, empty —” Her voice cracked. “—and your window’s wide open, huh? What do you think I’m going to say? ‘Oh, he’s probably fine, just getting some fresh air?’ All night long, I called you, waited for you, asked my friends and colleagues to keep an eye out for you, worked myself up into a frenzy as I
worried about all the ways you could have been *kidnapped, killed, maimed*. I could go on, and on, and on—” Kayama stopped right there and took in a deep breath. She pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed. “Where the *hell* were you.”

Midoriya flinched. “I felt trapped,” he said honestly, because he might as well be. “So I went out. I’ve been trying to… figure things out. So I went to Dagobah beach and… started clearing some of the trash. To clear my head.”

Kayama held her hands together directly in front of her face. “Okay,” she said, though her voice was strained. “Okay. Sure. Whatever. But the *least* you could do was— I dunno, leave me a message so I’d know you’d be gone? Let me *accompany* you so I know you weren’t hurt or attacked? I mean—” Kayama let her hands drop from her face, and she shook her head. “Look, I’m *trying*, okay? I know I’m not perfect, and I’m still trying to figure out this guardian parental thing as much as you are. I understand that. But you still have to think about how *I* feel, Izuku. I don’t know where you *are*, how long you’re going to be gone, why you even left the house, and literally not but a few days ago one of the most feared villains in the country was trying to *kidnap* you, and you expect me to be totally fine with this?”

Midoriya hunched his shoulders, doing his best to be as small as possible as she scolded him. For a second, she didn’t say anything, and she let her shoulders hang. Running a hand through her hair, she went to turn away. “I’ll make breakfast. Clean up, we can talk more about it later, okay?”

Midoriya quietly watched her go, feeling guilt tear at his insides.

He fell asleep early that morning. His body, aching and exhausted, needed a nap, and Midoriya could barely keep his eyes open for much longer.

So he closed his eyes after a long shower and an awkward breakfast, finally free from all the sand and grime and sweat (though not quite so free from the melancholy feeling that surrounded Kayama). For a few minutes his dreams wavered back and forth, flashes of green and blue and red hurting his eyes before it settled onto nothingness.

After a few minutes of floating, part of the white cloud enveloping him solidified. He found himself sitting at the park again, and bright red leaves rolled down the empty sidewalk. Watching them go with tired eyes, he felt dread churn his stomach.
If you get stressed out, you dream about the future. If you feel emotional, you get ‘warped’ to the ‘past.’

“It’s been a while since I’ve seen you,” the man there said. “Emotional day? You look a bit of a wreck.”

Midoriya nodded. “I may or may have not pissed off my new guardian,” he said quietly.

“New guardian huh?” The man—the first One for All user—sighed. “I assume a lot has happened since you’ve last warped here.” His lips quirked upward into a smile. “So how’s everything going with your new friend? Todoroki, was it? Last I heard you bulldozed him with a chain creature and he knocked you unconscious with a firestorm that had you puking blood.”

“Ah,” Midoriya said intelligently. “I guess it really has been a while, hasn’t it? That was all the way back at the Sports Festival.”

“All the way back?” The man’s brow twitched. “Surely it hasn’t been that long, has it? It’s only been but a couple of weeks.”

Midoriya sighed. “If only,” he groaned. “You missed a lot.”

Recounting everything turned out to be a nightmare in disguise, and though the explanation took far too long for Midoriya’s liking, the man beside him nodded along with him.

“What are you supposed to do, when you make someone that’s important to you mad?” Midoriya asked. He wrung his hands in his lap as he awkwardly avoided eye contact. “Kayama’s right, of course, and I was just being dumb, but…” He shrugged. “I just don’t want her to be mad at me anymore. I… I hate it when I see her so disappointed. She’s like a—”

The word got caught in his throat, and for a second, he thought it wouldn’t be able to dislodge it and let it come loose. Finally, though, after what seemed like forever, the word tumbled out of his mouth in a faint whisper.

“… a mother. To me.”
“I find that it helps if you just listen,” the man said. “And it won’t always work. Everyone’s different. Just give them time to work through it.”

Midoriya stared at the man for a long, long while.

“You know kid,” the man said, “this is the last time I’m going to tell you this, but consider opening up to them, okay? You’ve only got one life, and it’s going to be cut short. You should be allowed to enjoy it to its fullest. Instead of worrying about villains when you’re too young to fight them, I mean.” A pause. Much softer, he added, “No one’s going to think any less of you. If anything, I think they’d appreciate it, especially with all the information you know about All for One and his allies. That alone might prevent the inevitable.”

Before Midoriya could talk himself out of it, he laid beside the man, arms folded behind his head. Endless, the white fog burned static images into his eyes even after he closed them tightly.

“Okay,” he said.

They made a deal.

Midoriya wouldn’t go out anymore without someone accompanying him, whether that be a teacher, friend, classmate, or herself. He also had to have his phone on him at all times. Kayama also ushered him into his first therapy session with Nedzu and Hound Dog.

“If you don’t feel safe in your own bedroom, then maybe it’s time you talk to someone about it.”

Midoriya might have put up a bit of resistance before, but now he just nodded. The waves of disappointment rolling off of Kayama were enough to guilt him into doing anything she asked him to. Kayama noticed this, of course, and sighed heavily over her breakfast. She didn’t ask him to do much more than that, mostly because she knew that he wasn’t in the best mindset.
Midoriya made an effort to try and make her feel better. He felt awkward about it, but he tried his best. Though he made sure to give her enough space to breathe and think things through clearly, he did knock their knees together and ran his fingers through her hair when she lied down.

They weren’t not on bad terms, no. But it was definitely more awkward than Midoriya would ever want to admit.

It was later that evening when Kayama abruptly asked him a question he never would have thought she’d ask. It was over dinner, and Midoriya was just taking a sip of water, which promptly caused him to spit take and cough his lungs out.

“Could you bring me to the beach you went to, last night?”

Kayama waited patiently for him to stop coughing. When he did, Midoriya stared at her with wide eyes. “I mean, sure, of course,” he wheezed. “If that’s what you want.”

Kayama nodded silently.

End of conversation. Nothing more, nothing less.

It was around six when they left their apartment—they had eaten an early dinner, and Midoriya wondered if Kayama had done that on purpose—and Midoriya quietly pulled out his phone for directions. He didn’t feel up to taking random twists and turns as he had the night before, and the walk itself was already long enough as it was.

Most of their trek was spent in silence. Midoriya wasn’t surprised, though he had been hoping it wouldn’t have been.

When they arrived at the beach half an hour later, Kayama stared at the scene, her expression still as unreadable as it had been since that morning. “You do realize that you may never clear the beach up fully,” she said, lips pursed.

“I know,” Midoriya replied quietly. He shuffled his feet. “It’s… not really about the clearing of the beach, though. It’s more about the act of doing it for me, I think, so I guess you could say that the journey matters more to me.”
Kayama hummed. A long, drawn out sigh escaped her, and she reached into her pocket. Midoriya stared at her until she threw something at his face. He yelped as he struggled to catch it, and out of the corner of his eyes, he saw her begin to tie her long hair into a ponytail.

He looked down to what was in his hands, and his eyes widened when he noticed that it was a pair of gloves.

“Kayama—”

“Come on,” she interrupted. As she pulled on her own pair of gloves, she jutted her chin in the direction of the trash piles. “Let’s get to work.”

“But—”

“You said it yourself.” Kayama’s eyes were determined and serious in a way that he hadn’t seen it before. “It doesn’t matter if the beach is cleaned or not. It’s act of doing it. So why not let me help?” She placed her hands on her hips. “Going through self-discovery is nice and all, but you have to open up to others. People are here for you, right now, and have been for years. And there’s no use trying to change yourself if you don’t realize that there’s people here, with you, to help you succeed.”

Midoriya stared at her for a long, long moment. She sighed.

“Let’s go,” she repeated, and she gestured to the trash. “One step at a time.”

Midoriya watched her go, and he looked down at his gloves. The fabric was course against his fingers, and he bit his lower lip.

One step at a time.

He slipped the gloves on, getting a feel for how they fit. Swallowing past the thrumming nerves bouncing in his stomach, he followed after Kayama.
“Would you like some tea, Midoriya?”

Midoriya was extremely uncomfortable.

He wasn’t normally so tense, but he was pretty sure that this was a reasonable exception. Nervously glancing around the room, he shoved his trembling hands in between his legs to hide them. Nedzu’s beady eyes weren’t concentrated on him at the moment, as he was busy pouring the two of them a warm cup of tea, but Midoriya knew any second he would be the center of attention again.

He was just a little tired of being center stage, to be honest. He wanted to be back in the shadows, unafraid of everyone’s eyes on him. But it was unrealistic at best and a foolish dream at worst, so he steeled the bundle of nerves in his chest.

Therapy wasn’t anything he considered in-depth. Hiroji had mentioned it several times to him, gently pushing him in said direction—but without any parent in the picture, it had been an unachievable request. It would be highly suspicious if he applied for therapy without any guardian there to explain the situation or sign him up. Not to mention that it would be hard to keep his more… “out of this world” secrets from the public.

So therapy had not been considered. Not really. It had been a glancing thought that he easily brushed aside. There had just been too many cons to balance out the pros.

But now he was here, sitting in the principal’s office—his new therapist, possibly—and he was terrified. Therapy was suddenly much more real than it had been before, and he had no idea what he was supposed to do or how much he was supposed to say. With Ignition’s reveal, he was already hanging on a tightrope. He could tell that some people were getting a little suspicious, Tsukauchi especially. They probably wouldn’t be able to figure out much, and even if they did, connecting the dots would be hard. No one thought about time traveling in equations like this. But the possibility was still there, and he was very nervous.

Not to mention that this was Nedzu. Nedzu was… an interesting character, to say the least. Being comfortable revealing his secrets to him was the last conclusion he’d come to. And he was the principal, and if Midoriya revealed too much, there was no telling what he’d do with that information. With that position of power, he could easily expel him. Midoriya didn’t know if
becoming a burden would put him at that risk.

“You’re quite meek, aren’t you?” Nedzu’s voice was chipper and friendly, and his smile was welcoming. “I can assure you that you don’t have to be so worried. Today’s session will be simple and relaxed, as I will try to make all our sessions. Our first rule here is your pace is my pace. I don’t believe in pushing you unnecessarily.”

Midoriya hid his face in his scarf. Juni was with Kayama, unfortunately. Or maybe fortunately. Nedzu wanted complete privacy, and even though he would love the company, Juni was incredibly smart, and he was scared that she’d understand what he was saying and connect the dots.

“You say unnecessarily,” Midoriya started slowly, breath getting caught in his throat several times, “but does that mean you will push me if you think it’s required?”

Nedzu took a sip of his tea. His nose twitched, and he reached for the cubes of sugar at the center of the table. “It would depend on what I deem necessary,” he replied vaguely. He added two cubs of sugar to his tea, and he stirred it with a tiny spoon with designs engraved in small swirls. “Some things do need a bit of pushing. We will need to get into uncomfortable territory, Midoriya. But I will do my best to make it as painless and as cathartic as possible. And I will also do my best to make sure you won’t dread these sessions. While I don’t think I can guarantee you’ll ever want to go to these of your own volition, the best I can do is make you comfortable and at ease.”

Midoriya bobbed his head. He was still a ticking time bomb of nerves, but Nedzu’s promises were like a light salve. And the principal spoke the truth—not all things came easily, and not without a bit of pushing. It was unavoidable. If he stayed in his comfort zone the entire time, he wouldn’t get anywhere with these sessions. They were supposed to help him get better, not to make him a test subject and break him apart.

He wasn’t a test subject. He was a kid, here. A kid who needed help and was trying to accept it. That was what he was.

He told himself that over and over again as he cleared his throat. His heart was beating hard in his chest, and he definitely wasn’t ready for any of this, but he spoke quietly. “So… where do we start, exactly?” Despite how hard he tried to be louder, only a thin whisper escaped him. It was frustrating.

Nedzu hummed. There was a peculiar look in his eyes. “How about this. For this session, you can ask as many questions as you can about me and what our sessions entail. I think we should come to an agreement as to what we accomplish and how we go about this. Does that sound alright with you?”
Midoriya bit his lower lip and nodded. “S-sure. That sounds fine to me.” He cursed how he stuttered. It’d been a while since he had done it, long since growing comfortable with his surroundings at U.A. But being under the eye of the principal—the person he aimed his journal entries to, he realized with a startled jump—made him more nervous than he’d been in a while.

Nedzu smiled to him kindly. “Start whenever you’re ready, if you’d please.”

Midoriya licked his lips and glanced away, his lips pressed tightly together. “In these sessions… uh, if I say anything that… well, I dunno, would put me in a position to get expelled…”

He had expected a lot of reactions, but Nedzu laughing was not one of them. “Oh, but our dear principal will receive no word of what happens during our sessions. Here I am your therapist, nothing more, nothing less. Principal Nedzu, even if he were to somehow learn of what happened in our sessions, could not use the information to take any action of his own.” Nedzu’s eyes were sparkling.

“The only person I’m legally allowed to contact is your guardian, Midnight, since our contract had been in effect. That was what you requested, and I intend to follow that contract to the letter. If Midnight is not available, Aizawa is next in line, per your instructions, and they would only be contacted should you devolve into dangerous territory. I’m hoping that never happens, and we’ll stick to the “not a word leaves this room” policy. Thus, only I am privy to what happens in this room. Principal Nedzu is not. You could curse him to the depths of hell right here and now, and he could not do anything about it. Not legally, anyway.”

Midoriya blinked. He tried to wrap his head around the mess that was presented to him before he realized, with a jolt, that Nedzu was joking. In his weird, brain-melting kind of way. Because the person in front of him was Principal Nedzu, but at the same time… he wasn’t. The manipulator behind the scenes of UA was not the same as the dog-mouse-thing in front of him. Nedzu’s sharp edges had been softened, slightly, and there was an air in the room that showed that he might have actually cared. For some reason.

Biting his lower lip, Midoriya nodded shyly. Nedzu had practically covered all the ground rules with his small prompting, leaving only questions about the creature himself behind. He wasn’t sure how asking questions about his principal would make him any more comfortable, but really, he wasn’t the expert here. Maybe it helped more than he thought it would.

“You’re the principal of UA,” Midoriya started slowly, knowing full well that he was stating the obvious. That, and he was contradicting Nedzu’s whole “I’m your therapist, not the principal” talk. “Why?”
Nedzu tilted his head. His eyes flashed and clouded over for a moment. “Quite an interesting first question you’ve happened upon, Midoriya.” Nedzu smiled and took a sip of his tea before placing it on the coffee table. “Well, you could say that I wanted to be a hero, much like everyone else in your upcoming generation. But my quirk and looks are, unfortunately, impractical on the field. Most of my more… efficient plans would only suffice in situations where collateral damage is an ignorable defense. I would do much better as a support hero, but while my expertise could follow through in mechanics and designing, it’s never truly been my cup of tea. Going undercover would also be futile, given my looks. I would be too easily recognized from my animal-like features, and while I do possess the talent to manipulate and trick others, it’s much too hard to do it as an undercover agent.”

Nedzu’s smile seemed a lot more threatening now, and Midoriya gulped when he realized that his manipulation tactics might be used on him, too.

Nedzu sighed, the soft tone of his voice almost playful as he spoke up again. “Quite frankly, the only other position I could find myself was in the police force, and, sorry to say, I don’t have any intention of sullying my hands with them. Heroes might be seen to the critical eye as figureheads more than real problem-solvers while the government and the police solve backstage issues, but I find myself disagreeing. Every day the heroes are burdened more and more with the police’s work. They’re almost unsustaining at this point, except for the fact that their large numbers come in handy when it comes to the pettiest of things like distractions or locating missing persons. And even then heroes are coming more in handy in solving cases with so many of them coming out each year.”

Nedzu let out a small ‘ah’ sound as he waved his hand up and down. “But my bad. Quite a bad habit it is of mine to rant, is it not? To put it simply, I wanted to go into heroics, couldn’t, and had considered revolutionizing the face of the police force myself. But that’d be too easy, and it’s more of a pet project than anything else. Now that I have the title of UA’s principal, executing said power is easy as a wave of a hand. While the police force is prejudiced and it would take me years to rise into power, UA and the face of heroes was much more welcoming. The position was easy to acquire, and now I can raise groups of aspiring heroes and put them out into the world where they can do good. It’s not as amazing or as heart-racing as saving people myself, but it’s enough for me.” The smile on Nedzu’s face seemed less forced as he ran the edge of his finger (paw?) along the lip of his cup. There was an inkling of truth in his eyes, and a small sense of fondness. “Despite popular opinion, I do actually quite like our youths. I find their inspirations and dreams a joy to watch.”

Midoriya was quiet for a while. He absorbed all the information handed to him on a silver platter for later. He knew quite well that Nedzu was never this open to anyone else, not even All Might—someone he considered to be his trustworthy friend—and yet, here they were, Nedzu spilling out all his truths without much prodding.

A warmth fluttered in his heart, even though his stomach churned nervously. Nedzu was doing all of this for him, just so he could be comfortable.
Midoriya picked up his own tea, which was beginning to cool enough to drink. He took a large sip, gears turning in his head. “So you like power,” he finally said, hesitant to make any assumptions or theories. It had been a while since his analyzations had come to test, and he was too rusty to be comfortable conversing about them.

“How has a very negative connotation, I find,” Nedzu said airily. “People use it synonymously with controlling and suppressing. I find it a useful tool to use when bettering my school and my students’ future, as well as society’s—though, with such a large scale as that, it is quite difficult to pull anything off without getting unnecessary backlash.”

Again, Nedzu was handing his reasonings on a silver platter, but…

*What’s hidden underneath the lid?*

Nedzu was reaching for his tea when Midoriya asked his next question, so deep in trying to figure out the person in front of him that he forgot why he was there. “Do you really like power because it puts you ahead of everyone else, or do you like it because it puts you in a position of greater safety?”

It was the tiniest flicker in Nedzu’s movement that alerted Izuku that he was on the right track, a small pause, before he picked the cup up and held it to his mouth. “Greater safety? If anything I find that it’s quite the opposite. News outlets will use anything I do against my image and UA, even if it’s a simple mistake or a situation with lesser evils as results and no good news. Mistakes are sins. Failures are career-ending. Safety is nothing when you have plenty of people out to get you.”

“But at least as the principal you have people who look up to you or are forced to obey your orders,” Midoriya pointed out. “You have a circle of people you can trust. You have an even bigger circle that will make sure that no human could ever hurt you.” Midoriya’s eyes trailed over to Nedzu’s scar. “That’s why you want power. So you can show the world that animals aren’t objects, but more because you want the promise of safety. You want to know that no humans can touch you. Even if you’re threatened, you’re in a position of power that is irreplaceable. You can’t be hurt again.”

There was a moment of silence between them as Nedzu took a sip of his tea. The word again hung in the air quietly.

