# Children of Fate

**Rating:** Teen And Up Audiences  
**Archive Warning:** Major Character Death, Graphic Depictions Of Violence  
**Category:** Multi  
**Fandom:** 僕のヒーローアカデミア | Boku no Hero Academia | My Hero Academia, Mawaru Penguindrum  
**Character:** Midoriya Izuku, Yagi Toshinori | All Might, Todoroki Shouto, Shinsou Hitoshi, Hawks (My Hero Academia), Oginome Momoka, Bakugou Katsuki, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Toogata Mirio, Shigaraki Tomura | Shimura Tenko, Sir Nighteye (My Hero Academia), Class 1-A (My Hero Academia), Dabi (My Hero Academia), Kurogiri (My Hero Academia), Amajiki Tamaki, Eri (My Hero Academia)  
**Additional Tags:** where I take themes and other random stuff from mawaru penguindrum and turn it into a quirk, Midoriya Izuku Does Not Have One for All Quirk, Midoriya Izuku Has a Quirk, Angst, Hurt/Comfort, Comedy, Mawaru Penguindrum References, Revolutionary Girl Utena References, Temporary Character Death, Minor Character Death, spoilers for anime onlys, rampant character monologues about fate, some things to look forward to include: teddy bear robots, Izuku in an idol/prince costume, and penguins, from Utena it's mainly just sword fighting related stuff it had the same director so why not, Self-Esteem Issues, Mental Health Issues, Implied/Referenced Child Abuse, Child Abandonment, Child Neglect, Dabi is a Todoroki, spoilers for people not up to date with the manga, Prince Midoriya Izuku, Princess Tutu References  

**Series:** Part 1 of Children of Fate  
**Stats:** Published: 2018-10-29 Updated: 2019-07-04 Chapters: 51/? Words: 304992

## Summary

by lucky1025
"If everything is caused by fate, then God must be incredibly unfair and cruel"

“Fate” is a concept most people don’t like to think about. They despair at the idea that there exists some mystical force ordering the universe that dictates who succeeds and who fails in life, or that people die young simply because it was meant to be.

However, in a world where people are born with quirks, it is possible for people to be born with quirks that can surpass the limits of fate. For example, they can give a quirk to a person who was supposed to be quirkless, or maybe they can bring someone who was meant to die back to life.

People with these quirks can make what was previously impossible possible, and are referred to as “Children of Fate”. The only problem is that fate isn't kind to these Children who break the natural order.

That being said... this won't stop Izuku, the newly made Prince of the Crystal and owner of the Penguindrum, from becoming not just a hero, but a hero who can change fate.

Notes

I was randomly struck with inspiration to make the main thematic concept of Mawaru Penguindrum into a quirk like a year ago. It never went away and the chance of someone else writing this idea is extremely improbable, so here we are ¯\_(ツ)_/¯

You don't need to have watched Mawaru Penguindrum to read this. The only character I am using from that anime is Momoka, and I'm mostly making up her personality since most of what you learn about her in the show is second hand info anyway and it's been awhile since I watched the it.

Here is a link to a video that uses two of the main songs from the Mawaru Penguindrum ost, I think it they really convey the feeling I'm trying to get with this chapter and throughout the story in general: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RyWbtikNdcM&t=304s

Hopefully someone else also finds this idea entertaining...
‘I hate the word “fate”. Birth, encounters, partings, success and failure, fortune and misfortune in life. If everything is already set in stone by fate, then why are we even born? There are those born wealthy, those born of beautiful mothers, and those born into war or poverty. If everything is caused by fate, then God must be incredibly unfair and cruel.’

Midoriya Inko hadn’t truly taken those words her husband had declared to heart. Of course, she hadn’t spoken against him either. She understood that the quirk he possessed gave him a different perspective of internal clockwork mechanisms that made up the workings of the universe, not to mention what he knew from that other thing he possessed.

But the first time that he had first said those words to her, Inko was still rejoicing the second chance he had allowed her.

Through just the offering of half her lifespan and an impending case of future misfortune as “punishment for changing fate”, Midoriya Hisashi was able to use his quirk to revive Inko’s childhood friend Mitsuki from the tragic car accident that had claimed her life at the young age of twenty. Despite the fact he was simply an unrelated bystander at the time, Hisashi had offered the abilities of himself and his little book of miracles to Inko in the face of her despair.

It was a miracle that could only be gifted through love and sacrifice, and the punishment for enacting it wasn’t light, as it was proven when just a week later Mitsuki was involved in another accident which rendered her right leg permanently unusable, but it was unmistakably a miracle none the less.

Even if fate and God are cruel, as long as people can change their lives in some way, surely there will be more fortune in life than misfortune. That is what she had thought.

And she continued thinking this through her fortune of cultivating a friendship and relationship with Hisashi, through the joy of their wedding day, and especially the pinnacle of happiness that was the birth of her beautiful son Izuku.

In the back of her mind she was always aware, though, of the overhanging guillotine that could be sent down from the heavens at any moment. Both her and her husband had a punishment pending for
them, her for changing the fate of Bakugou Mitsuki, and him simply for being born with a quirk that could change fate, being a Child of Fate, as he described it.

She had prayed that the heavens would grant them even a little bit of mercy. Even if they were struck by an accident like Mitsuki’s and became bound by wheelchairs or crutches, she would accept that sort of fate because they could still work around that. They could still have the ultimate happiness of their life that was their family.

But her prayers had fallen on deaf ears.

*If everything is caused by fate, then God must be incredibly unfair and cruel.*

Looking at the pristine white hospital bed holding up the pale and still body of her child, only 14 years of age, Midoriya Inko now agreed with the words of her husband with all her heart.

After the doctor exited through the door, leaving them alone for their mourning, a steady hand settled itself on her shoulder. She turned to look at her husband’s face through her tears and sobs, his curly brown hair was ragged and unkempt, and his dark eyes glistened with tear-streaks down his face.

“I checked before coming here,” his voice wavered only slightly as he explained, “This is definitely my punishment, my punishment for being born with this quirk.”

The Number One hero, the Symbol of Peace himself, All Might had been minutes away from successfully rescuing their child from a slime villain, the doctors had told them, but he was still too late. Even after he personally rushed Izuku to the hospital for treatment, there was little they could do, and in the end…

In the end…

The overhanging guillotine had fallen down upon her little boy’s neck.