Without prodding from Nedzu, Midoriya ignored the burning at the back of his throat and asked another question. His voice was thin and tight and small again, dread pooling in his gut.
“Where did you get your scar from, sir?”

Nedzu was quiet for a moment. Midoriya was worried for a second that he overstepped his boundaries—maybe that was too personal for him to respond, or maybe he himself had his own troubles and Midoriya was just being too ungrateful to get the sessions he needed and walk away with zipped lips and—

There was a small thunking sound as Nedzu placed his teacup on the table again. “How about this,” he said quietly, and his voice was much more serious than it had been before. “We’ll do a bit of a trade-off, hm? If I answer that question, you have to answer mine.”

A lump welled in Midoriya’s throat. If Nedzu’s question was broad enough, he would be spilling a lot of things that would make him very, very uncomfortable for their first session. But, at the same time…

He was curious. And maybe curiosity killed the cat, but Nedzu was an interesting character, someone he had known for who knew how long. Since he was five and under Maiko’s care she had been teaching him all about this creature in front of him. It wasn’t much, and they didn’t know a lot about the elusive figure as most of his existence was wiped away when All for One came to power, but they couldn’t hide all of the remnants of his influence.

So sue him if he wanted answers for the first time in who knew long. But it was either tell him things like this without any sort of satisfaction or bribe—yes, Nedzu, he was seeing right through you—or spill everything without any sort of repayment. And that was too intimidating for him right now. He couldn’t even imagine having to say everything with nothing other than a prompt ‘What happened to you?’

“Okay,” Midoriya said slowly. “What do you want to know?”

Nedzu smiled. “If you tell me how you got the scar on your neck, I’ll tell you how I got mine. Simple as that.”

_The scar on my neck?_ Midoriya’s hands immediately rushed to the area of the injury where scarred tissue bulged almost uncomfortably. Old bumps and thick patches of rough, jagged skin comparable to sandpaper could be felt underneath his fingertips, though the nerves were long since shot and he couldn’t feel anything. The burn was hidden beneath his scarf, hidden in plain sight, but it didn’t make it any easier to know that Nedzu could see it. A part of him wanted to wrap his scarf tightly.
around his neck, but he stopped himself. His hand remained protectively hovering over his scar.

For a second, he wondered if it would be okay if he could reject the offer. But his gut told him not to, no matter how much he wanted to. Kayama would probably be upset with him, he reasoned, if he didn’t even try to make an effort to open up.

And anyway, the burn happened so long ago. He was barely five, and his biological mother was so faded from his memories that he didn’t even know her anymore. He was pretty sure she had orange hair and dark eyes, but her face was always blurry, as was his biological dad’s. He couldn’t bring himself to even find any sort of emotional connection with them. They simply were, there in his life but not really. Even Maiko, his aunt, had been a better figure than the two of them, and that was seriously saying something considering the fact that she put him through hell twice over.

Ungluing his tongue from the roof of his mouth, he swallowed thickly. Nerves burned hot in his stomach, but he cleared his throat and managed to speak. Slowly, he started talking.

It started with a very, very quiet, “My mother. My biological mother happened.”

Even long after the session was over, Midoriya wasn’t sure where it ended.

Aizawa stared at the files in his hand.

Quite frankly, he wasn’t looking forward to his shortened break’s ending. No thanks to a few certain students of his, his vacation—which was supposed to last about two weeks—was now cut short. And now he had a several-hours long interrogation of one of his students, which was transcribed and handed to him, to worry about.

Everyone was heading back to school in about three days, and to be quite frank, Aizawa knew that his sleep schedule would be whacked. Sleep would not come easy for him, especially because he thought he could allow himself to become nocturnal for a little bit before moving back to his students’ schedule. But nope, Todoroki, Iida, and Midoriya—as well as Shinsou of all people—had gotten themselves into trouble with a villain who was widely feared but believed to have finally gone to rest for good.

Ignition. Midoriya Hisashi.
When Aizawa had delved into Midoriya’s records after the USJ incident, he had been concerned about the obvious lack of a parental figure in his life. On top of that, Midoriya’s actions were starting to become a serious worry. His outright refusal to use his quirk, even risking the chance of being expelled—he had tied for last place in the Quirk Apprehension test at the beginning of the year because he didn’t use it—was alone worrying. Kids who wanted to be heroes did not completely ignore their quirks. Even Todoroki used at least one side of his, although the lack of development in his left side was also concerning.

And then there was just the total oddity of his character. Aizawa had met quite a few kids with interesting personalities, for sure, and he’s seen a wide variety of characters. But the way Midoriya had just held himself, and how little he seemed to worry about his permanent injury after the Nomu landed a punch to his side was terrifying for him. It was self destructive, a total lack of care of his own health, and if that wasn’t raising red flags about the kid then Aizawa didn’t know what would.

So he did his research and delved deep (even getting a warrant from the police and investigating the kid’s house) and found that Midoriya was living by himself. His mother and father were both out of the picture, and he was taking care of himself. Always by himself.

Now they knew that Hisashi, his ‘adoptive’ father, was a supervillain and someone that quite frankly no one was willing to fight. No one except Endeavor, and that left an entire block and a half burnt to the ground and entirely in ashes. They also knew that his ‘adoptive’ mother, Inko, was now a hero and had left Midoriya with Hisashi for several years. And that was chilling. The only two who would have any idea of what happened in those years would be Hisashi and Midoriya himself, and they were missing the former and the latter undermined his problems.

Though the two were considered his legal parents at the time, Midoriya was very much not related to them. Not biologically, anyway. The only thing that Aizawa knew of the boy’s biological family was that he was related to a villain—a grandparent or an uncle, as Nedzu had suggested. Aizawa couldn’t remember which.

Something about that villain being related to All Might’s injury, and being incredibly dangerous. Just a little bit of DNA testing blew the curtains wide open on the fact that Midoriya Izuku wasn’t really who he claimed he was.

On top of that, there were several missing years before Midoriya was taken under Hisashi’s care, as Inko confessed, and they had no idea what happened before that. Inko told Tsukauchi, and Aizawa had been in the room over silently watching, that Hisashi found him in the middle of Brazil and homeless. The knew nothing of where he came from or who he was related to, and he was around nine years of age at the time.
So there were nine years of his life missing from the picture, one villain they knew he was related to, and probably a lot of trauma that built up in those years. And that information when put together was very, very concerning.

But for all that Tsukauchi knew, and for all the information they had, they had more holes than actual material to work with. No one knew for sure what happened. Only guesses and speculations could be made about Midoriya’s past, and without concrete evidence, they were going headfirst into the catacombs without light.

Aizawa knew it wasn’t much of his business, and quite frankly, Midoriya’s past might not mean much at all to their future. But there was still something nagging at him.

During the Stain incident, Midoriya knew exactly where Iida was and led Todoroki and himself right to him. And for all that Tsukauchi made a big deal of it during his interrogation of Midoriya, the detective had failed to recognize that Midoriya did that exact same thing once before.

U.A.’s entrance exams.

Uraraka had been nearly crushed underneath the zero pointer, and Midoriya had immediately come to her rescue just in time, carrying her away from the rubble and egging on Bakugo to blow the pointer’s face off.

How odd it was that Midoriya—approximately thirty-seven seconds before the zero pointer even reached Uraraka—stood up from defeating a robot, gaze haunted and fear resting heavily on his brow. How odd it was that Midoriya, thirty-seven seconds before he reached Uraraka, suddenly ran away from his position in the field to her location.

Once was a coincidence. A coincidence that rubbed Aizawa the wrong way, but something he could drop. Twice, though?

Twice meant investigating. And screw what his peers thought of him, because Aizawa was going to figure his student out—preferably before something very, very bad happened.

Aizawa sighed and dropped several of the files in his hand on the coffee table in his living room. He collapsed onto the armchair across from the table, hand already reached out for the cat that he knew was going to bother him for the next half hour.
“It’s about Midoriya, isn’t it?”

Aizawa looked up to see his pseudo-son sitting on the couch, a book open in his lap. He was still wearing bandages around his shoulder and upper arm, and Aizawa winced at how obvious Shinsou was in avoiding putting weight on it.

“That’s not really your business,” Aizawa replied.

Shinsou’s lips quirked up slightly as he exhaled sharply through his nose. “Maybe not,” he admitted. “But you know…” He tilted his head and gave him a cat-like smirk. “I could help. Just give me the word.”

“I’m not going to tell you to spy on your friend.”

“No,” Shinsou said. “Consider it a… scheduled report. So you get to know your student better.”

Silence. One of their cats jumped into Aizawa’s lap, purring loudly.

“You didn’t hear it from me.”

“No,” Shinsou agreed. “I didn’t.” He turned back to his book, his smile still firmly held in place. “And you didn’t hear it from me, either.”

"Kimoto Daizō, this is Ray."

Daizō practically jumped out of his skin when the voice crackled to life from the comm placed firmly in his ear. He immediately ordered Asagiri and Ghost to quit fighting and placed a finger on the device.

"Ray? How are you contacting me? I thought—"
"That I was going to be arrested by the council for disobeying direct orders and helping you escape? Well, sure, they're searching for me right now. But I have my father to cover my tracks, and since more people look up to Commander Robin than the council itself, I've managed to get into contact with you and several others with the pull of a couple strings. That, or Commander terrifies the shit out of everyone."

"You're Commander Robin's daughter?" Daizō asked faintly. "Of course he terrifies the shit out of everyone, have you seen my boss?"

An unimpressed grunt. "So everyone's said. Anyway, that's not the point of why I'm contacting you. I have follow-up information about the time travelers coming your way. There's around twelve or so of them. All of them are ticking time bombs, and not to be trusted. Ghost's powers practically ripped them apart. Morrison picked them specifically because they're lunatics and will do anything he asks of them. They were promised leading roles in the council in their quest for 'spreading influence.' Be warned that they have no feelings. Their powers messed with their heads, and they're about as bad as Morrison is. Got it?"

"Got it," he said meekly. He saw Asagiri raising her eyebrow from the corner of his eye.

"Good. They'll be landing in around five or five weeks. In the meantime, Commander Robin and I are staging a coup d'état. Your colleagues in the Department of Time Travel Regulation didn't need much convincing when we showed them your imprisonment. Your escape also drew quite a bit of suspicion and attention, so thanks for that."

Daizō opened his mouth to respond, but she powered through before he could say anything.

"In those four or five weeks before they arrive, we're going to take control. Make sure you're prepared to fight the twelve of them. You may have to intervene, even in public or with an audience from the past you're in."

"You're well aware that that could very easily cause our timeline to implode? This time period, up until All for One’s capture, is incredibly sensitive. One wrong move and everything’s gone. I can’t just say yes to that, not when it’s my job to protect it."

"Well, Kimoto, you won’t have a timeline to protect if these time travelers take Midoriya Izuku, hm?"
“They wouldn’t.”

“They would, Kimoto. The council’s desperate for answers. They’ve spent the last decades with their thumbs up their asses and now they’re experiencing a slap to the face as they’re realizing that they haven’t done jack shit. They’re farces, just puppets meant to look pretty and make sure that the society is scrubbed clean and is orderly. They don’t have power, and they’ve realized it, and now they want to show that they can do something. It’s going to destroy us all, but they can’t see it. They’re shells, Kimoto. They’ve lost all hope.”

Daizō ran a hand down his face, jaw clenched. He took in a deep breath and held it before releasing it slowly. “Okay. Alright. What do you need me to do?”

“Well, by the time the time travelers arrive, we should have everything set up back here. It’ll be a rough transition, but it’s not going to break us in the long run, hopefully. We just need you to get those time travelers and drag them back here. You still have those teleporters in your suits, right? And if we took them off you when you got kidnapped, use the ones on your friends. You should have enough. Knock them out for us and use the teleport disks on them, and they’ll be transported—”

“By force,” Daizō muttered under his breath.

“—back to the time reality. We can handle them from here. And no, we’re not going to kill or torture them, I know you’re a huge advocate against that, and so is my father and I. We don’t resort to killing, maiming, nor harming others. We’re just going to put them in a mental health ward so they might actually recover from the brink of whatever it is they’re on now.”

“And why should I help you?” Daizō shifted as he glanced over to his three companions, who were starting to grow impatiently curious—especially Asagiri. A moment of silence followed his question.

“How about this. I’ll release all the prisoners who you were with. The two hundred that assumed that you and the rest of the council were corrupt and attacked your sphere. On top of that, Commander Robin and I will implement all the democratic policies you could want. Thirdly, we’ll jump on all the corruption that’s spread throughout the society and timeline as time has passed.”

Daizō’s brow furrowed. “That’s great and all, but—”

“And we’ll let you and Midoriya Izuku, as well as all your close buddies leave permanently.” Daizō’s mouth clamped shut. “You wouldn’t have to serve the society or clock in any more hours for
the time reality. You’d be given full permission to retire for good and spend your full life with your
friends and family back at U.A. and continue your aim towards being a hero. We would not contact
you, speak with you, nor ask you for anything else. The loop in which you go back to protect
Midoriya Izuku and make sure that he is untouched by any rampant time travelers would be broken
for good, since this loop has gone such to shit anyway. We would instead send trained professionals
to keep him safe. Every future version of him and you would be registered and given protocol
technology as everyone else, but they would not be involved. You could escape us entirely.”

Daizō stared off somewhere far, far into the distance. For a second, he could imagine sitting with
Todoroki and Sero and Hagakure, watching TV and eating cupcakes that Satou had baked for them,
just as they always had done every other friday for the past year.

“Just like that?” Daizō whispered.

“Just like that.”

“And what happens to us? You spoke the truth. The loop has gone to hell, and we’ll technically be
erased and rewritten as soon as we go back to our timeline. Since all the events recently have
changed the present, I mean.”

“We’ll record your history and make sure that nothing happens like that again.”

“... Midoriya might not live,” Daizō confessed. “The timeline’s gone so differently since those two
hundred time travelers dropped by to say hello. He might not make it. Not like my timeline’s version
of Midoriya did. There’s a chance that everything will change. Inevitably.”

“I am quite aware of this. In fact, I think you’d like to know about that time traveler who
disappeared during their unified attack. The one they couldn’t locate. Ahane, she was called, the one
whose brother the council experimented on? Well I did a bit of digging, and I managed to pull some
strings and get her to confess. She told me she spoke to All for One and outing Midoriya’s past self.”
Daizō felt something cold pour down his back, something akin to ice water.

“So yes, I’m aware your past self and Midoriya’s past self might be entirely fucked. But that’s why
I’m asking you, one last time, to stop it from getting worse. To help us let time heal. To stop another
fuckup before it happens. So maybe, just maybe, we might be able to stop both All for One from
taking over and from the timeline imploding. Does that sound like a fair deal to you? Or do I need to
pull out more to convince you?”
Daizō swallowed thickly. “No,” he said quietly. “No, that’s enough. I’ll do what I can to take them down. And to return them to you.”

“Good. Oh, and Kimoto?”

“Yeah?”

“You should have just told everyone that you were Midoriya. It would have saved everyone a hell lot of trouble.”

His comm poured static into his ears as the call ended, and Daizō shut the device off.

From beside him, Nana smiled. “Oh, did the nice lady talk to you about the time bombs?”

“Time bombs?” Asagiri screeched. “What the hell do you mean time bombs?”

Nana bounced on the balls of her feet. “Well, you see, Morrison hired these really, really bad guys to get Ghost’s powers and to come back here to capture Izuku. ‘Cause they think that Izuku will be able to prove a point if they use him as a front to sway all the time travelers in the time society, and also to answer all their questions since he was one of the first time travelers. But the only one who can handle Ghost’s powers is Ghost. Even though they managed to locate some of his DNA from all the files he’s touched in the time society—all the more reason not to do paperwork!—and warped theirs, their bodies still can’t handle it! So even though they can touch people from the past and be seen without causing the timeline to implode, they might self-destruct and go kaboom!” She held her arms wide over her head, grin wide on her face as she closed her eyes. Pink flushed her cheeks.

“... How the hell do you know all of this, kid?”

Nana held two hands over her mouth and giggled. “What do you mean? I know everything, Auntie Maiko.”

Asagiri sighed and rubbed her forehead. “So these people might ‘explode’ and cause problems for the timeline if we don’t deal with them?”
“A glitch,” the unusually quiet Ghost corrected. “Their powers might collapse within itself like a black hole and fracture the timeline, causing huge problems for the film of reality that’s keeping it all together. So yes, they could do a lot of damage.”

“So we need to take them down!” Nana said, waving her arms up and down. “And dismantle them back at the time society, since Ray and her dad are going to take over and fix things. There’s only twelve of them, so we can take ‘em!”

“Ray and her dad taking over? Since when? And can they even pull it off?” Asagiri’s frown deepened. “And that’s twelve people with Ghost’s powers,” she reminded, crossing her arms. “It’s not that simple. Ghost is a fucking monster to fight—imagine twelve miniature versions of him.”

“Well, for one, Ray and Commander Robin probably have a huge chance, seeing how much power the latter has. And I guess that’s true,” Daizō admitted, “but these guys are limited in how they use their Ghost-like powers. They probably barely scratch the surface of his full potential. Plus, they only have their time travel quirks, right? Asagiri, you have your wide array of quirks from your Contaminate. Ghost is practically unkillable with his glitchy time manipulation powers, longevity, and fire. And Nana…”

“I’m a god.”

“Yeah, that. I don’t even know how she’s here, since she doesn’t have time-related powers.”

Nana smiled up at him. It was empty. “That’s my secret for me to keep and for you to never know.”

“Gotch’a,” Daizō said, frantically nodding. He held his hands up in a peace offering. “So considering all of that, it may not be impossible. If the four of us work together, we could probably take them all out—”

“Count me out.”

The words were spoken harshly and abruptly, and Daizō flinched at how cutting they were. He glanced to the side, past Nana and Asagiri, to see Ghost frowning.

“Ghost—”
“I’m sorry,” he interjected, and he crossed his arms tightly over his chest. “But I’m not doing it. I’ve spent over eight hundred years of my life playing sides, back and forth, thrice over, and I’m not doing it again. I’m not going to fight for Ray, or for her ideals, nor will I fight for the council. I’m not going to do good versus bad, heroes vs villains. There are too many stories and exceptions in the system and I’m not going through that again. I’m not going to simply tell myself that the opposite side of your ideals are all pure evil.”

Ghost let out a shuddering breath. “I agreed to help prevent those two hundred time travelers from causing any damage because that seemed obvious that it would hurt the timeline. When you asked me to help watch over your past self, it was because I wanted to preserve the timeline. I stand by the timeline’s natural flow, and that more than anything else guides me. I will not stand by you just for your fights. I will not fight them just because you’re trying to do good. That’s not why I’m here.”

“Ghost—”

“No, Daizō, you need to listen to me.”

Daizō huffed. “No, you need to listen to me. I’m not fighting these people because of my ideals. I did it for a very selfish reason, actually, if you’d let me—”

“I don’t care,” Ghost shot back. “Those time travelers, those stupid ticking time bombs that Morrison hired, shouldn’t and won’t be taken down by me. Granted, they’re dangerous. I get that. I said it myself, they’re practically black holes. But do you think attacking them is going to help that? If anything, it’d put us all at bigger risk of them self-destructing by putting pressure on them. Do you think I’m going to risk that? Especially since, now that they have a version of my powers, they may very well take the past you without trouble? Who am I to stop them?”

A gasp from behind them. “Ghost,” Asagiri growled, “you don’t mean that.”

“I do,” Ghost snapped back. “I care about Daizō more than anyone else, but if you put any more risk on damaging the timeline, I won’t hesitate to stop you.”

“But what happens after?” Daizō replied. “Sure, they can feasibly touch past me without problems. But what happens when little Midoriya goes missing from the timeline? What happens here? What happens when there are reinforcements out in the world? What happens when U.A. tries to retaliate? What happens when everything changes?”
A hush fell over all of them, and Daizō pressed forward.

“The timeline is inevitably going to be damaged if past me is removed from the picture,” Daizō continued, his voice growing softer. “They’re landing four or five weeks from now, Ghost. That’s when the summer training camp at U.A. starts. That’s when All for One makes his appearance. He needs to be there more than ever. At least if we stop those time bombs from taking him, we can have a chance of everything running smoothly.”

Ghost frowned. “And what happens then? Ray and Commander Robin take over the time society, rip those time travelers apart, and then move on with their control? How are we supposed to deal with them then?”

Daizō sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose. “That’s what I was trying to tell you. First of all, Commander’s conservative as a nineteenth century brick. The timeline would be safe under him. Second of all, none of us have to worry about shit after this.”

It took a second, but an array of emotions flashed across Ghost’s face.

“... What?”

“Ray promised me that we’d all be given an out after this one last fight,” Daizō said quietly. “So we don’t have to worry about it anymore. No more threats. No more contact. We can go back to our time and relax and spend time with our family and friends without worrying. They’re going to alter the loop too, so our past selves never have to worry about the society again. No more. We’ll be rewritten and we won’t ever remember it. It’ll be like it never happened.”

Ghost’s brow furrowed. “Except I’ll remember it.”

“Except you will,” Daizō agreed. He always remembered what happened, in every loop and every change and every timeline. “But you won’t ever have to concern yourself with them again. You can go back to free roaming as you please. The society will change, certainly, but they’ll keep the timeline free. You know they will, you’ve seen Commander Robin.”

Ghost’s face remained blank for a long, long while. He turned and shoved his hands deep in his pockets. “So that’s what you meant when you said that you were doing it for selfish reasons.” He sighed. “Sounds like a pretty damn good one, too.”
Daizō bit his lower lip. “The society of time has never been my concern. Not totally. I’ve always been more worried about U.A. and my time’s Japan and all of the people needing saving there. I was only dragged into this because the society of time threatened that my people’s wellbeing would plummet through the ground if I didn’t make sure through the society that everything was kept in order. I was used, Ghost. I don’t plan on it again. I’m getting out so I can protect the people I care about.”

Ghost was silent for a long, long while.

“This is the last battle for them, you said? And you mean it?” Ghost’s expression was taut with tense emotion.

“Yes,” Daizō replied. He heard shifting behind them, and he could imagine Asagiri and Nana quietly moving around him.

Ghost took in a deep breath. Held it. Let it go very, very slowly.

Pursing his lips, he held his hand out. “Fine,” he said sharply. “One last fight together, Daizō. And then we’re done.”

Daizō took the outstretched hand in his own. “And then we’re done,” he echoed.

Ghost’s lips quirked up into a smile. “Good. I can’t wait to be done with your ass.” He held his arms up to the sky and stretched them, sighing in relief at how his spine popped. “Now come on, dumbasses, let’s spend the last four or five weeks of your life enjoying yourself. You’re gonna be rewritten as soon as you head back, so be prepared.”

Asagiri groaned and rolled her eyes. “You’re such a damn pushover whenever you argue with Daizō. Like damn, it would’ve taken me about another half an hour.” Holding her hand over her mouth, Daizō watched as she yawned into her palm. Her eyes watered as she did. “Anyway, did someone say enjoying ourselves? Cause I’ve been looking at that caramel latte at that coffee shop down the block, and it’s now calling my name.”

Nana skipped down the alleyway, passing to the front of the group. Her giggles tinkled, bouncing in the air and floating away.
Midoriya was dreading the moment he walked back into the dorms, and for good reason, it seemed. The moment he walked through the door, Kayama following shortly behind him with his bags in her hands, he was met with a giant mess of conversation and yelling.

“—ude, I mean, my internship was awesome but that doesn’t matter! Are you alright? We saw the news—”

“Kaminari, as I stated previously, we’re quite okay. We just need to recover—”

“But I’m confused. Why would Ignition of all people attack you? I mean, he’s so high-ranked. Why risk everything on attacking a bunch of high schoolers?”

“High schoolers who are aiming to become heroes, you morons! Of course he’d attack the upcoming generation before they’re strong enough to become a nuisance to him, why fucking else!?”

“Okay Bakubro, we get it, but—”

“Zuku!”

The next thing Midoriya knew, slender arms were wrapped tightly around him and swung him around in circles until the world around him spun and he felt like puking. Even after the arms let go of him, he felt like his ribs were crushed and he couldn’t breath.

“Yaochan,” he gasped, “give me a bit of a warning next time, would you?”

Yaoyorozu looked faintly sheepish as she smiled at him. “Sorry, it’s just been ages since I’ve last seen you, and…”

*And then Ignition happened.* The words silently hung in the air.
Midoriya gently smiled up at her and nodded. “Yeah, it’s been… yeah.”

Before Yaoyorozu could respond, strong arms lifted him from behind. Midoriya practically squealed as he was lifted into the air, and if he thought that Yaoyorozu’s hug nearly crushed his ribs, he was dead wrong. He felt like all the air had been physically pushed out of him, and he was left wheezing as the person who hugged him from behind let him go.

“Oh man, sorry dude!” Kirishima’s smile was sharp and bright. He reached forward and gave Midoriya another hug, though this time he was gentler. Midoriya almost fell over as Kirishima put his full weight on him by latching onto his side. “I just missed your manly face, you know?”

“Group hug!” someone announced—Midoriya was pretty sure that that someone was Hagakure—and before he could protest, he was overwhelmed with a large amount of weight and collapsed to the floor. He stared past all the heads and groans and looked up at the ceiling, exhaustion written clear across his face.

“Oof.”

“Todoroki,” Midoriya called out beneath the sea of bodies, “you’re not helping.”

A grunt, and Midoriya felt the weight on top of him increase.

“Am I helping now?”

“No. You just made it worse.”

A snap of a camera could be heard, and Midoriya squirmed slightly so he could tilt his head back. Kayama was holding her phone up, and a smirk was spreading wide across her face.

“You share that, and I’ll hunt you down.”

“Oops. You were a few seconds too late, hun.”
“Mom.”

“Wait wha—?”

“Don’t ‘Mom’ me. That’s your fault for inciting the parental wrath of your classmates.”

“I’m missing something, since when was Kayama Midoriya’s mom? I need answers.”

“I had a feeling… everything makes sense now.”

“Todoroki, no.”

“Todoroki yes.”

Midoriya groaned and started pawing at the chest in front of him—which happened to be Kaminari’s (of course he’d be the first to leap into group hug action). With a huff he attempted to push Kaminari off him, though his muscles still screamed at him from hauling garbage across the beach. To say the least, he made very little progress.

“Okay guys, I love you all but please get off. I can’t breathe.”

“Thank god, neither can I,” Jirou said from somewhere high up. “Todoroki, off.”

“Okay.”

That was how Midoriya found himself shoved in the middle of the couch, crowded on all sides as the interrogation was brought back up. He watched quietly, a bowl of popcorn in his lap and Satou on his left while Ashido took his right. Todoroki and Iida were practically mauled with questions, and back and forth the debate went on. It didn’t stop until Sero made a strangled sound at the back of his throat, and all attention went to him as he pointed at Midoriya.

“Dude, it took me a while to notice what’s different with your face, but I finally figured it out. What’s up with your eyes? Weren’t they green before?”
And yep, fudge, Midoriya had totally forgotten about that. Halfway through chewing a handful of popcorn, all eyes went to him, and he tried to sink into the couch until he couldn’t be seen anymore.

“Uhm,” he said intelligently after swallowing, “yeah. That’s a thing. So… I used to wear colored contacts?” He scratched his cheek and let out an awkward short laugh. His stomach churned unpleasantly in his stomach, and he could feel his heart pounding in his throat. Though he couldn’t be for sure, his eye color—pale, soft orange—could sometimes be a little more intimidating than the green they always saw him in. So he wasn’t sure if it freaked them out or not. “But I wore them for so long and so often that they were really hurting my eyes. So I took them out. I’m sorry, is that weird?”

Kirishima blinked, and for some reason, something akin to relief and awe flashed across his face. “No, you’re valid! I, uh—” He rubbed the back of his head and looked away. “It’s not the same, but I actually dye my hair. So I get the whole changing your appearance thing.”

Midoriya’s jaw dropped, and he leaned past Satou to look at him. “Wait, you do? That’s crazy, I never even thought that anyone here would— I mean, it looks so natural, who does your hair?—”

They got a little bit off track, all things considered. But it helped when Iida and Todoroki both shot him a relieved smile. A lot.

“You wanted us, Zuku?” Yaoyorozu asked quietly as she shut the door behind her.

Iida crossed his arms, brow lowered in concern. “Are you okay? Do you need some assistance, or is there something wrong…?”

Midoriya shook his head. “No, not… exactly. Nothing urgent, anyway. I just wanted to talk to you two about— well, about a lot of things. And I thought you should be privy to them. If you don’t mind me taking your time.”

He awkwardly leaned against his desk, and the two others glanced around his dorm room awkwardly. It was cold and dark, and the flowers in his vase were starting to wilt.
“Are we going to be here for a while?” Yaoyorozu asked. “Because maybe we should all sit down on your bed if that’s the case.”

Midoriya nodded, and Iida and Yaoyorozu glanced worriedly at one another before they complied. The three of them sat in a circle (triangle) shape, all trying to fit on the small bed. Compared to Yaoyorozu’s, it was tiny, and Midoriya could tell that she was uncomfortable.

“So,” Iida started, “what did you want to talk about?”

In the background, they could hear laughing and yelling, and Midoriya winced as he realized that Iida and him left Todoroki out on his own. Midoriya internally wished the boy his well wishes and not to die before he turned his attention back to the other two.

“Well…” Midoriya felt his palms grow sweaty. “First of all, I wanted to ask if I could transfer my position as vice president to you, Iida.”

“Wait, wait, what?” Iida adjusted his glasses, and his eyebrows shot straight up. “That’s not… I mean, I’d be honored to, but why? You’re completing your role as vice president perfectly! You’re perfect for the job, so why…?”

“I have to agree with Iida on this one,” Yaoyorozu said, and she clasped her hands together. “I think you’ve done an excellent job of vice president so far. And why now of all times would you want to change?”

Because I might not be around much longer, a voice whispered in the back of Midoriya’s head. Because I might disappear. Because I need all of my duties to be fulfilled even when I’m gone so there are no holes left. Because I need to make my disappearance as painless as possible, and don’t want anyone to fight for the positions I might have or am doing at the moment.

An excellent reason, but not the only one that caused Midoriya to contemplate it.

“As much as I enjoy the position, I don’t think it’s ever been my cup of tea,” Midoriya admitted. “And now, I’m… trying to figure a few things out. Both about myself and what I’m going to do in the future. About being a hero and what it means to me. I’m not sure where it’ll lead me, but I don’t want it to impact the class itself. I thought about it for a while, and I eventually decided that if anyone had to do it, it had to be Iida.” Midoriya exhaled sharply through his nose. “But only if you don’t do anything as reckless as you did previously and promise to put the class first.”
Iida saluted comically to Midoriya, his expression determined. “Of course, I could never dream about doing anything of the like again! I’ve learned my due lesson, and now know better than to let my emotions get the best of me.”

Yaoyorozu raised a brow. “I’m… missing something here.”

Midoriya nodded. “I know. That’s why I’m going to explain it, if Iida will allow me to.”

Iida blinked, and the chopping movement of his arm slowed. “The police told us not to,” he said slowly.

“Yes, but they also told us that we were better off leaving you dead,” Midoriya shot back. “I don’t want the credit for what happened, and I don’t want the story. But the least I can do is tell my best friend.”

Yaoyorozu glanced between the two of them, eyes wide. “Wha—”

“Fine,” Iida said. Midoriya blinked, surprised that he so easily gave in. “Yaoyorozu deserves to know it anyway, I think. As president, it’s her duty to know what happens among her class.”

“Thank you,” Midoriya murmured. He wiped his palms on his knees. “Yaoyorozu, if you could ‘formally’ give my position to Iida? And then I can explain what happened.”

Yaoyorozu, eyes still wide, nodded and cleared her throat. “I hereby present Midoriya’s resignation and appointment of Iida Tenya as Class 1-A’s new vice president—please remember that it is your duty to take over the president’s duties should she be out and stand forward to help your classmates in time of need.” Yaoyorozu’s cheeks flushed pink. “Uh, improvisation is cool, but I’ll have to actually contact Aizawa-sensei before you’re officially ranked. But thanks for putting me on the spot.”

Midoriya showed her a double thumbs-up. “You did great.”

Iida nodded. “Brilliantly done, my friend! Now, I do believe that I should leave the two of you alone, yes? An overdue conversation might have to take place.”
“Thank you, Iida,” Midoriya said. The boy nodded in return and left the room, closing the door behind him.

Silence.

“So,” Yaoyorozu slowly started. “What’s this about the police not letting you talk about something?”

Midoriya bit his lower lip. Quietly, he adjusted himself so he was laying on his back and patted the spot beside him. Yaoyorozu took the hint and laid parallel to him.

“The news reports didn’t tell the full truth,” he started. “Iida got himself in trouble with Stain. Todoroki and I had to help him… by the time that reinforcements arrived, Iida and Todoroki managed to defeat the vigilante, and I was out for the count. Endeavor and a couple other heroes were there, and we were about to drag Stain back when…” Midoriya trailed off.

“Ignition and his allies arrived, didn’t they?” Yaoyorozu’s eyes were wide, wider than they were before, and Midoriya nodded.

“It happened after one of Shigaraki’s nomus captured me. Stain woke up and killed it, and when he was in the middle of his speech Ignition came up and knocked him out.” Midoriya took in a deep breath, trying to settle the nerves in his gut. “Todoroki told you that Ignition kept on trying to take me in the group chat, remember? Well…” He licked his lips and stared at the ceiling. His hands rested comfortably on his stomach, and he clenched them. “There was a reason for that. There was a reason that… that I didn’t talk about my parents a lot, back when we first met.” Midoriya ignored how Yaoyorozu stiffened by his side. “There was a reason that I was transferred to Midnight’s care.”

Yaoyorozu was silent beside him, and Midoriya pushed through.

“Ignition’s real name is Midoriya Hisashi,” he breathed. “I didn’t… I never told you, not when we were eleven, and never after because I thought you’d leave if you knew. But he was… not my biological father, because he just took me in when I was nine, but he was in charge of taking care of me for a few years before he left and I’m sorry I never told you I just was scared about what you’d do and—”

Lean arms wrapped around his middle, and Midoriya stiffened and cut himself off. Yaoyorozu pressed her forehead into his chest, and her long hair fell around her face and neck. Through the haze
still fueled from anxious fear, Midoriya saw her shoulders shake.

The room was silent, the air heavy and cold. His curtains were drawn, and the quiet rumbling of voices in the background washed away. Something quiet settled over them, pressing down on his chest and making it hard to breathe.

“I-I’m so sorry.” The whisper was full of pain and anguish. Yaoyorozu’s breath hitched, and tears began to make their way down her face. “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, I never even bothered to ask or notice or tell anyone—”

Midoriya rested her palms against her shoulders. “It’s not your fault.”

“I could have done something!” she exploded, and Midoriya flinched as she snapped her head up, her face pink and splotchy. She wiped her eyes, even as her brows furrowed with upset. “I was right there, for four years, and I could have done something! I could have— I could have figured it out. You were right there, and you hinted it to me so many times, and I-I could have told someone and helped you but y-you—”

Midoriya rubbed her back. There was a lot of things he had been expecting to say, a lot of reactions he had prepared for, but this… this wasn’t one of them.

“I wanted to be a hero,” Yaoyorozu croaked. “I wanted to be a hero, and ever since I met you, I-I th-thought I could accomplish that. But y-you were w-with s-someone so awful—” She gasped for breath between sobs. “—and I didn’t even notice. I didn’t tell anyone, I was so stupid and you got hurt because of it—”

Midoriya brought her close to him and wrapped his arms tightly around her. Something wet his chest as she leaned heavily against him, and he rubbed small circles into her back. He rocked the two of them from side to side and rested his cheek on top of her head.

He didn’t know what he was doing. The shaking in his hands showed it, but he tried to shove the panic in his chest down. But for all that he tried his hardest, he still had no idea how to comfort people, no idea how to calm someone down after they worked themselves up, no idea how to make someone feel better.

But damn it if he didn’t try.
He squeezed her tighter, and he leaned down so he could press his forehead against hers.

“I’m better now,” he promised in a faint whisper. An especially loud sob escaped her. “I’m in a better place, now.”

She nodded. Took in a deep breath. She had deep bags under her eyes, and Midoriya realized with a start that she had been stressed to no end these past few weeks. His talk had been the straw that broke the camel’s back. Guilt bloomed in his chest.

“I’m sorry,” he said quietly. He ducked his head.

Yaoyorozu swallowed a sob, and she breathed shakily. Her arms tightened around him as she pressed her face into the top of his head. “I’m sorry too. For a lot of things. I’m… still trying to learn how to be a better hero.”

Midoriya patted her lightly on the back. “It’s okay,” he reassured. “I’m trying to be a better friend, too.”

She smiled. It was pained and full of guilt, but it bloomed and stayed rooted.

There were too many emotions. Too many complicated messes. Too many things that Midoriya didn’t know how to deal with.

One step at a time.

Midoriya breathed, sighed, and fell asleep. Just like that, with the two in each other’s arms.

“I’ve called you all here today in preparation for the exams,” Nedzu stated. A thin smile was present on his face, and his dark, coal-like eyes glittered. “Due to the fact that our upcoming classes have been attacked by villains, I do not think it appropriate to challenge them with robots. That would not sufficiently test their skill levels.”
Yes, Nedzu already had a solution and a plan. He always had one.

In fact, he was pretty sure he already knew who Midoriya would face…

“Kayama?”