A punishment by fate that was the definition of unfair and cruel, for what else did it mean to punish a child of the sins of his parents.
But still there was a single ray of hope, though whether it shone from heaven or hell she didn’t know, for Midoriya Hisashi was a man that could create miracles.

“Can you save him?” she asked in a quiet and hoarse voice, barely a whisper, “Can you bring him back to us, Hisashi?”

Hisashi paused before answering, as though considering the way he wanted to phase his thoughts, “Your punishment has also appeared, Inko. When I inquired further, I learned that when a death occurs as a punishment of fate, half of a lifespan isn’t enough to revive the person, you need to give everything,” he paused again looking her straight into her eyes, “You only have half Inko, that’s why it can’t be you.”

Inko looked away from her husband and shut her eyes tight, trying to keep renewed tears at bay.

It was just like Hisashi to get straight to the crux of the matter, and to know even without her having said it that she was offering up herself for their boy. Even in a normal case, Hisashi had once said that at least a half was the minimum that needed to be given to revive a person. Between the two of them it would make no sense for her to be the one offering anyway.

But in this case, since Izuku needed to be given everything… There’s no way this can go that doesn’t end with someone missing from their perfect family of three.

“Inko…” Hisashi’s voice wavered even more than it did before, but the conviction it shown was firmer still, “Let me bring our boy back to you. No matter how you look at it, its only natural that a parent should choose their child’s life over their own life. That’s what it means to love, after all…”

He couldn’t help his mouth quirking up at one end in a half smile, “Since he’ll be getting everything, then that means he’ll be getting my quirk too. Our little Izuku can have a real shot at being a hero now, just like he’s always dreamt of.”

She won’t bother trying to talk him out of it. She knows that he’s already made up his mind, and as cold as it may seem, Inko would also choose to save their son over saving Hisashi. Just like Hisashi would choose Izuku over Inko as well.

But even as she starts mourning for her husband’s impending end, she can’t restrain herself from fearing what fate may still have in store for them.
“If Izuku is getting your quirk, that means he’ll be punished too, you know, even if he goes his whole life without using it once. What will happen to him then? Will it be better than this? What if it’s even worse?” She can’t even imagine what fate could be worse than this, let alone think of it happening to her son.

Hisashi’s eyes strayed from her face to Izuku, still lying on the bed in front of them.

“I don’t know, Inko. There’s no way to know that. But at this point… the only way to go is to let things come as they may. Maybe even with what awaits him, his future can still be one filled with fortune, maybe not. But either way, he has to have a future in the first place in order to get there.”

His hand, which was still upon her shoulder, tightened its grip as he continued, “We’ll just have to place our bet that it will be a good one. It’s a bet we already made once, when we brought him into this world the day he was born. That’s all we can do.”

Inko looked at her husband with her watery green eyes, then lifted his hand from her shoulder and held it between both hands. She leaned up from her short stature to kiss him gently.

“I love you, Hisashi,” she whispered into his ear, “Bring our child back to me, please. I’ll take care of him in your place.”

Hisashi gave her a firm but gentle second kiss in return, and hugged her tightly with one hand, the other still within her grip. “I know you will, Inko. I love you and Izuku, always. Remember that even after I’m gone, please.”

Inko rested her head on her husband’s chest, listening to his heart beat. “Of course, always,” she breathed as a simple reply.

The couple stayed like that for some time, before turning as one to face their child, and the destination of their fate.
When Midoriya Izuku slowly opened his eyes, it was to the sight of what appeared to be a white ceiling.

“Where…” he started to mumble, turning his eyes to examine his surroundings.

His first thought was that he was at a hospital, though he was slow to remember how he would have gotten there. Upon looking around though and seeing red benches and hanging metal rails, he realized that actually he was inside what appeared to be a regular metro train.

Then he looked outside the window, only to see pitch black darkness, as though just outside the train was a never-ending expanse of nothingness. That’s when he realized that this was no regular train.

“Izuku… Oh, Izuku, my baby…”

As he heard the sound of his mother crying, Izuku slowly regained feeling throughout his body. His mother was holding his upper body in her arms with his head lying on her chest, and the rest of his body was lying upon what seemed to be a plush, light pink blanket covering of a bed right at the center of the train. Izuku gently started pushing himself up to look around the cabin.

“Mom? What…”

“Izuku, I’m glad you were able to wake up so easily.”

The voice of his father startled Izuku. It was only then that he looked forward to see his father standing at the end of the bed.

He was wearing a strange black and white outfit that looked like some mix between what a prince might wear and a train conductor uniform, with a black tailcoat featuring long trailing tails in the back, simmering gold shoulder pads and double-breasted buttons, and white pants ending in black calf length boots.

It was complete with a distinct conductor’s hat that featured two black slanted dots with an orange triangular orange patch on the rim of the hat between them. It looked vaguely like the face of a penguin.
Izuku knows that is the outfit that his father wears when he uses what he describes as his “quirk enhancing book”, a mysterious item that one day had literally fallen from the sky into his father’s hands, the Penguindrum.

“Dad! Why are we– Is this that train you and mom talked about?!”

While Izuku has seen his father using the Penguindrum before, he has never seen this train. It was explained to him, when he was young and curious, that one cannot enter the Train of Fate unless they plan on using it.

He later learned that there was only one thing that the Train of Fate is used for.

“Yes, Izuku, it is. Your mother and I came to pick you up.”

Midoriya Hisashi moved from the end of the bed to stand next to his son’s side as he spoke, opposite of wear Inko was leaning on the bed. He leaned down to press a soft kiss against Izuku’s forehead and carded his fingers through Izuku’s green curls.

“The outcome of your run in with that villain is all my fault, Izuku, because your father was born with this quirk... So let your old man take responsibility for this, okay? I’m sorry for the pain that I’ve caused you.”

It was at that point that Izuku remembered the events leading up to this strange awakening; Kacchan’s cruel taunts, his ruined notebook, walking underneath the bridge on his way home. It ended with a slime villain trying to suffocate him, while Izuku lost consciousness.

“That means I was– Wait! Dad, where are you going?!” His father had stepped back from his bedside and started walking towards the door at the end of the cabin. It opened to reveal the outside of a second carriage attached to the unit they were inside.

“Because of my punishment, I couldn’t do this like how I did with your mother and Auntie Mitsuki. Please don’t feel guilty that I’ve traded myself for you, Izuku. It was all my fault in the first place anyway. I love you so much… I couldn’t stand to not do this for you.”
His father smiled to him from the doorway, it reminded Izuku of the kind of smile All Might wore whenever he saved people. But instead of the overwhelming awe and hope that he felt when seeing All Might’s smile, Izuku just felt a creeping sense of alarm and dread.