The woman’s eyes snapped up to him. She had been unusually quiet and solemn, but a determined glint in her eye reassured Nedzu of what he had planned.

“Yes, sir?” she asked, and she placed her folded hands on the table.

Nedzu’s smile widened. “I hope you’re ready for something very, very demanding. Call it a direct challenge from me.”

Kayama’s eyes flashed with something dark. Her lips twitched upward ever so slightly.

“Of course.” Her blue eyes burned brightly.

“I won’t disappoint.”

The room was quiet except for the heavy breathing of the man in the middle of the room and the whirring of the machines around him that helped keep him alive. The light from his desktops cut through the darkness of the room, and it shone on the interconnecting pipes that snaked their way through the room and up the walls.

On his monitor was a zoomed-in photo of a group of four people. One of them was tiny, and her glowing orange-yellow hair made her stand out even among those with obvious quirked features. The man following behind her had a dark green mask on his face, which failed to hide the dark burns that spread from the bottom of his face and along his arms. A lean woman with blonde hair and hazel eyes trailed behind, holding what looked like a caramel latte in her hands. Beside her was a boy with deep bags under his eyes, with green hair and pale orange eyes.
“What an odd group,” the man at the center murmured. *This is the group keeping Midoriya safe, hm?* “Boy,” he ordered, and the young U.A. student kneeling at the entrance of the room flinched.

“Yes, sir?”

All for One tented his fingers in front of him. “We have one last battle until it’s all over.” The machine beside him beeped lowly as he took in a deep breath. “I hope you know what to do.”

The student was trembling from head to toe, but even so, he managed to nod. “Y-yes sir. Shigaraki told me.”

Another long breath. The monitor flickered.

“Good. Don’t fail me.”

“I-I won’t.”

One of All for One’s fingers flicked upward. He breathed out very, very slowly. “You’re dismissed.”

The boy stumbled out of the room. All for One watched him go.

*One last battle.*

And everything was going according to plan.

“Ah, sorry,” Midoriya bumbled as he started to pack his bag. It was the first day after school was in session, and several of his friends had offered for him to join their study sessions. Since exams were starting to loom ever-closer, that was. “I’m going with Kayama to do a little bit of a work out, if that makes sense.”
Uraraka, who was at the head of their group, grinned up at him. “Of course! Dagobah beach, right? Kayama told us. We thought it would be a good way to multitask, you know? While we cleared the beach, we could gain some physical strength. And Yaoyorozu offered to recite terms and definitions to us while working back and forth so we remembered all the basic stuff. So that way when she tutors us later in-depth, we already know what all the terms are and mean!”

Midoriya blinked at them. “O-oh. Oh yeah, sure then. Of course.”

Kaminari laughed from beside Uraraka. “You should see your face dude. It’s priceless.”

Midoriya just continued to nod.

When Midoriya met with everyone else back at the beach, there were… a lot more of them than he had expected. Ashido, Kaminari, Kirishima, Uraraka, Iida, Yaoyorozu, and Tokoyami were all there. The last one was a bit of a surprise, but maybe he shouldn’t have been so shocked. Tokoyami had always joined them on their group shenanigans.

“Whoa dude, what happened to your neck? Is that new?” Kaminari asked, eyes bright with worry.

Midoriya blinked up at him as he was pulling his gloves on, and he flushed pink. Nedzu told him that he should start showing some of his weaknesses to his friends, if just so he could open up more to them and accept his own weak points. The first suggestion had been to stop wearing his scarf and hiding the scar on his neck, which was nerve-wracking.

“No,” Midoriya stuttered. He avoided the blonde’s eye as he adjusted the strap on his gloves. “It’s actually pretty old. I got it when I was really little.”

Kirishima nodded as he put on his old gloves. “Gotcha. I think we all have our fair share of kiddie scars.” When Kaminari opened his mouth, Kirishima elbowed him in the gut. “Anyway, you ready to beat this beach into the ground?”

Midoriya chuckled and shook his head. “Whatever you say, Kirishima.”

For the several hours that they worked together, all without their quirks, to lug refrigerators across the beach and roll tires along the sand, Yaoyorozu called out algebra and biology terms. Kaminari and Ashido struggled the most with them, but the amount of times they had to answer the same things
over and over again let them remember them solidly by the end of the session.

The sun was setting by the time Kayama called it a day, and all of them were sweating and tired. Midoriya himself—ignoring how sweaty and hot his skin felt—was pulling on the hoodie that Kayama recently bought him when Iida posed the question.

“So Midoriya, how’s Juni?”

Midoriya blinked. “Oh.” He pulled his scarf tightly around his neck. “Fine, actually. She’s doing pretty great.” He picked her up from within her scarf, holding her out on his palm for them to see.

“Random question,” Tokoyami asked, speaking up for the first time since their sessions started. “Is your companion as strong as you say she is? Her quirk is reality alteration, correct?”

Midoriya blinked, and he glanced down at her. She stared back.

“Uhm,” he said, because he didn’t know how on earth he was supposed to respond to that.

She answered it for him. Midoriya released her with a yelp as her body began to swell, and she landed between her feet. With a blink, she began to expand at an alarming rate, and Midoriya cursed as she suddenly lifted him from his feet.

“Oh damn,” he heard Kayama say.

Uraraka squealed as Midoriya’s vision tilted, and a sharp laughter belonging to Kirishima filled his ears. When everything stilled, Midoriya sat up, blinking in quick repetition. He stared down at his friends, which were far below.

“You are so petty,” he murmured to Juni.

“Welp, I think that answers our question,” Kaminari said. “Juni is powerful enough to ride her like a battle horse into war.”
Tokoyami hummed as he crossed his arms. “What a mad banquet of darkness.”

Yaoyorozu held a hand over her eyes. “We should do this more often!” she said. “I didn’t think that dirtying our hands like this would be any good—” Midoriya’s hands traveled to the pristine gloves that she created for the job, which had been promptly ruined. “—but it’s been a lot of fun. And maybe Juni can help us next time!”

Midoriya hummed and looked at Juni. “Nah,” he replied. “She says that she’d rather be carried and doesn’t feel up to doing any work.”

“I think Yaomomo has a point,” Uraraka called. “I thought it was pretty fun too, and it’ll build up muscle for us overtime, right? If that’s okay with you, why don’t we do it tomorrow?”

“Heck yeah!” Ashido jumped up and down in place, arms high in the air. “Please Mido, please please pleeeeeaaaasssee?”

Kayama shrugged, wiping her face with a small hand towel she brought with her. “That’s up to you, kiddos. I’ll do whatever you want me to.”

Kaminari fell to his knees, right in front of Juni. Clasping his hands together, he bowed until forehead reached the sandy dune. “Please, I ask that you grace us all with your presence Midoriya and come with us on our journey to survive the beast that is finals.”

Kirishima followed Kaminari’s movements and collapsed beside him. His spiky hair was starting to come undone from its style, and several strands fell in his face. ”You are our only sword,” Kirishima said. ”Yaoyorozu is our shield, and Iida is our armor, but we have no hope without the sword. The sword, Midoriya,” he begged. ”We need the sword.”

Midoriya laughed. He pulled at his scarf, letting it hang loosely around his neck, and he twisted himself until both his legs rested over Juni’s side. Waving them back and forth, he smiled. “Sure. Why not.”
They didn’t have to ask him to be included. Kayama could bring them to the beach without him. But, he thought…

It was nice. To be wanted.

He grinned mischievously. “Hey husbando, you better catch me.”


(And yes: Iida caught him, like the good husbando he was.)
PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE SUPPORT THE ARTIST WHO CREATED THE ART PIECE IN HERE. Please take a second and stop by their profile, even if it's just to give a like or a follow. Here's their profile. Once again, I struggle with tumblr, so if it's wrong my bad. :O

Last but not least, I'm gonna try shouting out smaller works I find interesting to me that are newer or don't have a lot of support. The one for today is thegardenwitch's i am bulletproof (but i never said i was unbreakable). I found it incredibly thrilling, though it does contain mentions of trauma, child abuse, and there's (I guess what you'd consider) grooming for military purposes of children. Though it does have its really dark moments, it's actually pretty funny and lighthearted in many scenes and I thought I'd rec it, but please do be aware of the tags.

On a more personal note, I am sad to say that Indefinite's updates may not be as frequent as I used to make them. I thought with the stress of exams over I could maybe accomplish weekly updates, but I have... hit an all-time low. To ease a couple of minds that might be whirring, it's not drastic per se, and I don't consider cutting or anything like that, but there's been a lot of crying and fluctuation of my eating habits so it's been a rough week or so. I'm hoping that soon I'll be able to get over it, but it's been hard and I, to be frank, feel like shit. Indefinite's a high-stress work in progress especially because of the huge audience I have and how large it's gotten to be, and I'm just... going to take it easy on my heart a bit. I'll be focusing more on my most recent project, Imaginary, because that's more cathartic and stress-free. And it's fun. I think I'm also going to spend some time doing what I want to do. Maybe color and read some instead of binge/stress write during all my free time. If that makes sense. Hey, I found an old owl coloring book recently, so maybe I'll work on that, yeah?

Anyway, thank each and every one of you guys for being there for me, it's been a blast. I'm doing my very best not to burn out so let's cross our fingers that I can power through till the end and make this worthwhile. Thank you to my discord family as well; for all that you threaten people with knives, you're honestly the sweetest group of people I've ever met and I thank you for that.
Gentle Breeze

Chapter Summary

Unnecessary fluff: otherwise known as the calm before the storm. Thought I'd give y'all a bit of a break, your welcome.

Chapter Notes

me: im gonna take a break from writing this bc its stressing me out
my mind: okay fine but here *hits me with a baseball bat studded with ten ton spikes of pure chaotic inspiration*
me:
my mind:
me: am i a joke to you?
hey weve reached 20 chapters. thats two tens. whatdya know. also, weve reached 50k hits! whatever you want me to do, ill do it. q and a's, special chapter, cracks, one shot, i dont care. lay it all on me.

tumblr
discord

Traitor Theory:
Kaminari: I
Sero: II
Shinsou: II
Mineta: II
Bakugo: II
Kirishima: II
Uraraka: II
Iida: I
Monoma: I
Tokoyami: I
Hagakure: I
Midoriya: I
Ojiro: I

a small review:

so way back when i explained that afo took over the world. unfortunately even in 3000 there were people rebelling against him. maiko asagiri was he head of the revolutionary forces. maiko, as in midoriya's aunt. when daizo (as hes known at that point) was seven he was kidnapped by a raid headed by shigaraki on the revolutionary forces. took him back to his humble abode of a fucking emperor's home and planned on keeping him there for a while. unfortunately for him, maiko took him back a year later via blowing out the windows and snatching him up on her sick motorcycle.
also, afo chopped off izuku's left hand, for some reason. i dont know what was up with me in my past storytelling, so dont give me crap, i dont know what past me was thinking either. but im not gonna ignore it, imma address it. so deal with it.

WARNING: mentions of violence. i mean, i think it's kind of obvious given the fic you're looking at, but just because we've taken a bit of a change of pace recently im gonna give you that warning and i feel like ive been kind of lacking them anyway, so sorry about that. we're also going to be addressing some of izuku’s Mental Health Issues cause it's abysmal. tread carefully please.

Bakugo was just as angry with him as he was before the Stain and Ignition incident.

Although he was ignoring Midoriya for the most part, it didn’t stop the fact that he would level glares at Midoriya every once and a while. Or more accurately: every time they were in one another’s presence, which was often enough for Midoriya to feel increasingly guilty about whatever was spinning around in Bakugo’s head.

Sometimes, when Bakugo would brush past him or when they would lock eyes in the dorms, Midoriya would remember Bakugo’s confession. He would remember the fuzzy image of the dorm’s kitchen and the feeling of Bakugo’s hand on his shoulder, sparking and dangerously warm. He’d remember the pinched look on his face as he yelled at him, “How many of those screams were yours!?”

Midoriya couldn’t look him in the eye. There were a lot of things he needed to do, a lot of things he should apologize and explain to Bakugo, but…

To be honest, he was terrified of him. Terrified of Bakugo’s explosions and his dark crimson eyes and his scowl. He’d let it slip that things were tense between him and Bakugo in his second session with Nedzu, and they walked through it. Talked through things, talked through the confusing mess in his chest. Nedzu told him that he was scared, but that was reasonable and entirely okay to feel. Therapist Nedzu asked Midoriya if he wanted Principal Nedzu to take action and step in to make sure he was safe and to ‘enlighten’ Bakugo, but Midoriya said no. No, they could work things through on their own, and Bakugo was least likely out of anyone to listen to authority or those not close to him… which meant almost no one could talk to him.

Part of him hated that he knew exactly how Bakugo was going to react before he did. He hated that he understood completely, from deep within his gut, why Bakugo spat certain curses and why his eyes would darken with rage whenever one of his classmates made a passing remark. Why his quirk would spark in his palms or why he’d grit his teeth and snarl.
Midoriya didn’t like to dwell on the fact that he was, once upon a time, a lot like the Bakugo that he knew now.

It was a period in his lifetime that lasted about a year before it was weathered down, but it didn’t mean it didn’t happen. There were still moments where it leaked through—the sports festival, specifically his battle with Todoroki, was enough of an indicator for that. Even Stain had pointed out that he had that side of him; it was a side that the vigilante had praised, but it was a side that Midoriya hated.

Some things just struck a nerve with him, and he’d lose his temper. Not in the way that Bakugo would, not exactly. He was better than that, better than he used to be. Todoroki commented on it once, how he was like ice. Ice cold, unreachable, and terrifying.

When Midoriya had gone to buy the drawings of his friends hung up on his dorm room walls—the ones that the vendors were selling at the sports festival as it was coming to a close—all of the drawings made of him were scary, too. Midoriya should have thought about that when he broke from Todoroki’s glacier-like attack with a giant chain creature on fucking fire, but that hadn’t occurred to him in the moment. He had been too pissed at Todoroki for undermining himself and not using everything he had in him.

Which, yes, was totally ironic and hypocritical. He was self aware and that didn’t change his opinion in the slightest.

He shouldn’t have gotten caught up in the moment, though. He knew. He knew he scared the shit out of his classmates and a lot of people and kids, and to be honest, he knew he had acted a lot more like Bakugo than anyone had any right to.

But he couldn’t help it. It was something he hated so much, but it was something ingrained into him so well. No matter how many times he tried to wash it away, it would stick.

So yes, he knew how Bakugo was feeling, at least to a degree, and he knew exactly how he’d react, and he thought he was doing a pretty good job of Not Pissing Him Off More Than Usual. It was a finicky thing, but he was avoiding confrontation like the plague and it was the next best thing he could do.

At the moment, he was sitting back in front of his piano, trying not to think about Bakugo or his behavior and how hard he cringed when Bakugo would blow up. Too close to home. Too familiar to
how he used to act.

Too similar to Maiko.

He tried to ignore it in favor of playing a new song that he’d found and printed off online among many others, though he was attempting his best to free style as well. His hands were sweating and they were cramping for playing for almost half an hour now, but he did his best to ignore it. Yaoyorozu was sitting beside him, leaning with her back against his right side. She was warm and heavy and grounding, and he greatly appreciated the comfort she was unknowingly giving him.

He’d asked everyone in the common room if he was bothering them, and told them multiple times that if he was becoming an annoyance to just ask him to stop, but they didn’t. Ashido was particularly loud in protesting that, and she sat backward on an armchair with her arms sprawled across the back in order to look at him at all times. It was slightly unnerving, having her stare at him like an insect under a microscope, but all things considered, it could be worse.

Satou was making brownies in the other room, which was nice. Midoriya, for all that he tried to stay in shape, could safely say that he was going to accept any and all sweets from Satou. He was a god at baking.

Tokoyami was hovering in the background, his eyes closed and his arms crossed. Midoriya was pretty sure that he enjoyed the music, even if he preferred the chaotic rock music he sometimes blasted in the middle of the night.

Damn bird. Midoriya was still trying to adjust from living all by his lonesome, excluding from Juni. Moving in and living with Kayama had already been a huge change in of itself. Living with nineteen other insane homo sapiens was a disaster waiting to happen.

A good disaster, but a disaster nonetheless.

“Dude, your hands must be ready to fall off,” Kaminari commented. “You’ve been at this for like fifteen minutes straight.”

“Forty-five minutes straight, Kaminari,” Jirou corrected. “You really don’t have any sense of time, do you?”
Kaminari blinked and looked at his watch. He blinked again, and his expression flickered into something confused before it melted away. “Oops,” he said, “my bad.”

Aoyama interjected before Jirou could snap back with a shallow smile and a twirl. His hands landed lightly on Midoriya’s shoulders, which caused him to slip on a couple keys—luckily for him, though, he had gotten used to constant interruption while playing in the past week or so, and he managed to get back on track relatively easily.

“My dear, marvelous friend—”

“Please stop flattering me, Aoyama.”

“—perhaps you out to take care of yourself. As much as your music brings joy to my heart and makes my ears sing, I must confess, your hand must be stiff, is it not? You’ll hurt your wrist at any point now.” Aoyama’s voice was just as over-the-top as it always was, but the actual context of his words threw Midoriya through a loop. That was on fire. And moving one hundred miles per second.

“You know, Tomura collects hands. Guess you could say it’s part of his costume. Why don’t we add yours to the collection? It would go so well with the rest of them, and I’m sure my apprentice would be very, very happy...”

Midoriya’s hand decided to seize up in that moment like the troublesome limb it was. A reminder that, yes, it was still a mess even long after it had been regenerated after being cut clean off, and that yes, his hand was noticeably hard to work with. Enough that Aoyama of all people noticed, which caught him by surprise, at a time he had his guard entirely lowered.

His hand, stiffened to the point of being painful from being reminded of distasteful memories, failed to play the keys he wanted, and the music ended like a car about to crash: in a mess of keys that clanged and mixed produced a sound that could make someone’s ears bleed. A disaster, then. And not a good one.

Yaoyorozu jolted from his side at the exact same time that a very, very loud swear slipped from his mouth.

So much for being better than he used to be.
He leaned forward, placing his elbows on the music shelf. His head was promptly placed between his arms, and he held his hands over the back of his skull. Holding his breath for a second, he stamped down on the nerves that skyrocketed into his chest and into his throat.

Okay, panic attack, he saw you. Didn’t mean he wanted you there, but he saw you creepin’ in through the back door. *Now please leave before you actually touch something in my head and set me off, thanks, appreciate it bud.*

“... Zuku?” The voice was soft, and featherlight fingers pressed into his back.

*This isn’t home,* he remembered. This wasn’t like with Kayama, who’d asked him upright what might set him off. This wasn’t like Kayama who could see him panic the split second it appeared on his face, who quickly jumped in to pull him away from any ledges he was about to fall into. She was much more attuned and trained to notice it than these heroes-in-training. She knew more. She knew that he had trauma. His classmates didn’t.

“Sorry,” he mumbled. “I think I need a minute.”