“Dad, wait! What are you talking about?! Why are you leaving?!” Izuku leaned forward with his hand stretched towards his father, as though trying to follow him, but the firm hand of mother holding onto his shoulder stopped him, “Mom?!”

When he looked at his mother’s face, he realized that tears were streaming from her eyes. “Your father and I decided this together, Izuku, he had to give you everything just to bring you back to me. I’m so sorry, but please accept this.”

“What?! No, Dad stop!” His head whipped back towards his father, he was in the middle of walking across the connection to the other train car. Izuku quickly jumped out of the bed and ran towards the door, but his mother caught him by the shoulder again once he reached the doorway.

“Izuku, you need to stay here. It’s already been done,” his mother’s hand gripped his shoulder tight and her voice was quiet but firm. He’s never seen her look at him so intensely, ”At this point if you go out there all you’ll be doing is leaving two of our family dead instead of one. Please respect your father’s sacrifice…”

Midoriya Inko’s words rang through him like the tolling of a funeral bell, and soon he was crying too.

His dad had already reached the second car. He had thought that there could be nothing more disheartening than hearing the doctor say that he was quirkless, or than hearing everyone say that he could never be a hero.

He knew he was wrong as a sob burst through his throat, “Dad–! ”

“Izuku,” his father called from across the connection, “my quirk is yours now. Whether you use it to become a hero, or go down some other path in life, I’m sure you’ll use it well. You were always such a smart boy.”

He was still smiling.
“Please try to be like me, though, and don’t use it on yourself lightly. Think of the rest of your life as a precious gift from me if you need to. You’re such a kind child, I feel like if I don’t tell you this, you’ll go around giving pieces of yourself to every person in need you come across until you die an early age. Please don’t do that, it would make your mother and I so sad…”

From the train car Hisashi was on, tiny pieces of glass began breaking off from the car and floated up through the air, before disappearing all together. It seemed as though it was slowly falling into pieces.

His father turned his head to look at the phenomena, before turning back to Izuku, “Ah– It seems like we’re taking too long, I’m sorry Izuku.” The smile he was giving wasn’t like All Might’s anymore. It was a very sad smile, paired with the tears slipping from his eyes.

“Goodbye, Izuku, Inko. I love you both so much, please remember me…” Hisashi couldn’t keep his voice from wavering a bit.

“–Oh, and Izuku, I gave you the Penguindrum too, okay. Please keep it safe, but don’t be afraid to use it as you please.”

With his last parting words spoken, the mechanism linking the two train cars together released, and the car that was still attached to the train with Izuku and his mother on board gave a jerk as it slowly began to move forward, leaving the second car with is father behind.

Glass pieces started to rapidly part from the car, soon leaving whole chunks missing.

Midoriya Hisashi then started breaking into glass as well, his pieces dissolving into nothingness along with the glass from the train car.

Izuku screamed through his sobbing, “I love you, Dad! I promise I’ll remember you, and I promise I won’t waste what you gave me! I promise– !”

He could feel his mother’s hand shaking from her quiet sobbing as she watched her husband’s fading form beside him.

The Train gained more speed, rolling away from the lonely and forgotten train car.
By time that Izuku could hardly see it in the distance, engulfed by encroaching blackness, the train and Midoriya Hisashi had already completely dissolved into glass, and disappeared into nothing. All that was left were rail tracks that led to nowhere.

At this point, Izuku’s legs gave out and he fell to his knees on the floor of the white train car. Inko followed his movement and hugged her son tightly with his head turned into her chest. His tears wet her shirt as they sobbed on the cold floor together, a family of three reduced to two. The pain in his chest refused to dissipate.

Thus, came the end of Midoriya Hisashi’s existence, having reached the destination of his fate…

And thus, came the beginning of Midoriya Izuku’s new fate, and the beginning of the Peguindrum’s new successor…

It was a miracle the likes of which Musutafu General Hospital had never been seen before.

A young boy, only 14 years of age, had been brought in by the Number One hero, All Might, in an attempt to save his life. But by the time he had reached the doctors, all attempts to resuscitate him had failed. The doctors, though saddened by the end of such a young life, accepted it as a reality that was often seen in a hospital, and had called in the boy’s mother to explain the situation and give a short moment to grieve with the body of her child.

However, sometime later the mother had called the nurse, saying that the boy had woken up. And sure enough, when the medical staff arrived at the room, the previously deceased child was instead looking at them through teary green eyes.

He had held a small, light pink book to his chest, but they took no notice of it, believing it not to be of importance.

*This is unmistakably a miracle.* They had thought. *If this is the work of fate, then God must be*
"incredibly kind and merciful, to make an exception for this boy.

“Well, Midoriya-san, it seems like Izuku here is in perfect health now, though I’ve never seen anything like this in my entire career as a doctor before,” stated the primary doctor on the case, “But due to these unusual circumstances, the hospital would like to keep him for one more day just to make sure there are no unforeseen complications.”

Midoriya Inko, also with tears in her eyes, which looked very much like her son’s, sniffed before replying in a steady voice, “Yes, that is understandable.”

“Thank you for your cooperation.” The doctor smiled at her softly, but as a thought crossed his mind, his eyebrows scrunched in slight confusion. “For some reason I had thought for a moment that I need to inform the father as well, but that’s a mistake on my part. After all, it states that you are the single parent of Izuku in your records. In any case, I’ll leave you two be for now. Just focus on resting, Izuku-kun.”

As the doctor left the room, he never noticed how the patient and his mother forcibly stiffened, as though if they didn’t hold themselves together they would fall to pieces because his words.

Chapter End Notes

I will incorporate various quotes from Mawaru Penguindrum into the story because it’s got some really good ones so I couldn’t help myself.

quotes from this chapter:
the entire first paragraph, and "destination of fate" is a common phrase that is used throughout the show
All men are not created equal. This was the reality of society that Izuku learned at the young age of four. Because it seemed as though ever since that day, he no longer had a future, and the only certain thing was that he wouldn't amount to anything.

When Izuku was four, he had heavily anticipated the arrival of his quirk. As a hero fanatic, he had known that the kind of hero a person could become depended on the kind of quirk they had, and that some quirks were more suited to hero work than others. He had hoped that his quirk was of a similar kind to the quirks of the people he looked up to, so that he might be a great hero in the future that could save many people.