He abruptly stood up, avoiding everyone else’s gazes. From the corner of his eye, he saw Aoyama’s smile—he was always smiling—but it wasn’t vain, and it looked faintly constipated. Jirou was sitting up, her brows lowered in concern.

He tried not to look at anyone else. He shuffled out of the room, his feet automatically taking him to his room.

He closed the door softly behind him. Quietly, he laid on his bed and stared up at the ceiling.

The flowers in his vase looked fresh. He’d reversed them yesterday, late at night when everyone else had been asleep.

He’d have to change the water later today, he thought timidly.

Nedzu sipped some of his tea carefully. “It’s not unusual, no, to get upset like that,” Nedzu reassured
carefully. “The point is, home is your safe place and that’s where you let your guard down. Unfortunately, that meant that you were unprepared to be reminded of your less-than-merciful memories, and those little things that usually wouldn’t have any effect on you are comparable to a stab to the gut.” Nedzu placed his cup on the table with a small *chink.* “Also, the new environment is probably a high stressor. It’s a difficult change, but I do believe you can make it easier on yourself.”

Midoriya bobbed his head as he tapped the side of his cup. “I just don’t know where to start,” he confessed quietly. His hand was still numb, but he could move it now and it wasn’t twitching like it was before.

“Communication is always a good starting point,” Nedzu replied. “Talk to your classmates. Ask them if they can keep in mind your triggers. Simple actions can lead to simple solutions. It may not fix everything, but it’s an effective place to begin.”

“Triggers?” Midoriya mumbled.

Nedzu tilted his head. “Ah. Never heard of the word before, have you? I guess some people don’t look up certain things about their mental health.”

Midoriya’s face flushed. The most he’d used the internet for was for cat gifs and for school work, so it was safe to say that he lived under a rock.

“Triggers are just a term for things that when read, seen, heard, mentioned, etc. can upset an individual and usually bring up harmful memories that relate to it,” Nedzu explained. “I guess you could say that it ‘triggers’ those memories to arise again or other unwanted feelings, potentially where the name comes from. I never bothered to investigate,” he dismissed.

“Oh,” Midoriya said dumbly. That was… kind of obvious, in retrospect.

“It’s quite alright,” Nedzu soothed, already jumping on his thoughts. “You don’t know what you don’t know. No one told you, and you never thought to look. That’s simply how gathering knowledge works.” Nedzu shrugged it off. “Now then, would you mind explaining to me why you were set off by your classmate?”

Midoriya stiffened. Silence fell over the two of them, and he glanced away from Nedzu’s face.
“... Dangerous territory, I see.” Nedzu’s voice was soft.

“You might have to bribe me for that one,” Midoriya admitted.

“Bribe you?” Nedzu sounded mock offended. “When have I ever bribed you?”

“When you asked about my scar,” Midoriya offered. He took a sip of his tea. It was hot.

Nedzu hummed lightly. “Fair evaluation.”

“I think you mean ‘fair point,’ sir.”

“As if I am going to regress into your informal tongue,” Nedzu said, a hint of amusement in his eyes. “Quite frankly, it horrifies me how you humans speak. The amount of colloquialism you rely on is appalling. I don’t even know how you would address the use of words like ‘yeet’ and ‘freesha vacadoo.’ The articulation. It’s dismal. Your generation’s future is dismal, young man.”

Midoriya snorted into his tea. “You’re very passionate about this.”

“I have my personal thoughts on it, yes,” Nedzu admitted. “But that is a conversation for another time. What kind of bribe might I settle you with?”

Midoriya paused. Nedzu hadn’t ever asked him upright what he wanted. Usually it was Nedzu who threw out the line, and he was always the one who took it. It was easy to get him to fall for it. Midoriya, for all that he was stubborn about a lot of things, let Nedzu guide him the way he intended. He knew that he’d have to pick and choose his battles, and this wasn’t one of the ones that he would fight back.

Quietly, Midoriya set his teacup on the table in front of them. “What do you know about me?”

“That’s a broad question. We could be enjoying one another’s presence for a week if I tried to answer that in full.”
Midoriya’s brow furrowed. “Okay, what do you know about my past?”

Nedzu paused. He took a sip of his tea. His nose twitched. “I know that your quirk is not entirely what you claim it to be, though even if I have my qualms, I do not have concrete evidence. I can confidently assert, however, that your quirk is complex and consistently evolving and adapting to better suit your body. An interesting discovery, if I might add.” Nedzu took another long sip of his tea, and Midoriya clenched his hands in his lap. “I also am aware that at the age of nine, you were summoned into the Midoriya household, where Ignition kept you under watch. I also am led to believe that you are biologically related to a villain, presumably one who is an uncle or grandfather.”

At this, Midoriya froze. He had suspected everything else since his interview with Tsukauchi, but… not that last one.

Midoriya licked his lips. “Villain?”

Nedzu tilted his head knowingly. “… Yes. I do believe I know which one, too.”

“Oh really?” Midoriya said, ignoring how high-pitched he sounded. His voice was strained. “Who?”

“I think we both know the answer to that,” Nedzu replied instead.

Midoriya’s lips thinned. A bluff, perhaps. Maybe it wasn’t a bluff, but it very well could be and he wasn’t going to reveal any information. He ran a thumb over the back of his hand. “Cool,” he said lamely, because he wasn’t sure how else he was supposed to respond to that. “Uh, where were we again?”

“Why your classmate set you off.”

“Oh,” Midoriya said, and he felt something fuzzy and static-y piling up in the back of his head. Something in his stomach squirmed uncomfortably. He felt deeply dissatisfied with Nedzu’s answer all of a sudden. “Uh.”

Nedzu was patient, and he poured him some more tea as he waited. Izuku stared at his cup as it was handed to him. The dark liquid stared right back at him. It was warm in his hands. Faintly, he could see part of his reflection.
Just say it.

Midoriya glanced up. Nedzu was pouring himself his own cup of tea. Steam rose from the surface. Midoriya knew he’d be reaching for cubes of sugar any minute now.

Just say it.

“I had my left hand chopped off when I was seven,” he blurted. Nedzu’s hand froze, but the words, slimy and slick, continued to be pulled out of his mouth and fall onto the table between them in a messy tangle of grief to be stared at in horror. “I— I didn’t mean t-to upset him. I-I just…” He bowed his head and clutched at his pants.
He hadn’t. All for One had been so cruel to him. He’d only come in passing, but when he did he demanded everything from him. He demanded that he be trained, put in his place, be good for Shigaraki. A pet.

He’d gotten angry. He was eight, and it was when he started developing a personality not unlike Bakugo’s. He was dangerous. He was the part of him he didn’t like anymore. He was the part of him that stabbed Shigaraki in the throat while the man was sleeping in desperation, the part of him that detested Shigaraki’s laugh when he healed completely right after. The man had been so amused by the attempt to finally taste freedom since he’d kidnapped him from Maiko and her revolutionary forces, and he hadn’t even punished him. He was the part of him that got so angry with All for One
that when the man required that he’d quirkless spar with him, he snuck a blade into the dojo and nicked the man’s palm.

He’d been so fucking proud of himself that he’d almost cheered, but All for One wasn’t and that was how he found himself beaten half to death and missing a hand. The man had promised he’d regenerate it, and he did. The man always kept his promises. But his left hand didn’t work like it was supposed to, and even eight years later he struggled to use it fully.

(He’d lost a lot of hope, then. He was angry. Anger drove him. Maiko used it when she took him back, especially after Seiya gave up his Time Manipulation quirk to him. He became the new tool to stop U.A.’s Judgement Day. And Maiko beat him into the ground over and over again, and he didn’t get back up because he was determined. He got back up because he was angry. )

Midoriya tried to mouth the words, but he felt his throat constrict. He could barely choke out “He gave m-me a new one” when his words failed. Something deep in his chest lashed out, and his shoulders trembled. He gripped the arms of his chair, trying to keep himself grounded.

Silence.

“Oh dear.”

He left Nedzu’s office with bright red eyes and a swollen tongue. He had a candle in his hands. It was a gift from Nedzu himself. He hadn’t been planning on giving it to him until his birthday, but it apparently helped ease nerves and people slept better with it. Nedzu had gently handed it to him and asked that he try it out starting tonight.

Midoriya nodded. Nedzu asked if he could take the next day off from class, and if he could mention the details vaguely to the other teachers to prevent anything from being said. Cementoss, apparently, was going to go into dissection soon in his class and why it was often used by villains to spread certain messages. Midoriya wanted to say no, but then he thought about the potential dismemberment that might be talked about and he gave a reluctant yes.

He managed to stop sniffling by the time he walked to the dorms. Several of his classmates worriedly stared at him. Kouda tapped on his shoulder when he passed by and handed him a bowl of soba. Izuku took it and shuffled over to the counter where an open seat was. He kept the candle in his lap and started eating slowly.
“Midoriya,” Ojiro started, “are you alright?”

“Yeah, you seem kind of off…” Uraraka added, sharing a worried glance with Iida. “Do you need some support?”

Midoriya shook his head. “I’m good.”

Asui put a finger to her chin. “Are you sure, ribbit?”

Midoriya nodded.

Ashido frowned as she set down her bowl. “Okay dude, but… we’re here for you, you know.”

“Yeah,” he said, and his voice wobbled. “I-I know.”

Shouji hummed from beside him. He was usually quiet, and Midoriya hadn’t had a notable conversation with him since the heroes versus villains training exercise at the beginning of the year. Still, his expression was as welcoming as it could be with his mask on—which was to say, very. He flexed two of his arms so they were wide open. “A hug,” he explained simply, like it was the most obvious answer in the world.

Midoriya’s lips trembled. His spoon clattered and hit the counter, and he burst into tears, again. He was pulled into a hug, a giant warm hug, and Shouji wrapped his many arms around him until he was entirely out of sight from the others from the waist up.

He was crying so much and he didn’t know why, but he was and now it was in front of his entire class. And he tried not to, he tried to keep it in.

But he was just so, so tired.
“Get up.”

Daizō was eight, and he watched with blank eyes as Maiko leaned over the woman. Her eyes were bright with cold fury, and she pressed one foot to the back of the woman’s skull, the toe of her boot digging into her neck. “I can break you further, girl,” she said icily. “Give me one reason why I shouldn’t.”

“I can’t!” the woman wailed. “I-I can’t g-get up, my ankle—”

“Is twisted,” Maiko finished coolly. She pressed the heel of her boot further into the back of the woman’s head, further smothering her into the ground. “Walk it off. I fought with my arm blown clean off. If you can’t fight with a twisted ankle, then you’re not fit to be on my team.” Maiko’s expression was stone cold, not a hint of remorse in her face. “I take you out there, and you’re fighting the world’s emperor. You’re fighting his top men. We kill and we take and we weaken him. You die? You walk it off or get replaced. That’s how it works.” Maiko stepped back, and she peeled off her gloves. “So either get up or get out. If that eight-year-old can handle it better than you, then you’re not going to make any cut.”

Daizō blinked at him being mentioned, but he didn’t show any other outward reaction. He watched quietly from the shadowed corner.

The woman stood up. Daizō hadn’t bothered to remember her name. They fought. She was thrown into the ground. Maiko broke her arm. She left crying, a shell of herself.

They always did.

Break their arms if they resisted. Break their arms to show their weaknesses. Break their arms if you were angry. Break their arms if you were happy. Just. Break arms. That seemed to be their motto. Break arms because it was a slap to the face of what life meant. Don’t care about their feelings or their crying. It was weakness.

Break their arms unless they were your enemies. Then break their kneecaps. They’d never recover. Not fully.

“Daizō. Floor.”
Maiko was stretching her shoulders. Daizō glanced up at her slowly. He slipped from his corner of the room, and he fell in position across from her.

“The nurse said not to break any of my ribs for another month,” Daizō reported, his eyes narrowed as he looked up at her behind his bangs. His hands hung loosely at his sides. “He said he doesn’t have the supplies to recover me anymore. Fresh supplies that were supposed to arrive last week didn’t. Shigaraki’s men apparently discovered the trading route and disrupted it.” Disrupted as in killed everyone there. “They linked it back to our suppliers. So they’re under scrutiny. You’re going to have to take it easy on me for the next thirty or so days then.”

“I could also just let you bare through the pain.”

“You could also cause permanent damage to my nerves,” Daizō replied as he slid his right foot back. “Then you’d really be in trouble. You know they don’t have the time to do intensive surgery. Also, you get carried away. They don’t want you to break a rib and have it puncture my lung again.”

Maiko rolled her eyes. “Shame.”

“There’s only one of me,” Daizō reminded.

“Like I give a fuck,” Maiko replied, and then her hand whipped out. Faster than Daizō could react, the palm of her hand left a burning mark across his face, and the blow left him seeing stars as he tripped over his own feet and fell to the ground.

Something rattled in his chest. Fear diffused and pressed heavily against his stomach, and he raised a hand to touch his tender cheek, which was already turning pink.
A spark of anger ignited in his chest. “That was a low blow,” he hissed lowly, his eyes flashing as he slowly, ever so slowly pulled himself back to his feet.
Maiko stared down at him, unimpressed. “Don’t talk back to me then.”

“I’m not going to be crushed under your boot, you bitch,” he spat.

“Prove it.” Maiko’s expression didn’t waver in the slightest at his insult. Her palm came to deliver a heavy punch to his gut, and had he eaten that morning, Daizō was sure that he would have had thrown it up in that moment. Bile settled on his tongue as he kneed her in the jaw.

She was fast, though. Too fast to react. He could never keep up with her. He landed on the ground, body bruised and aching, and she landed on top of him, fists pounding his face until her knuckles were red.

Daizō always got back up. He was too bitter not to. This time though, when he tried to, Maiko pressed a bloodied heel into his face, smearing the blood from his probably-broken nose across his face.

“What were you saying about not being crushed under my boot?” Maiko’s voice was scathing. “You don’t make the orders around here, kid.”

In response, Daizō gripped her ankle tightly and twisted, and she swore. Loudly.

She left the building with a limp—a twisted ankle, the karma—and a bruised neck from where Daizō had wrapped her hands around her throat when she’d viciously tried to pound his gut.

Daizō left much, much later when he could actually see straight long enough to walk. His injuries were much worse, not that it mattered.

The kindness that Maiko showed him before Seiya committed was gone. Vanished, in an instant. Despite this, despite everything, Daizō gave her his life and his trust and she held it in her hands.

“You’re a dog, kid, you’re nothing more than a stupid pet to prevent U.A. Judgement Day and to keep All for One from taking over the world. You’re a stupid fucking dog and I’ll kill you and break you apart, piece by piece —”
Midoriya woke up at three am in cold sweat and pins and needles running over his body.

Midoriya had been angry, but he had loved her. He had no clue that love wasn’t like that. No clue until he was nine and Midoriya Inko’s ever so soft hand molded him into an entirely different person. Midoriya Hisashi molded him too, because Midoriya had thought the pain was normal, but Hisashi too hated it.

He realized, one year later, that Maiko’s relationship with him wasn’t love. And he knew now, many more years later, that he was scared of her. More terrified of her than he was of Hisashi.

More terrified of her than All for One.

“Izuku, I think you should take the day off,” Uraraka said the second he shuffled down the stairs and into the dorm room. She was at his side in a heartbeat.

He glanced up at her before looking back down at his feet. “I couldn’t sleep,” he mumbled.

Uraraka pursed her lips. “All the more reason to go back to bed. You aren’t going to feel good.”

Midoriya was about to argue with her, but Iida interrupted it quickly as he set down several plates of eggs in front of half-asleep students. “Nedzu contacted Yaoyorozu and I last night. He requested that we make sure you take today off. We’ll be getting all of today’s notes and assignments for you as well, so please don’t make the argument that you’re going to get behind.”

Midoriya slumped. “But…” He was lonely. He didn’t want to be alone with his thoughts. He wanted something normal in his life, and his classes were normal. He wanted—

“I’m sick,” Sero suddenly blurted. “I. Uh. Feel like I’m about to puke. So I’m gonna stay behind. With you.”

Iida raised a brow. “You’re not convincing anyone.”
“I totally am,” Sero countered.

Yaoyorozu politely cleared her throat. “Iida,” she said, “he’s convincing us.”

“I’m concerned about how you’re using your position, Yaoyorozu,” Iida said as he placed an especially-filled plate in front of the girl. Yaoyorozu had to eat a lot for her quirk, they found. “But I suppose I’ll let it go this once.” Iida sighed as he pushed his glasses further up his face. “We’ll get your notes for you as well, Sero.”

The boy smiled blindingly at them. “Thank you.”

Midoriya glanced between them cautiously as Uraraka ushered him into the seat she had been sitting at. Iida came blindingly fast, setting a plate of French-style foods—Aoyama’s influence, no doubt—and a pen and paper.

He frowned. “What’s this for?” he asked quietly.

Iida took in a sharp breath and shared a glance with Yaoyorozu. The girl placed her chopsticks off to the side. “We’re asking everyone to write down any phobias or subjects that may upset them so everyone in the class can avoid setting them off.”

Midoriya paled. “I—”

“Just write them the fuck down,” Bakugo said for the first time. “I’m sick of your crying and whining.”

Midoriya’s hand twitched at the comment. Kirishima frowned.

“Dude, don’t say stuff like that…”

Ojiro sighed from beside Midoriya. His tail twitched. “It’s okay, Midoriya,” he assured. “We all came to the collective decision. We hadn’t realized it at first, but not all of us have really talked about
our fears. It didn’t come up in the classroom environment. So you’re not alone.” His dark eyes stared right through him. “And anyway, we’re classmates, and now roommates as well. We’re going to be in close quarters for the next few years. We should do our best to make everyone as comfortable as we can. In addition, we do care about everyone’s health. I think we can all agree that we want to know what to avoid and not talk about than go down a conversation and unknowingly set someone off.”

“Yeah dude,” Kaminari added. “Don’t mind Bakubro. Even he wrote down his own stuff.”

“Shut the fuck up you piece of shit!”

Midoriya bit his lower lip as he picked up the pen. A few eyes were curiously staring at him as he wilted. “It’s going to be a long list,” he whispered.

Silence.

“That’s okay,” Sero finally said. “It’ll be as long as it needs to be.”

Midoriya raised his hand up to his mouth, and he nervously bit his thumbnail. Pushing his plate away, not hungry at all, he let the tip of the pen hover over the paper. He shifted awkwardly, and he felt his nail start to bend under his teeth’s bite.

“Oh, we could just wait,” Kirishima jumped in. “Just do it whenever you think you’re prepared enough. We’ll wait. That’s okay too.”

Midoriya shook his head. “It’s okay. I’m just… thinking.”

_What was he afraid of? What might set him off?_

Guilty, he wrote down _Storms._

_Bodily mutilation._
Electrocution.

Forced starvation.