His friend Kacchan, with his quirk Explosion, had such an incredible quirk for being a hero. The day his quirk appeared was the day that confirmed his future as a great hero. His mother had a quirk that allowed her to pull small objects towards her, and while it would've taken some work, Izuku was sure that he would find some way to be a hero if he happened to get it.

And of course, everyone knew that All Might’s super strength and speed was an amazing hero’s quirk that helped him to reach the number one spot in the hero rankings. The combination of All Might’s super quirk and his dedication to helping people, with a bright smile on his face and his proud reassurance of “I am here!”, had helped to make him Izuku’s favorite hero.

However, even in the face of all these possibilities, as well as the many other kinds of quirks he had seen, what Izuku had wanted most of all was to have his father’s quirk, Conductor.

Midoriya Hisashi had told Izuku the story of how he met his mother, of how with the help of a small book that seemed to be made of magic, the Penguindrum, his quirk was able to help her save Auntie Mitsuki’s life.

While his father had said that Conductor would be a hard quirk to apply to heroics, though using it together with the Penguindrum would simplify things a lot, Izuku had still hoped to inherit a quirk like Conductor over all else. After all, what other quirk could let a hero grant people the chance to give their loved ones a second chance at life? What other quirk could let a hero literally change a person’s fate?

It was unmistakably a quirk that created miracles, and in Izuku’s eyes, that was the perfect kind of
quirk for a hero to have.

However, fate was not so kind to the young 4-year-old child. The day that he had gone to the doctor to check on his quirk development had left a mark on Izuku’s dream, as well as all his interactions with society.

_Ever since that day, he no longer had a future, and the only certain thing was that he wouldn't amount to anything._

Upon hearing that he was quirkless, the stark difference in the way people would treat him was staggering.

Kacchan had gone from being his best friend to being his worst bully, a constant reminder of how much of a useless “Deku” he was for not being born with a quirk. His teachers had gone from being attentive to being down right neglectful, because what did they care for some quirkless child that would be incapable of pulling their own weight in society. Even random strangers who happened to hear about his “condition” in passing sent him pitying looks.

Even his parents, who had once completely supported his dream to be a hero, now no longer believed that it was possible for him. Though at the very least they didn’t think he was completely incapable like most people.

In this age of quirks, people that were fated to be quirkless were fated to have no future, they were fated to never amount to anything worthwhile in their life. For how can they achieve success in a society that looks down upon them for simply being born missing something that _everyone normal_ has?

Quirkless people have no future because society doesn’t believe they can have one. Even with a sizeable 20% of the population being quirkless, the 80% majority still rules.

_There are those born wealthy, those born of beautiful mothers, and those born into war or poverty. If everything is caused by fate, then God must be incredibly unfair and cruel._

He had once overheard his father say those words to his mother in private, sometime after his quirk appointment, and they describe the reality that the young 4-year-old Izuku had realized.

All men are not created equal. People are “fated” to be born into specific circumstances, and these circumstances were not equal in prosperity. That was why Kacchan could be born with an incredible
hero’s quirk, while Izuku was born to be a Deku with no quirk at all. Spinning the wheel of fortune can give one person a jackpot, and another person debt. It was a simple fact of life.

*Even so, he still wanted to be a hero.*

Even if his parents didn’t believe he could be a hero. Even if everyone told him he couldn’t be *anything*, let alone a hero. He still decided that that was the only path he wanted to take, that if it was his fate to never amount to anything, he would find some way to *change* his fate so that he could amount to *something*.

All he wanted to do was help people, trying to do this was his purpose in life, his reason for existing. And with or without a quirk, he would find some way to do this. However, even though he had faith in himself, living in a society that told him every day that he was worthless and would never amount to anything took its toll.

That’s why on particularly hard days, when Kacchan’s words and explosions hurt a little too much to handle or when one too many teachers had ignored his pain or achievements, even though he knew it was impossible, Izuku would sometimes wish to whatever God or gods that exist in this universe, whether they be unfair and cruel or kind and merciful, that he would one day wake up and find that he has his father’s quirk, the quirk that he had desired above all else as a young child.

Then came the day where that actually happened.

Now all he wishes was that he could go back and *erase* all those times that he’s made that *stupid, petty, worthless wish*. Though he certainly doesn’t make that wish to God now.

*This isn’t a miracle.* He wants to tell those doctors, even after they have already long left Musutafu General Hospital behind. *This is a tragedy. An ironic twist of fate, that happened because Dad spun the quirk wheel of fortune and somehow managed to land a jackpot and debt simultaneously, because Izuku couldn’t even save himself let alone other people, because he was such a useless Deku that Dad needed to sacrifice his life and existence to save him.*

A person’s life and a person’s existence were two very different things, in the context of his father’s quirk and the Penguindrum. His father had only mentioned it once before in reply to Izuku’s never-ending questions about his impossible quirk, that if a person loses their life, they simply die, but if a person loses their existence, *it’s as if they were never alive in the first place.*
That’s why the hospital staff didn’t remember that Izuku’s father was also at his bedside along with his mother. Checking in on Hizashi’s friends showed that none of them remember him, though they still know Inko and Izuku. Even Auntie Mitsuki, who was once saved by Hisashi, remembered neither him nor how she was saved in the first place, other than the fact that Inko was involved somehow. The only people who remember him are Izuku and his mother.

All that’s left in other people is a vague sense that something might be missing, that there might be something that was supposed to be remembered, but if it was forgotten so easily, it probably wasn’t important in the first place.

Birth records, the Midoriya’s marriage certificate, even the framed pictures that are placed throughout their family’s apartment, they are all missing Midoriya Hisashi’s name, information, and image.

Sometime after she had worked through their important documents and pictures, to see what had changed and what had stayed the same, Mom idly stated, “I suppose it’s a good thing he ended up taking on my name instead of the other way around, this transition might have been harder if that wasn’t the case…” Did he know that this might happen some day? was left unsaid.

Izuku has both the quirk Conductor and the Penguindrum now, but whereas before he would have explored these new abilities in an endless investigation, at this point he hasn’t even used them once.

Why would he want to use them? He doesn’t want them anymore. He would trade them in a heartbeat just for the chance to put his father’s body in a proper grave, that way at least his mother might have a chance at getting closure.

If everything is caused by fate, then God must be incredibly unfair and cruel.

That was the outlook that Izuku had on this entire situation, and it might have stayed that way, if it hadn’t been for a certain encounter that occurred around two weeks after the day that he was supposed to die.
“I-Izuku! Come quickly, A-All Might is here to see you!”

Midoriya Izuku, who was previously lying on his bed wondering aimlessly through his through, promptly fell off his bed in surprise at his mother’s declaration. He landed on the floor with a thud.

“What-- All Might?! As in All Might, All Might?!”

He jerked himself off his bedroom floor’s All Might themed rug and threw open the door in a rush, running down the hallway and towards the door.

Sure enough, standing in the doorway next to his mother was the hulking figure of the Symbol of Peace himself, All Might. He stood tall in his blue and red hero costume, but the way he barely seemed to fit between the door frame and how his two bits of stuck up hair brushed the top of the Midoriya household’s doorway almost looked comical.

And of course, All Might’s every present smile was gleaming on his face, Izuku just never thought it would be directed at him.

“I am here, young Midoriya! It’s good to see you looking well boy!”

While the presence of such a famous hero at her doorstep surely had her anxious, his mother’s hospitable nature still shone through. “P-Please, come in, All Might. You can rest on the couch while I make us some tea, unless you would prefer anything else?”

As he stepped through the entryway All Might replied, “Oh, there’s no need for that. I’m sorry to say that I won’t be able to stay long. I just wanted to have the opportunity to properly meet young Midoriya and apologize.”

Izuku had felt a rising sense of awe at the fact that All Might actually wanted to meet him! but it was soon replaced by confusion as he internalized the rest of his statement.

“A-Apologize? What would need to apologize for, All Might?” Izuku managed to stutter out, eyebrows scrunched in response to the questioning declaration.
At his words, All Might seemed to shrink in on himself in sadness, his iconic smile wavered a bit. “I’m not sure if you two remember due everything else that was keeping you occupied, but I was the hero that arrived on scene for Midoriya’s assault by that villain. Despite being the Number One hero, I still wasn’t able to find that villain fast enough to rescue him. It’s only because of a miracle that the boy made it through alive.”

*It wasn’t a miracle, it was a tragedy.*

All Might bent in a low bow towards both Inko and Izuku as his somber deep voice continued, “I’m sure that if I was able to live up to my duties as a hero and had properly rescued him, it would have saved you two a lot of suffering. I am sorry I failed you.”

Izuku gave a startled reply, “A-Ah! You don’t have to apologize, All Might. It’s not your fault, really…” After all, fate was clearly sabotaging you. In a normal situation, the Number One hero would have definitely made it in time, he refrained from speaking the rest of his thoughts though.

“That’s right, All Might. There’s no need to apologize, you did what you could for that situation and brought my child to the hospital as fast as possible. After all, even for the Number One hero, it’s impossible to save everyone right…? The important thing is that Izuku made it out okay,” his mother’s voice was soft but clear. She gazed at the man with kind, understanding eyes. “Thank you for doing what you could to help him and for coming to see him today.”

*He’s only okay because his father isn’t.*

“Y-Yeah, thank you for trying to save me, All Might! You even came to see me when you didn’t have to!” Izuku hoped that his words conveyed the amount of gratitude he felt for the hero he had looked up to since he was a young child.

“I do not feel as though I deserve your thanks, but I will accept them gladly.” All Might then raised himself from his bow

“Oh, if you still feel guilty about this whole thing, there is one thing you can do if you feel like you need to make up for it…” A grin began to form on his mother’s face. “I know for a fact that my little Izuku here would just love to have your autograph, you are his favorite hero after all.”

“—Ah, Mom!” he could feel his face heat up as he exclaimed in embarrassment.
“Is that so? Haha!” All Might laughed, “Well an autograph is the least I could do for you, boy!”

After rushing to get one of his notebooks for All Might, the hero signed his name in large black print and handed it back to Izuku and *oh god he can’t believe he actually has All Might’s autograph—*

“Well, I have to get going now. The schedule of a hero is very jam packed you know, haha!” All Might stuck his hand out towards Izuku. “I hope to meet you under less dire circumstances next time, young Midoriya!”

“R-right. Thanks again, All Might!” Izuku offered his hand for a firm handshake from his favorite.

During this, the latent abilities of his father’s quirk arose, and it seemed as though a golden apple had appeared within All Might’s chest…

“Ack– !”

“Hmm? Is something wrong young Midoriya?”

“A-A-All Might! Your Fruit– what on Earth happened to it?!”

“…My fruit? I’m sorry, boy, but I have no idea what you are talking about,” All Might’s confusion was evident in is tone.

“Oh dear… Izuku what’s the matter with his fruit?” While the hero was still in the dark, his mother knew exactly what he was referring to.

All Might’s Fruit of Fate was a sight for Izuku’s eyes alone, and it wasn’t a pretty one, but despite its abysmal state there was one notable feature that gave him the most concern.

*No– that means… But if this has something to do with a punishment that could explain what happened to his Fruit…*

Izuku had to make to a decision. The knowledge his father gained from the Penguindrum is not to be
given out lightly. The whole system was something that existed beyond the wildest imaginings of humankind and was almost entirely unbelievable without proof. Furthermore, telling the wrong person could result in someone targeting the Penguindrum to use for unethical purposes.

Not only that, but he will have to use Conductor and the Penguindrum, something that up until this point he had been avoiding. Just the thought of using what was once his father’s quirk and possession made him sick to his stomach.

However, in the end the decision was an easy one to make. After all, this was the Symbol of Peace, a hero and person of unmatched caliber, and Izuku’s favorite hero who had even taken time out of his day to personally apologize to him.

He deserves to be fully informed about the state of his fate, and he deserves a chance to change it.

Izuku straightened up, held on tighter to All Might’s hand, and looked him straight in his shaded eyes.

“All Might… I know you said that you needed to leave, but what I need to tell you is important, your life could be a stake here,” he stated firmly. When he saw the hero’s confusion increase he continued, “I’ll answer most of your questions with my explanations. First, let me start off with this though… have you ever seen a golden apple that looked like it was inside a person, either in yourself or other people?”

He heard his mother let out a quiet gasp as she realized the implications of his question. All Might on the other hand, was starting to emerge from his confusion, but answered in a questioning tone, “… Yes. Only once, though. I saw it in myself and in… a mentor of mine.”

“That apple, All Might… is what is known the Fruit of Fate. Each person has one, and it is the culmination of their entire being, life, and fate all rolled together. You have a specific feature on your Fruit that indicates that your quirk can interact with these Fruit and can therefore “change fate”, which makes you a Child of Fate.”