Midoriya was chewing on his lower lip, trying to ignore the stares directed at him. Faintly, in the background, he could hear Iida ordering everyone to get their things together. They still had school today, he reminded them, and they weren’t going to be late on his watch.

Would his mother burning him also set him off in some way? Fire didn’t bother him too much. Not usually. He seemed fine with Todoroki’s fire. Hisashi’s fire hadn’t ever set him off before.

But Hisashi hadn’t ever burned *people* in front of him before. So maybe burning people like his mother did to him would set him off. Wouldn’t that go under body mutilation though?

Well, there was that time that Hisashi tortured Disaya in the basement, now that he thought about it.

Oh.

* Loud screams, he jotted, which was quickly followed by *Explicit mentions of torture* and *Predators/attraction to minors.* (He avoided the other ‘p’ word. He couldn’t bring himself to write it down.)

Okay. Now that he was forced to look at it, he was a lot more messed up than he thought he was.

* Seiya, something in the back of his head whispered. Something churned in his gut, and he wrote down *Suicide* with a shaky hand.

Looking back at the list, he felt nausea bubble under his skin. Before he placed the pen down, he made a little note at the bottom—*please avoid talking about my hands and scars without a warning first.* He placed the pen on the table and shyly pushed the pad of paper forward, and he tucked his chin in. Iida noticed it and pulled it closer to him. Yaoyorozu came and peered over one shoulder, while Uraraka stood on her tippytoes and peeked over the other.

Simultaneously their faces paled. Yaoyorozu’s thin eyebrows shot up, and Uraraka’s fists clenched.
“Izuku,” Uraraka said, her voice strained, “are you okay?”

Midoriya opened his mouth to say yes, but he stopped himself and changed his answer. “I’m getting therapy,” he mulishly replied instead.

Iida nodded. “Good,” he said. “That’s… good.”

“What?” Satou had a slice of angel foodcake in his hands, and his brows were furrowed in concern. “What is it?”

Iida looked to Midoriya. “I can share this, yes…?”

Midoriya bobbed his head. He wrung his hands in his lap, glancing nervously around the room as Iida handed the list to Satou. The boy practically choked on his cake as he read it, and he went into a coughing fit for a few long seconds.

“Dude, who [hurt] you?” he said, clearly without thinking it through. “Wait, no, don’t tell me. I might get thrown in a cell if you did.”

“Lemme see,” Kaminari said. He snatched the pad from Satou’s hand, and his golden-wheat eyes trailed back and forth. His face paled. “Dude, no, screw that. Prison time or no, I’m gonna hurt these people back.”

“Woah, who pissed in your fruitloops this morning?” Jirou took the pad from him. “Ah fuck, wait, no, I take that back. Good job Kaminari, I’m going to agree with you for the first time in forever.”

Dark Shadow suddenly whisked by and stole the pad from Jirou. “My apologies,” Tokoyami said as Dark Shadow settled beside him, “but I’m afraid to say that your attempts at expressing comfort are merely upsetting Midoriya.” He grabbed the pad from Dark Shadow and glanced over it. “While I agree with action of bodily harm against those who hurt Midoriya, we should also keep in mind what he desires. And for all we know, they very well may be handled. After all, he is in the hands of our teacher, Midnight, is he not? My assumption may be incorrect, but that would sufficiently explain why he refers to her as ‘mom.’ Surely, then, the staff have taken it as their responsibility to handle both his health and his wellbeing. As they should.”
Asui placed a finger on her chin as she looked past Tokoyami to the paper. “But they’re not impeccable, kero. The people that hurt Mido-chan might still be loose. If we knew what they looked like, we could stop them if—”

“Oi, Frogface, shut the fuck up.” Bakugo’s voice carried through the kitchen, and Kaminari flinched at the sound. The explosive blonde was leaning against the far wall, his arms crossed. “You’re being overwhelming shits. Give Deku a break, and chill your asses. They’re not on fire, so fuck off and give him some breathing room. For fuck’s sake, he just did something that was probably really fucking hard ‘cause he’s a weak emotional fuck. Don’t go fucking demanding for more goddamn shit, you’re going to break his pathetic ass if you do.”

“Bakugo’s right,” Todoroki drawled. He was standing next to a very, very small-looking Midoriya, whose face was looking very pallid at the moment. “He’s already scared. If you want answers, ask him yourself later when he’s better. Don’t talk about him like he’s not here.”

Asui keroed. “Sorry.”

“Yeah, me too,” Kaminari added. He rubbed the back of his head sheepishly. “Look, if I stick around much longer, we’re all going to be outrageously late, but… my door’s always open, if you need it. I’m not the best when it comes to this stuff but you can always talk to me.”

“Seconded,” Uraraka interjected.

“Me too,” Jirou said.

Iida nodded. “Me as well.”

“My room is always welcome with your presence.”

Koda signed from somewhere in the back. Yes, what Tokoyami said.

“Oh, we’re doing cute group stuff!” Hagakure shouted. “Yeah, I’m always open too!”

Yaoyorozu sighed. “Okay guys, I think we get the point. Now come along, we’re all going to be late at this point. Don’t you remember what happened the last time we made Aizawa angry?”

Sero chortled. “Bye guys. Don’t die.”

There were a few groans in response. Satou patted Midoriya’s back before he left, leaving the two boys to their breakfasts. Alone. In tense silence.

“So,” Sero started, “I want to take a nap. What about you?”

Midoriya looked queasily at his plate of food. “That sounds… nice.” And then, after a moment of awkward silence, he added, “I think I’ll join you.”

Sero grinned, and then he let out a small ‘oh!’ He jumped up from his seat, eyes bright. “Hey, after our naps, why don’t we binge some Disney movies? I’ve been wanting to watch Monsters Incorporated again. Or maybe Mulan? Oh! The Incredibles is great too though!”

Midoriya blinked. Before Sero could go on a mumbling rant, he interrupted. “What’s Disney?”

Sero stared at him, smile frozen in place. “Huh?”

“What’s Disney?”

Sero’s smile became strained. “I think,” he said faintly, “I’m going to have to educate you.”

_Edu...— What?

Sero grabbed his arm and began to drag him into the common room. “Our naps can wait. Come here, we’re starting with the Toy Story series.”

Midoriya blinked as he was shoved onto the couch, and a blanket was thrown over him. Midoriya
stared out over the folds of the fabric as Sero whipped around the room.

God, the problems of being born in the future. He had no sense of culture, even now.

(They were still binging movies when their class came back, their morning’s conversation long forgotten. WALL-E was forever going to be Midoriya’s favorite.)

Subject: A Little Thought

To: aizawashouta@yuu...

From: hirojichikara@ind...

Hey, Aizawa.

It’s been a while. Hiroji Chikara. I was a sort of a mentor figure to one of your students, Midoriya Izuku, if you don’t remember. I thought I’d trust you with a little bit of info. Don’t go spreading it around, and you didn’t hear it from me.

Aika lost her quirk. I can see her mental state from my own quirk, and she’s still traumatized, (an effect from her quirk) but the source of her problems are gone. Everything used to stem to one place, her quirk factor, and now the quirk factor looks broken and it’s just the junk left behind to slowly filter out.

I don’t know how she lost her quirk. Not exactly.

But you may want to ask Midoriya why her quirk disappeared the night he was over at our house. Or, actually, don’t ask him. But perhaps it would be best to… investigate.

Good luck. Tread lightly, he’s got more trauma than the two of us combined, and we both know what we’ve seen in our work. I’m nowhere near as bad as him, and I knew Ignition.
Subject: Re: A Little Thought
To: hirojichikara@ind…
From: aizawashouta@yuu…

Thanks. And don’t worry. I’m looking into it right now.

“Kaminari, I just went over that problem with you,” Midoriya said, his tone slightly clipped. He didn’t mean to, it was just frustrating when someone wanted you to explain a problem that you just went over. Midoriya had a feeling that he wasn’t even paying attention to what he was saying even though Kaminari was the one who asked for his help studying for the upcoming exams.

Kaminari paled, and he looked miserably down at the problem. “We did?” he asked, his voice quiet and on edge.

Midoriya sighed. “Yes. I’ve explained that exact same problem to you five times now in this study session alone.”

“I-I’m sorry,” Kaminari said. “I just… don’t get it.”

But two minutes ago you said you did.

Midoriya ran a hand over his face. “Okay. I’m going to explain it one more time. But please don’t ask me again.”

Kaminari bobbed his head, and Midoriya sighed. Grumbling under his breath, he took out his notebook and began writing down the problem. He began explaining it all over again—see, look what you have, what formula are you going to use to find the variable, then use your system of equations and—
Midoriya boxed the final answer and looked hopefully at Kaminari, internally pleading that the boy would finally get it. The blonde’s eyes were cloudy, and Midoriya could almost see the gears whirring in his head.

“I think,” Kaminari said faintly, “I got it.”

Thank god.

“You’re ready to move onto the next problem then?” Midoriya asked, his tone hopeful. Kaminari nodded again, and Midoriya made sure to walk him through the next problem, step by step. For the third one, he let Kaminari try mostly on his own, though he made him recite the steps before he wrote down his equations.

Midoriya loved Kaminari, he really did, but sometimes the kid could be frustrating to work with. It wasn’t that he wasn’t smart—Midoriya was quite surprised to find that he had some better English than even he did—but he was just slow on the uptake. And he forgot things. Consistently. Midoriya found himself repeating the same things over and over again so Kaminari could grasp it.

“I’m sorry,” Kaminari suddenly said, not looking up from his paper and finishing the next problem. “I know it’s annoying to have to study with me. I’m just… I can’t help it, you know? I’m really trying, but it’s just…” Kaminari ran a hand through his hair. “I know I’m frustrating. I’m sorry,” he settled for instead.

Midoriya blinked. “Kaminari…” And oh god, now he felt really bad. Kaminari looked like a kicked puppy who just wanted to be praised and yet couldn’t. Midoriya slipped his hand so it rested in one of Kaminari’s, and he squeezed it lightly. “Hey, don’t say that. I’d do this for ten years straight in a heartbeat if you asked me to, Kami. I don’t mind doing this at all.” He ran the pad of his thumb over the back of Kaminari’s hand. “And sure, yeah, I get frustrated, but it’s not at you. You’re not annoying. It’s just… sometimes I wish I could plop the answer and how it works right into your head, but it doesn’t work that way. And it’s just frustrating for me because I’m not sure if you grasp it fully or if I’m doing something wrong with my tutoring.”

Kaminari shook his head, still avoiding Midoriya’s gaze. “You’re… actually really good at this. You have a lot of patience.” His eyes fell on their intertwined hands. “I just… yeah. It’s hard for me to… I mean, I don’t grasp things well unless I see an immediate reward. So studying’s always been hard for me.”
Midoriya suddenly had a strange, strange feeling in the back of his head that Kaminari wasn’t telling him everything. But he brushed it off in favor of smiling lightly at the blonde.

“Well, then we can arrange something to help.” Midoriya tilted his head and hummed. “How about this? Every five problems you do out of the math book, you get to eat one candy of your choice. I’ll get it for you tonight, whatever you want. Just make a list of what kinds you like and I’ll buy them for you. Jirou and I are on shopping duty tonight, and we’re going out to buy more supplies anyway, so might as well.”

Kaminari blinked and finally looked up at him. “You… sure? Anything I want?”

Midoriya nodded. “Absolutely. And we can use the exact same trick for other assignments. For every worksheet or every page of a book you finish, you can eat another piece. Instant gratification like that, right?”

Kaminari gaped at him. “Dude, you’re like… so considerate. What the heck.”

Midoriya let out a short laugh. “Kaminari, I’m just trying to help you out. I want you to pass the exams so you can come with us on the summer camp trip. If you have anything that’s bothering you in any way and I can somehow help remedy it, you just have to tell me. Communication.”

He’d learned that just recently with his list of triggers. Iida asked that he speak to them, and for the first time he did. All sort of conversation alluding to everything he’d mentioned ceased entirely, and whenever he seemed uncomfortable with any sort of talk they’d ask him if he was okay and if they needed to move onto some other topic. Midoriya had thought it’d be tiring for all of them, but they easily accommodated it into their routines, and with an increasingly irate Bakugo nipping at the heels of anyone trying to whittle information out of him, Midoriya felt safer and more relaxed than he’d ever had before.

He didn’t even think it was possible, just by speaking up, but it was. It was just as foreign to Midoriya as it seemed to Kaminari at that moment, but clearly it was a welcome statement.

Kaminari smiled. “Okay. I’ll… try to keep that in mind.” Suddenly nervous, he continued. “Hey… instead of the candy, can it be something else from time to time? Different rewards? I want to do good because I want a good payoff, but using just candy might make me just rush through my assignments instead…”
“What were you thinking of using, then?” Midoriya asked. He tried to ignore the sudden tingling in his hands from where Kaminari involuntarily used his quirk. Most likely it came from the bout of nervousness growing in Kaminari’s expression.

“Well...” Kaminari rubbed the back of his head. “I was wondering. If I do really good on certain assignments, or I do some really quality learning and I can get ahead of the ‘just barely passing’ mark, can I ask questions about you?” Something must have shown on Midoriya’s face, because he immediately backtracked. “It doesn’t have to be about your background or anything! And I promise you that you don’t have to answer a question if you really, really don’t want to. But... I don’t know. I don’t know much about you as I’d like. I was thinking that I could make it like a challenge. To get to know you better, I mean.”

Midoriya bit his lower lip. “I—” He paused. “I guess I don’t really see the harm in it. Like you said though, I may refuse to answer some. If they go too far out of my comfort zone, I mean.”

Kaminari bobbed his head. “Of course, of course, reject any questions that you aren’t comfortable answering. I just want to know more about you. Your more personal issues aren’t any of my business unless you want them to be.”

Midoriya smiled. “Thanks. And sure, that sounds like a great idea.”

Even after Midoriya left Kaminari’s room, a list of candies in hand, something was nagging him. Something far, far, far in the back of his mind that he couldn’t place.

“Are you doing better?” Jirou asked as they began to head to the register. Midoriya had his arms full of candy, and Jirou had snorted when he explained the situation to her.

“Uh. What do you mean by that, exactly?” Midoriya responded, trying to adjust his hold on all the bags of candy so he wouldn’t accidentally drop one. They were dangerously close to slipping from his grip, and Midoriya really didn’t feel up to bending down anytime soon.

Jirou shrugged, and she absentmindedly started to pull the bags from Midoriya’s hand and placed it in the bag she was carrying. “I mean, are you feeling better or not? It’s a little bit hard to tell with you. You’re kind of quiet most of the time unless you’re with Yaomomo or Todoroki, and even then you guys prefer to sit in comfortable silence. You don’t ever speak up unless someone directly asks you something or you have a burning question.”
Midoriya sheepishly shot her a smile. “Sorry. I’m trying to be more outgoing, but it’s a work in progress. I never know what to talk about either. It’s much easier just watching you guys fool around.” Midoriya tilted his head as they started to make their way toward the cash register. “But yeah, I’ve been doing pretty good. You guys have been… really helpful. So thanks for everything that you’ve done.”

Jirou smiled at him that bordered on a smirk. “Of course. Hey, if you need anything, just tell us. We’re all family here, and if you need something I— we’d happily get it for you. Just ask.” There was something odd in her eyes as she said it.

Midoriya nodded his head. “I know. Yaochan and Todoroki keep on telling me the same thing.” The sweethearts. But the class acted more like unbearable parents to him than classmates ever since Aoyama set him off, and as endearing as it was, he wasn’t sure how much more fussing he could take from them.

Jirou smirked. “That’s just how we show our love and appreciation for you.”

Midoriya smiled back. “I know.” Doesn’t change the fact that it’s still unnecessary.

Jirou clapped him on the back. “Good. Now do me a favor and start checking us out. I forgot to buy something.”

Jirou handed him the bag, and Midoriya huffed at the weight of it. Had he tried to carry it a month ago, he would end up stumbling over his own feet. It seemed like clearing the beach had helped him in ways that he hadn’t counted on—he was slowly getting stronger as the days passed, if Asui commenting on the slightest swell of his arms meant anything.

Maybe Yaoyorozu would finally stop teasing that he looked like a toothpick nowadays.

As he began to bag all his items one by one, he bit his lower lip. Jirou had better hurry up, or he would be awkwardly standing there waiting for her to come back and he really didn’t want that…

She came rushing to the counter just as the man behind the counter rang up his last item. Smiling lightly, she placed several identical boxes right back on the counter. They were red, but she had purposefully turned them so he couldn’t see the front of it.
“What did you get?” Midoriya asked, pulling at the bags hanging off his arms. The straps were starting to dig into his skin.

Jirou shot him one of her shit-eating grins. “I’ve heard you make really good chocolate chip cookies.”

Midoriya blinked once, frozen. “Really?”

“Yeah.” Jirou took some of the bags from his arms, relieving him from some of the weight of all that they bought. Feeding twenty teenagers wasn’t an easy feat, after all. “Yaomomo was bragging to us girls, including the ones in the other class. A girls night out. You should come, by the way. Anyway, she said that you made the best baked goods anyone could ask for. You and Satou? Gods.” She kissed her fingers. “It’d be great if you could make us something for our next girls night. You could even join us.”

Midoriya snorted as he reached out to take the last bag. Jirou snatched it away before he could, and he gave her the stink eye. “Doesn’t that kind of defeat the purpose of having a ‘girls night’ though?”

Jirou hummed. “I mean, maybe, but you’re cool with all that. And anyway, if they protest I can always pull the gay friend card.”

Midoriya choked on his own spit. “You’re joking, right?” he wheezed. The two of them left the store through the sliding doors, and the cool air hit them right in the face. It was dark, and Midoriya moved slowly to give his eyes time to adjust from the blinding lights inside the store.

“Not really.” Jirou shrugged nonchalantly. “I don’t see the problem.”

“I’m not gay though,” Midoriya said. “Probably. Maybe. I don’t know, I’m like twenty-three percent sure I’m aromantic.”

“I thought you were forty-three percent sure.”

“Hnh. Yes. But that was all the way back at the Sports Festival, before I had an entire internship with Todoroki Shouto.”
Jirou clicked her tongue and patted his arm. “I’d give you a commiserating ‘mood,’ but I’m not sure how helpful that really is. But anyway, spill the beans. What happened?”

Midoriya groaned, and it was high pitched and sounded more like a whimper. “We shared a room, Jirou. A room. Together. The whole time. And he was so nice about everything. And so supportive. That blew my mind. There’s people out there like him who can just be sweet about everything. Imagine living with one and getting all the warm hugs you could ever want.”

Jirou held a hand over her mouth, clearly trying to stifle her giggles and failing miserably. “Oh my god, you’re hopeless. Honestly dude, I don’t think you’re avoiding romance, I think you’re just avoiding the super intimate stuff. So even if we can’t pull off the gay best friend card, we can at least do that. I’m sure that’ll be your ticket into getting into our girls night out.”

Midoriya's brow twitched. “Why are you so focused on me being there?”