Izuku ignored the hero’s questioning looks and made sure his grip remained tight. “My dad was a Child of Fate, and when he passed on his quirk to me, I also became a Child of Fate. I will show you what that means, so please remain calm…”

All Might started to open is mouth, likely to voice his concern, but Izuku cut him off.
“Survival Strategy”

With those words uttered, the room that was previously filled with three people was now down to only one.

Chapter End Notes

quotes from this chapter:
The first two sentences from the first paragraph are actually from bnha, and sentence after it is the last part of the quote I used in the first chapter. The phrase "___ will never amount to anything" is also used throughout the show in general. "Survival Strategy" is a catchphrase from the show.
I forgot to mention this when I first posted this chapter but "Fruit of fate" and "Children of fate" are both central concepts of the show, but are used in a metaphorical sense instead of literally.
Snow White's Poisoned Apple

Chapter Notes

Since the kinds of clothes I'm describing in this chapter are probably hard to picture if you've never seen Mawaru Penguindrum, here is a link to a picture on the wiki showing the outfit the girl in the picture is wearing. The only difference is that her boots don't have high-heels and she's not wearing the scarf:
http://penguindrum.wikia.com/wiki/Princess_of_the_Crystal?
file=Chara_princess_of_the_crystal.jpg

All Might let out a gasp as he realized that his surroundings had changed.

Where he had once stood in the living room of a homely apartment, he was now in some sort of library or large study.

Large windows let in abundant sunlight from what seemed to be a deep blue sky, shining upon the dark pink walls, vaulted ceiling, dark wood flooring, and cool black sofas and inclining chairs. There were also tables of various sizes throughout the room made of dark brown wood, and various lamps with light pink lamp shades, though there didn’t seem to be a need for them with all the light from the windows.

The second most notable feature, however, was without a doubt the large dark brown bookshelves, which extended against all the major portions of the room’s walls, almost reaching the ceiling with how tall they stretched. On their shelves were countless books of various dull colors, all of them looked old but well kept, and not a bit of dust was in sight.

There was only one wall which was clear of bookshelves, and upon that pink wall hung three portraits; Starting from the left was a picture that was unmistakably of young Midoriya in a strange outfit, with curly dark green hair, and matching green eyes that seemed to bore right into the soul. Next to his portrait was a picture of a man with similarly curly dark brown hair and steady brown eyes, wearing an outfit that was similar to but not as strange as Midoriya’s.

Young Midoriya’s father most likely...

The last portrait was of a small young girl who was even younger than Midoriya. She was also wearing an outlandish black and white outfit, that seemed to be some mix between an idol and a princess dress? The corset top and trailing puffed skirt with frilled edges were black, with the front
portion of the skirt removed to reveal a white leotard and long black boots underneath. The inside of the skirt that could be seen from the long train was a deep red, and she was wearing some sort of hat that was stylized to look like the face of a Rockhopper Penguin with pink eyes.

The girl had distinctive deep pink straight hair that stopped just above her shoulders and expressionless matching pink eyes, they looked as if they were actually watching him.

The girl’s picture was set over the first most notable feature of the room, which was a tall, wide silver mirror with two cloth penguin hats hanging from the top corners. They had appeared in the room in such a way that they were directly in front of it. All Might choked on his breath looking into the mirror.

Because even though he was still in his full-blown “All Might” form, the person that was reflected in front of him was the frail, skinny, limp haired, and sunken eyed form of Yagi Toshinori, still in his ill-fitting All Might-sized hero costume.

“Well,” he could see the eyes of Midoriya’s reflection looking at him as it spoke these words, following along with the boy’s voice, “you’ve brought quite the visitor, little Izuku. He certainly has some secrets underneath that muscled heroic exterior. You may be the best hero, but you certainly aren’t the fairest.”

“Please don’t tease him, Momoka-san,” the Midoriya standing next to him spoke, he wasn’t looking at All Might through the mirror, but at his own reflection, “his Fruit of Fate is in a fairly unhealthy state, so it would make sense that he’s not as healthy as he seems.”

It was at this point that All Might realized that Midoriya and Midoriya’s reflection were speaking completely independently of each other.

“–Gah!”

He couldn’t help his high-pitched exclamation and involuntary step backwards.

Midoriya’s reflection laughed at him. Instead of green eyes, he was examined by deep pink irises and pupils. “Haha, but it seems like a rather easy thing to do. I’ll probably just end up teasing him on accident.”
Midoriya sighed in response before turning towards All Might to speak, “I’m sorry if this seems… presumptuous, but as you can see, there really isn’t a point in keeping up appearances when faced with Momoka’s Mirror. I’m not sure how you’re keeping that form, but if the other one feels more comfortable please feel free to relax yourself.”

After a moment’s hesitation, All Might started letting off a mass of steam. When the steam dissipated, what was left was Toshinori’s true form.

The questions started spewing from his mouth, along with coughs of blood, “What– where on Earth are we?! What is this place?!” He glanced over the boy’s outfit and couldn’t keep himself from adding, “And what are you wearing?”

The boy was wearing something that seemed to be a derivative of the outfit worn by the girl in the portrait.

His black top had a tall, stiff collar and featured three sets of golden buttons on either side of his chest connected with horizontal golden trim. The top ended at a pair of tight white shorts that stopped before the mid-thigh and piece of frilled fabric that puffed out around his sides and ended behind him in coat tails, its shape looked similar to a short skirt lacking a front. It was black on the outside and red on the inside.

The outfit was complete with a pair of high black boots that reached just past his knees, black gloves that reached just past the elbows, and a high collared deep red cloak pinned shut at the top of his left side with a small golden apple ornament.

On his head was a crown featuring tall spikes, with an orange middle spike and two adjacent white spikes with a slanted black dot at the base. The rest of the crown was black. Some people might describe it as looking vaguely penguin-like.

Izuku looked worried at the sight of blood coming out of his mouth, but in response to his question the boy examined himself more thoroughly using the mirror, and promptly choked on air.

“What– ?!”

He took off the cloak to further examine himself, with Midoriya’s reflection, who was apparently named Momoka, following his movements either for amusement or so he could continue using the mirror. Its absence revealed that the boy’s shirt was sleeveless, showing off his shoulders.
“Momoka-san, what’s with this design?! Actually, I always thought Dad made his own uniform… ?”