The girl grinned. It was all sharp teeth. “Well, we need someone to spill the beans on what’s going on with the boys. And it’s either you or Kouda, and the poor boy’s already been dragged to several meetings. The kid just needs some company and some support. The last time we almost freaked him out by putting all the attention directly onto him.”

Midoriya shook his head. “If I go, it’s only to support Kouda. And to give you the cookies.”

“Oh that’s awesome,” Jirou commented offhandedly. “Because Ashido was going to try to convince you later tonight, and you know how crazy she can get. I tried to take pity on you and coerce you before you were subjected to her methods of tortu—” Her eyes flashed, and she gripped her bags tightly. “I mean, uh. Uhm. Uh—”

“Torture?” Midoriya finished for her, amused. “It’s okay. I know you’re into dark humor and some things slip. Don’t worry too much about it, the joke wasn’t even that dark.”

“I-I know, it’s just—” She spluttered as her cheeks turned pink. “I just don’t to mess things up. You know. If you’re having a bad day or something. And—”

Midoriya rested a hand on her shoulder. “It’s fine. Seriously. I mean it. I’ll tell you if something you say does rub me in the wrong way.”
“I know, but…” Jirou seemed to be internally struggling with herself, and Midoriya sighed.

“How about a safe word?” he suggested. “Anything you want.”

“Kirby,” she blurted out immediately after.

Midoriya blinked. “Kirby? What’s a kirby?”

Jirou stared at him. She stopped walking for a moment, her eyes wide. “Oh my god,” she said. “Sero was right. You aren’t educated at all.”

“Huh?”

Jirou gripped his upper arm where the straps of their grocery bags weren’t hanging. With a tug, she began to drag him across the street.

“Get ready to be educated again, boy.”

*Oh no. Not again.*

Kayama took a long sip of her tea. From beneath her dorm room, she could hear a game being played, the sound effects vibrating through the building. There were screams and raucous laughter, and she was sure she heard Kaminari screaming “Dude no fair this is your first time playing, and you’re beating the shit out of us! What kind of sorcery is this Mido—”

Hearing her charge’s name made her cringe slightly, reminding her of the papers on her desk. She glanced at them, a frown tugging down at her lips.

*The final exam.*
There had been much debate about who Kayama would face. Many wanted Mineta to battle her, especially due to obvious reasons about her figure and hero persona, but Nedzu didn’t want that. He wanted something else.

He wanted Midoriya.

It was like a blow to her gut, and no doubt it would be one to his too. Kayama wasn’t sure if he would break apart at the news, because, quite frankly, he depended on her. Heavily. She was his emotional support. Sometimes, late at night on the weekends, he would creep into her room clutching himself, and she’d usher him into bed and tell him all sorts of childish bedtime stories to get him to sleep. Bedtime stories that he should have been told as a young child, but wasn’t. It was concerning, though not surprising.

If Midoriya was facing her for his exam... Kayama wasn’t sure how he would react. Nedzu was right, being too emotionally dependent on someone like he was of her could cause problems. Especially if she wasn’t around. He had to face that sometimes someone that usually comforted him might not be there for him to do so.

It was cruel but necessary if he wanted to be a hero. Especially if something bad happened to one of his friends and they weren’t there.

Even so, Kayama wasn’t sure if she herself was ready to fight Midoriya. She loved him, with all her heart, and she just…

Didn’t want to see him hurt.

She took another long sip of her tea, her brows drawn low. She knew about the event with Midoriya that happened not that long ago. She knew how careful his class was being to make sure he’d be okay, and for that, she was ever so grateful. They even sent a copy of the list Midoriya made to Nedzu, and they told him what they already knew.

And that got Kayama’s blood boiling. Because, at the sports festival, Midoriya admitted to them that he was scared of using his quirk because of his aunt. Who he alluded to being ‘not all there in the head.’

Kayama stopped herself from tightening her grip any more around the cup. It might break if she did.
Because of Midoriya’s aunt, he was terrified of using his own quirk. He’d admitted, carefully on the bus ride back to the school, that she hadn’t used her quirk in the best of ways, and that was why he was scared of his own.

And that rang too many bells. Something dangerous was going on in Midoriya’s background, something they had to unveil. Nedzu himself seemed to be connecting the dots, and he was mumbling something under his breath about a villainous grandfather when she’d passed by his office.

But… where was his aunt now? Where were the people that hurt him? Why was there no trace of Midoriya Izuku before he was nine?

There was only one person who knew. And if the haunted look in Midoriya’s eyes said anything, his lips were sealed. Tightly.

But there was someone who could help. Help reveal everything so they could finally start tackling Midoriya’s problems. So they could help him heal. So he could finally be a hero. So they could understand why he wanted to be a hero. So they could make sure he was safe and his fears were locked away to rot in jail.

Too bad that someone couldn’t speak.

Kayama placed her teacup on its saucer. She stood up, ignoring how her bones crackled at the sudden movement.

Now. Let’s see if Kayama could convince a slug to use their quirk. She had a feeling that there would be much to write down.

“Baking?” Satou raised a brow at Midoriya. “I mean, sure, I’d love to have a partner. It’s been a while since I’ve had one. I would usually do it with my mom, but…” His brow creased. “Anyway, that doesn’t matter. Sure, I’d love to bake with you. What would we be baking?”

Midoriya’s cheeks flushed pink. “Ah. Well, I normally bake cookies and brownies, and occasionally cupcakes. Jirou got me some stuff for chocolate chip cookies, but we could do something bigger if you want. I’ve never made a cake or anything like that though, so I don’t know how you’d make
Satou gave him a bright smile, and he pointed at himself with his thumb. “If you want, I can teach you.”

“You sure? I don’t want to bother you or anything, promise—”

Satou waved him off. “I’m the one who offered you, didn’t I? And anyway, it’s no big deal. It’ll be fun, I promise.”

“Wait,” Midoriya said, stumbling after the larger boy, “what do you mean? Right now?”

“Well yeah, of course! When else would we do it?”

Midoriya sputtered. “Uh, I mean, I dunno, I just—”

Satou laughed. “C’mere.” He patted the counter. “I have everything in my bedroom, just in case. I’ll be back in a minute. Don’t hurt yourself in the meantime, you understand?”

Midoriya nodded mutely, and he watched Satou’s back as he left to go to his dorm room. Asui entered the kitchen not much later, and she blinked her large eyes up at him.

“Oh. Hey Mido-chan.” She hopped up on the counter so she was sitting beside him. “What are you doing now?”

“Huh?”

Asui let out a small kero. “It seems like everyday someone’s dragging you to do something with them. So what are you doing now?”

*Oh. Now that she mentioned it, his classmates were hellbent on including him in everything…*
“Uh, Satou wants me to bake with him,” he said. “I think we’re doing a cake. Maybe. I’m not sure.”

“Cool,” Asui said. “I’m going to stay here with you. I’ll stay out of the way, I just want someone to talk to.”

Midoriya raised his hands. “Oh, yeah, of course! My bad, I should’ve asked if you wanted to join us —”

“It’s fine,” Asui replied. “I invited myself, and it worked out.” Asui, blunt as ever, continued. “Also, I wanted to apologize for trying to push you. I should have known not to ask you what those people looked like. That wasn’t any of my business. I thought we could protect you from them if they ever showed up, or something like that, but it was upsetting you and I didn’t notice. I’m sorry.”

“Ah, no, Asui—”

“Call me Tsu.”

The tips of Midoriya’s ears turned pink. “Ah, right, Tsu, uh, it’s not your fault! Really. You had legitimate reasons for asking, that’s all. It’s just…“ Midoriya’s smile grew strained, and he glanced away. “Most of them are… gone, anyway.”

“Gone?” Asui stuck her tongue out slightly. “You mean dead?”

Midoriya pursed his lips. More like they’re all in the future that’s hopefully going to be rewritten. So they probably don’t exist. Except for Shigaraki. And Dabi. And Toga. And All for One. Except they’re a lot younger still. Weird to think that they’re not centuries-old villains. “Something like that,” he settled for instead.

“Ah ah ah, no serious conversations in the kitchen.” Satou’s voice filtered from the entrance, and the two of them looked up to the muscular frame holding several boxes in his arms. “Only sweets. Tsu, you’re joining us today too?”

Asui placed a finger on her chin. “I’m just here to watch and have conversation. I wouldn’t trust myself with baking.”
Satou nodded as he placed the boxes on the counter. “Well, I made a bunch of green icing the other day. If you want you could help decorate the cake. Make it frog styled with a bunch of lily pads or something.”

“That sounds cute.”

“Yeah, I think I’ll leave the decorating to you two,” Midoriya said bashfully. “I kind of suck when it comes to that stuff.”

“But that’s the best part!” Satou said. “No way are you getting out of decorating. Even if it’s hideous, that’s what makes it glorious. Hideous decorating is part of baking’s charm, my friend.”

“Mm. Satou’s right.” Asui smiled from around her tongue. “Don’t feel too bad if it looks awful. It’ll be funny, at least.”

“You better not make fun of me.”

Satou smiled. “No promises there, my friend.”

“Don’t worry, Mido-chan. I’ll go easy on you,” Asui assured. She swung her legs back and forth. “Now andele. You’re not going to finish the cake before ten hits at this point.”

Satou yelped. “Oh god, she’s right. Midoriya, get off the counter, we’re going to have to speedrun this cake.”

“How on earth am I supposed to learn how to bake a cake if you speedrun it?”

Satou patted his back as he slipped off the counter. “Don’t worry, I’ll teach you on the next one.”

“Will there be a next one?” Midoriya asked.

“Sure, if you want there to be,” Satou said. As if doing it just because Midoriya wanted to was the simplest thing in the world. “Now hand me the flour. And make sure not to get it everywhere!”
They fail at that endeavor, but it was okay. Asui laughed so hard it brought tears to her eyes, and several guttural croaks escaped her as she stared at their whitened hair.

It was the first time he’d ever heard Asui laugh, Midoriya realized belatedly.

Midoriya woke up the next morning, eyes crusty and feeling lethargic as hell.

He’d slept well—perhaps too well, considering the fact that it was almost afternoon and he’d been sleeping for pretty much twelve hours. Juni was sitting on his nightstand, sunbathing in her small cup of water. You know, so she wouldn’t end up drying out.

Midoriya let out a very, very long breath. He should really get up. He’d promised Kayama that he’d try to clear out more of the beach today, and—

Upon trying to move, he came across a problem: there were arms spooning him. To a chest. A warm chest. Which belonged to someone whose even, warm breaths gently hit the back of his neck. Midoriya froze, his muddled brain starting to fall into pieces in front of him and crash and burn. Without thinking, the red flags in the back of his head began waving frantically, and he reached to grab onto the arm around his middle. In a mess of fuzzy vision and pure instinct, he rolled himself over and off his bed, landing so whoever was sleeping in his bed hit back first with him on top.

The next thing Midoriya knew, he was holding their wrists high above their head with one hand while his palm rested over their throat. He wasn’t putting any pressure with it, but that didn’t stop from the person underneath him from stiffening and grunting.

“Dude,” Sero groggily wheezed, “you’re light and all but you’re putting a lot of weight on my stomach.”

“Oh my god,” Midoriya said, and he let go of Sero’s hands and scrambled off of him. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I just…”

Sero waved a hand weakly in the air. He was still wheezing, and he probably had all the air knocked out of him when Midoriya threw him onto the ground. “You’re fine, dude. Probably should’ve
known I’d freak you out.” He let his hand drop onto his chest. “Can we go back to sleep now? I need a snuggle buddy.”

Midoriya sputtered. “Sero, it’s… eleven. In the morning. How much more sleep do you need?”

Sero grunted and shrugged. “I didn’t get to sleep til five anyway. Nightmares. ‘Bout USJ and stuff.”

Midoriya heaved himself to his feet. “Oh. I mean… sure. Just tell me if you’re going to sneak into my room, okay? I might’ve actually hurt you.”

“What do you mean you might have hurt me? I am hurt. I am very much hurt right now.”

Midoriya sighed and shook his head. “I mean seriously injure you, idiot.” Midoriya reached down and helped pick Sero up.

“Oh, someone’s getting stronk. You usually would be huffing and puffing trying to carry me.”

“Sero?”

“Yes, sweetie?”

“Shut up.”

“Okay.”

Midoriya plopped Sero back into his bed. It was weird, having his safe space being intruded upon like this. He hadn’t ever thought that someone could sneak up on him, let alone in the middle of the night. How he hadn’t woken up to him slipping into his bed was beyond him, he was an incredibly light sleeper.

He glanced up at Juni right as he pulled the covers back over him, and something clicked. Looking far too pleased for her own good, she turned her back to his stink eye.
Kaminari was nervous their next session. Midoriya wished he wasn’t. He always stumbled over himself when he panicked and didn’t think straight. And now that Midoriya was starting to give him his made-up practice tests, the blonde needed to be as focused as possible to pass.

Though Midoriya couldn’t be sure whether or not his practice tests would come in handy and if they covered the material needed, it’d at least help Kaminari handle his stress about the assessments better than ‘accepting his fate,’ as he put it.

“You’re not going to fail, Kaminari,” Midoriya reassured. “You just gotta keep pushing and tell yourself that you’re going to do well.”

Kaminari gripped his hair tightly as he looked down at the thick packet of paper turned face-down at his desk. “I don’t know how you can be so sure about that,” he said. “I’m going to forget everything.”

Midoriya shook his head. “Have a little more confidence in yourself. Remember, the only thing the test is grading you on is how well you know the material of this year. Don’t panic. It’s not going to ask you about rocket science stuff. If it has a bunch of complicated words, remember, it’s just trying to distract you. Just pick out what’s important and what’s not and ignore what doesn’t make sense to you.”

“How will I know what’s important to me and what’s not though?” Kaminari wailed. “What if I forget how to do something a certain way and—”

“Then skip it,” Midoriya said. “Don’t worry. One missed problem won’t kill your grade. Just work through what you know how to do. And something later in the test might help you. Use what they give you to your advantage.”

Out of everything that Midoriya had expected when he’d started tutoring Kaminari, crippling self-doubt was not the main issue he’d thought they’d have to battle. But it was, and Midoriya realized that most of Kaminari’s problems stemmed from not having someone to keep him on track. He needed someone to be his wall and firmly keep him from backing out of studying and preparing himself for his tests because he was scared or frustrated. But beyond that, there wasn’t much that
Kaminari needed. Kaminari was quick to grasp things, Midoriya eventually realized, he was just bad at remembering them, which made studying slow and painful. As long as he had that someone to stick with him though, Kaminari was set and ready to go…

Except that he doubted himself severely. Which led them back to the cycle of Midoriya trying to get him to think things through. Calmly.

Kaminari bit his lower lip before nodding. He took up the pencil to his side, and he rested his hand on the packet. Midoriya took out his phone.


While Kaminari worked at his desk, Midoriya shuffled over to his own pile of books on Kaminari’s bed. Between his classmates dragging him to spend almost every evening with them and the study sessions he had with the blonde, he hadn’t had as much time to study himself. Granted, he had another two weeks or so before the exams were set to take place, but he always liked to spread his studying out.

Midoriya occasionally looked up from his books to check up on Kaminari. The boy was quiet still, though his brow was furrowed. Though he wanted so badly to help him, if he didn’t show improvement without Midoriya there to egg him on, then it wasn’t worth all the time and effort he spent. He’d have to try something new, switch it up a little…

“Done.”

Midoriya’s head shot up from his own book. He glanced to his phone, and yes, there was still fifteen minutes left on the clock. “You sure?” Midoriya asked as he slipped off Kaminari’s bed. “Have you checked over your work?”

At Kaminari’s nod, Midoriya took the packet from him. The blonde looked slightly nervous, and when Midoriya reached for his red pen, he blurted “If I got above a seventy, can I ask a question about you?”

Midoriya blinked. “Sure,” he agreed slowly. “Though I get to opt out of answering if it’s too much, right?”
“Of course.”

Midoriya nodded and opened up the packet. He grabbed his answer key from where it was stuffed in his book and began marking through the sheets. Kaminari waited patiently while he graded, though he’d occasionally release a spark or two. Probably from nervousness.

When he was done, he put the grade at the front and circled it.

“You want to see?” he asked, and Kaminari blanched.

“No. God no.”

“Too bad.” Midoriya thrust the packet into Kaminari’s lap, and the boy immediately held his hands over his eyes.

“I can’t look,” he wailed.

“It won’t kill you,” Midoriya teased. It just seemed to further devolve Kaminari into a whimpering mess.

“Yes it will!”

“Kaminari.” The serious tone of his voice caught the blonde off guard, and he peeked out through spread fingers. “It’s not bad. I promise. Like I said, have a little more confidence in yourself.”

Kaminari bit his lower lip and looked down. He blinked once. Twice.

Jumping up from his seat like his pants were on fire, Kaminari yelled in pure exhilaration. “Mido, Mido, I got a seventy-six, I got a seventy-six oh my gosh I did it!—”

Midoriya stared at Kaminari as he stumbled over himself in his rambles, a soft smile on his face.
“W-wait, can I ask you a question now?” Kaminari plopped himself directly in front of Midoriya, who jerked back from the lack of a personal bubble.

“Uh.” Midoriya placed a hand on Kaminari’s shoulder and gently moved him back so he wasn’t leaning so close to him. “Sure, I guess.”

Kaminari brightened. “Okay, so, I met your mom the other day—Midoriya Inko, she stopped by UA to speak with Principal Nedzu for some reason and I talked to her a bit—but anyway we kinda chatted for a lot longer than I thought and she told me that she like, took you in when you were young? And she gave you the name Izuku. So I was just wondering what your real name might be. If you had one before you Inko adopted you.”

Midoriya stared at Kaminari blankly. Out of all the questions he had been expecting, that… had to have been the least likely one out of all of them. And Inko dropped by recently? He hadn’t known that. Then again, he and Inko hadn’t talked much at all, even if she had given him her phone number.

“I… what?”

Kaminari flinched. “Sorry, was that too far?”

“No!” Midoriya immediately said. Oh god, he didn’t want to see Kaminari upset again. Anything but that. “It’s just… It was forever ago that he even spoke of his name, or that anyone called him that. Why would Kaminari even want to know that information? It wasn’t even that important. Not really.

“Oh.” Midoriya played with the strands of his hair, his lips pulled into a light frown. “I do have one, actually. My real name… it’s uh. Daizō. But I haven’t been called that since I was nine. It’s just… you know.”

“Daizō,” Kaminari echoed slowly. His lips pulled into a smile. “That’s a nice name. Can I call you it sometimes?”

Midoriya blinked. “Why?”

Kaminari shrugged. “I dunno. It just sounds really cool. Plus, sometimes I forget people’s names in a pinch. So if I remember Daizō instead of Midoriya, I want to make sure you’re okay with me calling you that.”
“I mean, if that’s what you want,” Midoriya replied slowly. The gears in his head were whirring. A picture was finally coming together in front of him as the puzzle pieces were dug up out of hiding. He squinted at Kaminari for a moment, and then said, “Is there a reason why you forget things so often?”