“Oh, no. I made it, like how I made yours. I decided to give you a look that made you look more boyish.” Momoka-san spoke with amusement clear in their tone, “You know, I just threw in a bit of pop idol fashion here, a bit of dashing prince charming there, added a marching-band uniform theme, stylized it with feminine tones throughout, and topped the whole thing with a superhero cape, since I know you like heroes.”

They said this as if any of those clothing styles naturally go together, when most people would know they most certainly do not.

“This is a cloak not a cape,” Midoriya automatically corrected. After blinking at his apparel for an extended moment he continued saying, “And I’m 90% sure that you just took your own outfit design and adjusted it as little as possible to make it unisex.”

“…Looks like I’ve been found out.”

“How would you have not been found out?! The only real difference is the cloak and crown!” the boy uttered incredulously.

Toshinori decided at that point it was time to intervene. “Um… I apologize, young Midoriya, but I have no idea what is going on with any of this current situation, including everything you spoke of concerning that… Fruit of Fate, was it? So, if you could please…”

At that request Midoriya blushed and stuttered, “R-right, sorry…”

He turned to fully face Toshinori. “This will be a lot easier for you to understand if I show you what I’m talking about so, look at this.”

Midoriya’s right hand seemed to go through his chest, right at the area where the heart would be located, and when he retracted it…

“That– that’s exactly the fruit I saw before!” Toshinori couldn’t help but exclaim in response to seeing a luminous golden apple in the palm of the boy’s hand.
“Yes, this is my Fruit of Fate. It’s a representation of my being and future. An average Fruit of Fate looks exactly like this, with the exception of the stem.”

He pointed at the matching golden stem with his free hand.

“A normal person, whether they’re quirked or quirkless, will have a brown stem on their Fruit. The stem is connected to the core of the Fruit, which is where the representation of a person’s quirk is if they have one. If a person is a Child of Fate, however, they will have a golden stem like this. The fact that you were able to see this Fruit before means that your quirk was interacting with it in some way at that moment.”

He moved his right hand to the side and let go of the Fruit, which was somehow able to stay suspended in the air, and placed his left hand on Toshinori’s chin, guiding him to lean down to bring their faces closer together.

“S-sorry, but I need somewhat, uh– intimate for this to work with another person. This is going to feel a little weird…”

That was all the warning he got before Midoriya put his other hand through Toshinori’s chest, where he could feel it grab… something, before pulling it out, and oh, he could see why the boy had become so worried now.

The golden apple was covered with sickly purple guck, corrupting the integrity of its gold sheen. But even more apparent was the fact that a whole two-thirds of the Fruit was missing. It also had a golden stem.

Midoriya removed his grip on Toshinori’s face before continuing to speak.

“The proportion of Fruit present in a person’s Fruit of Fate is correlated with the proportion they have of their full potential lifespan. My whole Fruit indicates that I can fulfill my whole lifespan, though how long that lasts is decided by fate. Your Fruit indicates that something happened to you or your fruit which caused you to lose about two-thirds of your lifespan. Additionally, the purple means that your Fruit is poisoned.”

“What does it mean if a Fruit is… poisoned?”
“Basically, it means that the integrity of your thought process or heart if you will has become… unhealthy, in some way. I can’t tell exactly how it’s unhealthy, though since I’m in contact with it, I’d be able to tell if I tried looking for it, but from what I’ve been told by my Dad, it should mean you’re having unhealthy thoughts about yourself or your future.

“Those things aren’t what I’m most concerned about though,” as though Toshinori didn’t have enough to worry over with just that, “The thing that I really need to check has to deal with the fact that you’re also a Child of Fate, as seen by the golden stem. Do you know what aspect of your quirk would let you interact with or affect some part of your Fruit or other people’s Fruit?”

Toshinori hesitated for a moment before deciding that being transparent would be much more useful for him in this situation than trying to keep his quirk’s secrets.

“My quirk, One for All, is a power stock-piling quirk that has been passed down through generations. During the process of my mentor passing it on to me, I was able to see both my Fruit and hers, and I saw that my stem went from brown to gold. She said that was a normal part of the process, though none of the previous users knew what it meant. Would that count?”

Midoriya frowned in response. “Yes. Quirks are an important aspect of people’s beings and futures. They’re part of the Fruit of Fate’s make up, so something that directly affects a person’s quirk like that also affects their Fruit.”

Again, the boy held his face while moving to return his Fruit, and he shivered lightly at the unusual sensation of what was apparently the culmination of his being going back to its rightful place. Midoriya then plucked his own Fruit from the air and moved it back into his chest.

“The biggest problem with being a Child of Fate is that you receive a “punishment” of some sort, supposedly due to the fact that our quirks can affect fate, which is something humanity isn’t supposed to be capable of.”

Toshinori blinked at that. “A punishment? Is there really something that actively punishes people for… going against the order of the universe, I guess you could say? How is a person’s fate decided in the first place anyway?”

Midoriya snorted at his question, “If I knew that, I wouldn’t be nearly as frustrated with this whole system. In any case, we should check to see if you’ve already gotten your punishment. My guess, though, is that it occurred and led to the loss of most of your Fruit.”
With a simple hand gesture, a light pink book appeared suspended in the air in front of the two. The cover featured a distinctive design in darker pink with what seemed like a small simple image of a temple in the center surrounded two intertwining long-bodied fish on either side of it. He just barely got a glimpse of the backside, which featured a small, dark pink turtle.

“This,” Midoriya spoke with tension laced in his words, “is what is known as the Penguindrum. It’s an item that was previously owned by my dad and was created by Momoka-san years ago.”

His hand flicked out towards the Penguindrum, and the book suddenly opened and flipped through pages on its own. “It’s the physical embodiment of the pocket dimension we’re in right now, a place which Momoka-san named the Crystal World, and when inside it, the Penguindrum has the ability to divine people’s punishments.”

The Penguindrum finally stopped to show a blank page.

“Uh… I need the name that you think of yourself as for this…”

“Ah, that’s right. I never properly introduced myself. How rude of me,” Toshinori replied sheepishly, “My name is Yagi Toshinori.”

After speaking his name, words seemed to bleed onto the page in front of their eyes.

*Yagi Toshinori:*

*Child of Fate*

*Punishment – Stricken with ill health, diminished quirk ability, and loss of lung and stomach*

“I’m fairly sure that this is the physical condition that lead to the loss of your Fruit of Fate.” Midoriya winced a bit at the information. “At least you’re not guaranteed to have any major unpleasant surprises in the future.”