Blurting his thoughts out might have not been the best idea, but he seemingly hit the metaphorical nail on the head. If the way Kaminari flinched back and paled was any indication, his question was more than just a little invasive though. The smile that had been widely spread across his face cracked, slowly slipping from his face.

An awkward silence over the two fell as Kaminari stared at him with his wheat gold eyes, expression unusually solemn. He stilled as small sparks of electricity burst around him.

“That obvious, huh?” he finally said. His tone was lacking much of the normal cheer that was often there, and the unfamiliarity of it sent goosebumps up Midoriya’s spine.

“If it’s personal, you don’t have to tell me,” Midoriya quickly interjected. “I’m sorry, I just… I kind of blurted that out without thinking. Seriously, I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable if I did— I’m sorry. I won’t pry anymore. Promise.”

Kaminari quietly stared at him for a moment longer. “That would be a little hypocritical of me, though, wouldn’t it? If I didn’t answer your question.”

“But—” Kaminari cut himself off when a determined gleam in Midoriya’s eyes appeared. “Okay,”
he mumbled. “Fine. But… I’ll tell you. If I pass my finals. I’ll tell you then.” When Midoriya looked like he wanted to argue, he added, “You can’t stop me. I want to repay you. Somehow. I want to do this though. Please. Let me.”

Midoriya blinked. “Alright,” he agreed. “But if you decide you don’t want to tell me last minute, then don’t try and force yourself to. I care more about you than any secret, okay?”

Kaminari nods. The tension that weighed the air slowly dissipated, leaving behind only relief.

Midoriya opened Kaminari’s door, ready to leave the boy to do some studying on his own. He wasn’t met with an empty hallway. Instead, he was greeted with a fist balled up and ready to knock on the door, which belonged to a red-eyed, blonde-haired male with a scowl etched deeply into his face.

Bakugo.

The fist fell away from the door and came to slowly rest by Bakugo’s side. The tension was back now, and it choked Midoriya tenfold. He felt like he stopped breathing.

“Oi, Pikachu,” Bakugo grunted, looking away from Midoriya’s frozen expression. “Shitty-hair asked for me to get you, the lazy bastard. Wanted me to ask you if you wanted to study or some shit like that. Don’t know why he’s expecting to get anything the fuck done with you around, but that’s not my shit to deal with, so get your fucking ass down there before I make you.”

Kaminari blinked before he rushed to his feet. “Oh, sure! Thanks Bakubro!”

Bakugo looked away from Kaminari and glanced back down to the smaller boy in front of him. He tsked. “Sure, whatever.”

Midoriya felt like his limbs and joints had rusted over at some point as he tried to slip past Bakugo. He struggled to move quickly, and he felt more like he was about to fall over with a few steps.

He hadn’t made it two steps out the door when Kaminari rushed past him in a blur, arms totally free
of all his books.  *Bakugo was right,* he thought quietly. He might be more convinced if Kaminari at least brought a pencil with him, but he didn’t. They were probably going to end up watching a movie or something.

Suddenly, a hand was wrapped around his bicep, fingers digging into his skin—even with the loose fabric of his hoodie in the way. (It was Shouji’s. He was the best at comforting, surprisingly, if you just opened up to him long enough to. His looks were very misleading.) Midoriya had to push down the visceral feeling that sent every one of his nerves alight to grab the arm and twist it until it snapped or otherwise.

It was just Bakugo. It was just Bakugo. *It was just Bakugo.*

“We need to talk,” the voice behind him growled.

Midoriya took in a sharp breath, holding it tightly in his lungs until they began to burn. He twisted around, gaze sharp. “I won’t if you hurt me,” he snapped.

Bakugo reeled back, surprise flitting across his face. His grip on Midoriya’s arm loosened slightly before rage sparked in his eyes. “I’m not hurting you, dipshit.”

“But you did,” Midoriya argued back. He didn’t mean to say that. There was just some part of him, boiling deep in his gut, that needed to protect himself and keep people like Bakugo at arm’s length. Bakugo needed to understand that he couldn’t touch him like this. He would set him off if he kept barging into his personal space demanding things from him.

Bakugo didn’t seem to realize that he was being hypocritical, either. At least Midoriya knew that hypocrisy and himself went hand in hand. Bakugo didn’t. For all the times that he irately snapped at others to stop interrogating him, it seemed like every time he would just do the same.

“You did hurt me. Back in the kitchen,” Midoriya continued. “You burned my shoulder through my clothing and I had to put ointment on it for several days before it would stop stinging.”

The pain wasn’t even that bad, but it was the idea that his own classmate would willingly hurt him that made something dark and ugly broil in his gut.

The hand around his arm tightened. It was actually starting to hurt.
“What the fuck are you going on about?” Bakugo snarled. “I dunno what the fuck is wrong with you, but you’re avoiding me and I don’t—”

“You don’t what?” Midoriya spat. So much for avoiding confrontation. He grabbed onto Bakugo’s wrist as the hand tightened even further around his arm. It would definitely bruise later. “Bakugo, you’re not entitled to anything. You’re not entitled about knowing me, you’re not entitled about knowing my past, and you definitely aren’t entitled to force me into a conversation with you. So stop acting like you are.”

Bakugo looked dangerously close to blow up. “What the fuck is wrong with you? I’ve been chasing after you for years, agonizing over your existence day after day after fucking day, all to see if I could help you and save you. So why the ever-loving fuck are you bitching about it?”

The part of Midoriya that he didn’t like hissed somewhere far back in his mind where he buried it. “Because you never ask,” he spit. He hadn’t raised his voice in a long, long time, and his voice cracked. “You just demand, demand, demand, and I’m sick and tired of it. You think I don’t feel bad about not telling you? I do, it’s just that you terrify the shit out of me and I can’t tell you anything because of it.”

“Well I’m fucking trying, but if you’d just give me a chance I could help you!”

Midoriya exploded. “You’re not helping me!” There was a moment of silence as Midoriya breathed heavily. “You say you want to but you just make things worse! You yell at me and you don’t fucking listen and I can’t talk like you want me to because it’s fruitless!” The hand around his arm tightened considerably, and it warmed. He was starting to lose the feeling in his arm as sharp spikes of pain shot down to the tips of his fingers.

“STOP IT!” he yelled, and he pulled at Bakugo’s wrist. (There was an ugly part of him that wanted to punch Bakugo in the face, but he held back.) “FUCKING STOP IT! YOU’RE HURTING ME!”

Bakugo lurched back as if he’d been slapped. The hand slid off his arm. Midoriya was panting as if he’d just gone on a run. All other sound had been drowned out as they stared at one another for several overwhelming seconds.

“Bakugo, I will tell you if you ask and when I’m ready,” he finally said, voice raw. “But you are not doing yourself any favors by demanding information that you’re not privy to. So listen to me for god’s sake and stop yelling at and hurting me. Please.” And then, in a quieter voice, he repeated,
“You’re not entitled to knowing anything about me, Bakugo, no matter what you’ve gone through. I’m sorry that you went through all that pain. But you can’t take it out on me.”

Bakugo was quiet when Midoriya turned on his heel and shuffled down to the common room. He didn’t grab Midoriya’s arm again.

Maybe Kirishima and Kaminari could fit in one more person. Midoriya needed the company.

Midoriya was sitting in front of Yaoyorozu, criss-crossed on the floor. She was on the couch, surrounded by other girls. Kouda was sitting beside Yaoyorozu for emotional support—though wasn’t he supposed to be Kouda’s support instead?—and the girls were all chattering amongst themselves. Jirou wasn’t directly by his side, but she was nearby. She had given him double thumbs up when he was dragged to their group meeting.

He was pretty sure the only reason they were convinced to let him stay was because of the cookies. Honestly, he couldn’t even be offended. Cookies were a great form of payment.

To be fair, he wasn't really paying attention to them. He had eaten a couple of his own cookies (he made several batches before the girls arrived, so there were plenty. Plus, he couldn't ignore cookies straight out of the oven) and had a cup of tea in his hands. With classes becoming cramped and exhausting in order to review as much as possible, and with Kayama dragging him out to the beach for longer periods of time, he always seemed to be tired.

It was a good tired, one that made him feel like he was doing something and improving himself, but it was starting to catch up with him too. He found himself drifting off while in the common room, somehow falling asleep on people every time. Todoroki got the brunt of it, with his left side so welcoming. It helped that the boy actually encouraged him to lean towards him. His warmth eased all of Midoriya's pain that would build up in his muscles over periods of time, and Todoroki quickly realized that.

So napping was fun. He'd slept on a bunch of people by now, and he was pretty sure that he was about to drift off again. Although there was a lot of conversation going on, the girls didn't end in a screaming fit like the boys' often did. Bakugo would usually end up chasing after Kaminari and Sero for doing something stupid. The girls, though, even the ones from the other classes, seemed kind enough. There were sparks of hidden rivalry still between them, but they seemed to get along well enough.
He was just starting to fall asleep when he felt hands slowly take the cup from his hands. He let them and adjusted himself so his head lied back in Yaoyorozu's lap.

"Oooo, that's a new development," he heard a female say. "Since when were you two this close?"

He felt more so than heard Yaoyorozu laugh. "We've been friends since he was eleven. I love him, but not romantically. It's always been this way, Kendo."

"Aw, that's cute. Childhood friends are the best."

There's more talking, but Midoriya fell asleep shortly after. He drifted in and out of consciousness. Laughter rang loudly between the girls at one point that he was half-awake. He could tell that it'd been a few hours before he finally shook himself off from his nap. His neck had a crick in it from the uncomfortable position, but it was bearable.

He slowly moved forward, rubbing at the base of his neck as it ached terribly. He was met with several, “Good morning, Sleeping Beauty”s from the girls as he stretched his arms high above his head.

“Glad to be back,” he said, taking it in stride. A familiar hand—Todoroki’s—handed him his cup of tea, which was warmed by his left side. He said his thanks quietly. “You’re here too?”

Todoroki shrugged. Ashido jumped up and answered that for him. “He was looking for you, actually! And we didn’t see the harm in letting him join in on our fun.”

“Right now, we’re talking about the skill sets and relationships of our classes,” Asui stated. “Class 1-B has a bunch of really cool people. I think you’d like to see them.”

One of the girls, Tokage he thought, laughed. “Yeah guys, don’t hesitate to come over. Although…” An eerie look on her face appeared. “Be careful. We might use it to get out on top.”

Kendo shrugged. “Maybe we will, maybe we won’t. Personally, though, I think…” She tilted her head. “Well, I don’t really see anything wrong with you guys. It wasn’t like you guys ever said that you were better than us, so I don’t think we should be hostile. The only one you might have to worry about is Monoma, in that case. But he means better, he just truly cares about our class and sometimes goes too far.”
Yaoyorozu smiled. “I get it. And I don’t suppose I can really blame Monoma much either, even if he
does get… a little out of hand.”

“A little rivalry didn’t hurt anyone!” Uraraka said as she took another cookie from the plate on the
coffee table.

Midoriya finally spoke. “I suppose that’s true, but you have to know where rivalry stops and
animosity begins. Hurting other people instead of competing with them can easily stunt their
growth.” He took a long sip of his tea. “Also, if Monoma gets to be too much, he can always come
spend a day with us. It might just make things worse, but you never know.”

“Don’t,” Hagakure immediately interrupted. “Mido-chan, you’re terrifying when you want
something. You might be all fluffy otherwise but when you want to convince someone you suddenly
become a monster. Not in a bad way, but you just… yeah.”

Midoriya blew some air upward to get the bangs out of his face. “Am I really that terrifying?”

“My knowledge of you from the cavalry battle allows me to perceive you in a better and more
accurate light,” Shiozaki, the girl with vines for hair, said. “You were much more calm and sweet
then, so I don’t believe that you are terrifying.”

Kodai, a girl with short black hair, replied, “I think your battle with Todoroki stands out to us the
most. That’s what made your impression on me, more so than anything else.”

“Y-you’re so much more… quiet in person. And m-mellow.” The girl who said that had long hair
and bangs that covered her eyes.

Todoroki huffed. “Trust me, Midoriya facing me was the most terrifying I’ve ever seen him to be.
He’s actually really nice.”

Midoriya smiled. “Thank you, Todoroki.”

A snort from directly behind him. “Yeah, he’s actually kind of shy. I’ve known him for years and
he’s always acted like a little puppy, harmless as a fly.”
“I’m not saying thank you for that, Yaochan.”

She laughed. Kendo shrugged. “Guess that’s good information to know.”

There were hands in his hair, then, slender fingers breaking the knots and tangles. Yaoyorozu was still giggling, and he sighed lightly as manicured nails grazed his scalp.

“Oh lord, your hair might actually even be longer than Kirishima’s by now,” Yaoyorozu said. She gently tugged at his hair as she began to braid it. In the background, Midoriya could hear someone ask who Kirishima was. Kouda signed to Jirou, and she translated.

Deja vu struck Midoriya. Hard. He’d been here, before. He’d been in this conversation. He’d been in this time.

_The dreams at our internships._

Those few dreams that Midoriya had when he fell asleep. The ones that he had caused by being stressed when he went to bed, which caused his time manipulation quirk to act up.

Midoriya hummed, even as his skin crawled. This hadn’t happened before. None of his dreams involving Class 1-A or UA at all had happened in real time. The closest memory he had was when he woke up to Sero being in his room, but the dream he had when he was little only encompassed the second time that Sero would inevitably crash into his bedroom.

“I think I’m gonna get it cut soon, actually,” he said instead.

“Oh really? And how are you going to get it this time?” she asked, just as she did in his dream.

Midoriya smiled, hoping that it didn’t look like a grimace. “I…” He hesitated. He hadn’t in his dream. “I think I’m going to get it cut short, actually.”

He wanted to change things. Just a little. Kayama had already set up the appointment since she
noticed his hair had grown out so much, but it wasn’t until recently that he’d been considering something new.

“Oh really?” Yaoyorozu asked. “What caused the sudden change?”

Midoriya paused. Thought for a bit. And then he replied, “Shinsou texted me at three in the morning. He asked me about hairstyles and how it would be physically possible to make with his hair, and it kind of devolved from there.”

(Shinsou also sent him a bunch of pictures of his cats, but he didn’t tell them that. Their cat conversations were private, one on one things that they would never reveal to anyone.

And though Midoriya made the excuse that Shinsou asked about what styles they could make work with his hair, in actually, it was what styles they could make with his fluffy cat’s hair. But that was their secret. Just the two of theirs.)

It was dark when he came back to the dorms. Kayama was accompanying him, her hand resting lightly on her shoulder.

He walked into the common room, where his classmates were sitting around eating. Bakugo was quietly moving in the kitchen. He’d been quiet for several days, and it made Midoriya feel bad, but his arguing with him seemed to humble him slightly. Bakugo was being gentler with him than before, and he seemed more receptive to listening to him.

They’d have to have a conversation soon. One of these days.

Midoriya wasn’t paid much attention to until Ojiro glanced up at him. He smiled at him, looked away, then whipped back around with wide eyes. “Woah,” he said, gaining Kirishima’s attention.

“Dude!” he screeched, immediately jumping to his feet. “You got your hair cut! No way!”

It wasn’t short, per say—it was still long enough that some strands brushed his eyebrows, and compared to his other classmates, it was normal in length—but it was no longer nearly brushing his
He held his arms around his head, embarrassed. “I wanted a bit of a change,” he explained, which was muffled by his arms.

“Oh my god it’s adorable!” Hagakure squealed, pouncing him from behind.

It was a weird change, but a nice one. He’d… never had his hair so short. The time he was born in had seen longer hair as attractive, so that was the trend (and had been up until he came here, which was when he was nine.) The trend stuck with him for all this time, but…

He felt relieved, almost, that he could finally shed a little bit more of its influence on him. He might not be able to change a lot about himself, but this? He could do this. He could change these little things about him that he wanted gone. He didn’t have to stay the same.

So yeah, he cut his hair a little short. It wasn’t much. It was something, though.

It was the night before the exams, and Midoriya left Kaminari’s room at early dusk. They had just crammed in the last bit of studying, and Midoriya reassured the boy that he was going to do just fine. The blonde had also taken up sessions with Yaoyorozu, and their combined work steadily improved his work. Not even Ashido’s presence could distract him.

Midoriya had spent most of his morning before school started with Nedzu. He hadn’t been able to sleep, and Nedzu had given him his personal number from the get-go, so he texted the animal at five am and asked if they could have another session. He got an immediate response, thank god, so they had an impromptu session. He was getting way more than once a week, but they were helping. He hadn’t had one as dramatic as the Hand One, thank goodness. Nedzu seemed relieved.

The day was almost entirely dedicated to review. None of the teachers, not even the strictest ones, delved into exams without at least one review day. It was nice, and Kaminari had paid attention.

He’d gone to the beach for a couple hours, talked with Tokoyami a bit, teased Juni, and then spent many more hours cramming with Kaminari. And then he was left to himself, traveling the empty hallways.
Midoriya stumbled. It’d been forever since Faerie Whisperer had come back to haunt him. The last
time that it happened, he’d been in interning with Endeavor. It was when Ignition…

look and see the eyes of your captor,

look and see the eyes of your liar,

they dont mean to hurt you.

Midoriya reached out blindly and collapsed against a wall, his vision tilting and everything growing
fuzzy.

they’re here, they’re here, those traitors are here—

digging their hands deep into your mind,

tearing pulling twisting reaching farther farther farther farther

here comes the white human-like creature, the brainwasher, the teacher the mother the detective the
grandfather the traitors the erupter the forgetful

dont let them know

Midoriya’s breath came out in short gasps as he slid down to the floor, directly at the end of the
hallway, ears ringing. He was only a couple feet from the corner that led to the common room, and
he could hear voices.
Voices came closer. Midoriya held a hand over his mouth and tried to make himself as small as possible. Two figures passed by him.

It was a boy and a girl.

They were speaking to one another in hushed tones. They were smiling, but their smiles were strained. They shared words unheard by any except them.

Midoriya didn’t breathe as he stared at their receding frames.

He dreamt that night of a forest alight, blue flames roaring high in the sky. There were high-pitched screams and a girl with yellow-orange hair with her large, never ending smile.

“Hello, Daizō. Want to play?”

He dreamt, but he wasn’t sure he really got any rest at all.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for your undying support like wth how is one author supposed to deal with this? We've also reached 50k hits. Whatever you want me to do, ill do it. Q and a's, special chapter, cracks, one shot, i dont care. Lay it all on me.

Also im legally allowed to make the dumb blonde joke bc im a blonde myself. Beat that.

Anyway, thank you so much to my art peoples, they're beautiful check them out please!!:

Maan Asukas' Instagram
Trifo's Tumblr

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!