“Would this… Penguindrum be able to show what would happen to me in the future in that case?” he couldn’t help but wonder.
“No, it just shows this instead.”

The book flipped through pages once more before stopping on a page already containing words.

*Midoriya Izuku:*

*Child of Fate*

*Punishment – Pending*

*Transfer Punishment, whole Fruit of Fate – N/A*

“How ominous… What is that “Transfer Punishment” referring to though?!”

When Toshinori looked back to the boy, he then noticed the how intensely Midoriya stared at the page.

“That has to do with the quirk I received from my dad, Conductor.”

He hesitated for a moment, as though trying to avoid speaking about the subject. He stared at Toshinori with heavy consideration, his intense green eyes probing him, before looking away and nodding to himself as though he had come to a decision.

“With physical contact, Conductor can transfer pieces of one person’s Fruit of Fate to another person. This comes at the price of both people receiving a punishment for “changing their fate”. The punishment is relatively in proportion to the amount of Fruit transferred. From what Dad said the worst punishments are associated with transfers that are used to bring people back to life– ”

Toshinori choked, coughing up a new stream of blood.

“But those still aren’t as bad as the punishments given for being a Child of Fate I think– Toshinori-san, are you alright?!”

“Bring– bring people back to life?! Your quirk can do such a thing?!”
“Only if the user also uses the Penguindrum, and it can only be used with those that have recently died from what I remember,” Midoriya’s voice carried a somber tone. He clenched his eyes shut, face tensing, before he reopened them while flicking his hand to cause the pages to change again.

“My dad used that ability to revive me…” the boy couldn’t keep his voice from breaking a bit at the mention of his father.

Toshinori’s stomach felt like it dropped right to his feet at those words. Dread welled up in his chest. The pages stopped before he could respond.

Midoriya Hisashi:
Child of Fate
Status – Deceased
Punishment – Son, Midoriya Izuku, dies early at the age of 14
Transfer Punishment, whole Fruit of Fate – Erased from existence

The silence in the room was deafening.

After what seemed like an eternity Midoriya continued to speak, “When a person gives up their Fruit of Fate in its entirety, with their quirk and all, their punishment is that they are… Erased. It’s as though they never existed in the first place. The only people who will remember them are those who were present in the Crystal World at the time, and those who are Children of Fate… Dad did it anyway though, because bringing back someone who died from a punishment needs one whole Fruit to work. It’s also the only case where the Fruit transfer punishment only applies to the donor.”

He sighed with a wavering voice, as though he was on the verge of crying, “We have a large family portrait that used to be Mom’s favorite. She hung it in the place of honor in our home, on the big wall across from the door leading out… When we arrived from the hospital to see only the two of us in the frame, she broke down sobbing…

“Now it’s not her favorite anymore. We had to take it down and move it so it’s resting on the floor leaning against that wall, with the picture hidden from view.”

Midoriya turned away from the Penguindrum to fully face Toshinori. He looked directly into Toshinori’s sunken eyes with frightening intensity. When he spoke again his voice was no longer wavering.
“I wanted to offer you Conductor’s abilities, Toshinori-san, to transfer part of someone’s Fruit of Fate to your own to improve your health and lifespan.”

He felt his body jolt in shock, but the boy carried on regardless.

“It has to be someone who loves you deeply, though any type of love will do. All that matters is that they want to keep you in this world no matter the cost. I know you probably dislike that idea, but if they love you enough to do such a thing for you, you should at least respect them enough to discuss the option with them.

“Now that I know your quirk can be passed on though… I also want to give you a warning.”

The emerald green of Midoriya’s eyes seemed to look right into his soul, resembling the portrait of him that hung on the wall beside them. Perhaps he actually was looking at his soul, using his quirk to see into his Fruit of Fate.

“The punishment for being a Child of Fate is not to be taken lightly. I have no idea why the One for All users have been passing down the quirk, but if you’re intending to do the same, you should reconsider. They may end up regretting that they received it very much, with what it might cost them…”

Though he was no longer looking at the page, Toshinori felt like the words stating Midoriya Hisashi’s punishment were burnt into his eyes.

The next day, the words of Midoriya Hisashi’s punishment still haunted him, but at least he decided to take his first step to addressing the issue.

However, the contact name on Toshinori’s phone mocked his weakness.
Why do you hesitate, when you know he needs to know? Why are you avoiding him, when you know he is already involved? Because of your fear to face the strain between you two? What a petty thing to let guide you, so called Number One hero…

Swallowing his apprehension, Toshinori reminded himself that he not only needed this man’s counsel, but he also needed to inform him on the matters which affected him personally. Biting the bullet, he pressed the call button. The other end picked up the line almost immediately.

“Nighteye… I know it’s been awhile, but I need to talk to you about some things of great importance…”
Chapter Notes

For basically every scene that involves sharing the Fruit of Fate, this is the background music I imagine going with it. Feel free to listen to it: (edited because YouTube took down all the OSTs rip)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sir Nighteye is a man who fully believes in the idea of fate, and he hates its inevitability.

How can he not believe such a thing, considering the quirk he was born with? Foresight, and the visions of the future it granted him, was proof in and of itself that people’s paths in this world are predetermined to some extent. At this point in his life, there has never been an instance of his quirk being wrong. No matter what kind of future he sees, whether it promises success or tragedy, the events have always occurred as he foresaw.

There is nothing in this world that brings him greater despair than the fact that the future he sees is unchangeable, that’s why he avoids using Foresight as much as possible.

Of all the visions he has seen though, there is one impending tragedy that haunts him the most, and that is the future death of his former partner and most valued hero, All Might. His quirk couldn’t give enough details as to when or how it would happen, just that All Might would one day face a villain that would bring about his end.

The issue forced them apart and lead to the end of Nighteye’s term as All Might’s sidekick. After All Might’s horrible injury at the hands of All for One, he had begged his hero to step down from his mantle to at least try to avoid the future that he saw. However, despite his concern, despite the fact that the man was missing an entire lung and stomach, All Might refused to retire. Thus, Nighteye refused to watch the Number One hero get himself killed, and struck out on his own.

It may have been weak of him, but he had already seen All Might’s death once, to watch it a second time would break him.

Even with their falling out, he still tries to support his hero from the sidelines. He scouted out and started mentoring a second year UA High School student who he saw as having a high amount of
potential as a future hero. He had hoped that if he could present All Might with a student who would become a hero of high quality in terms of both attitude and skill, the man would accept them as his successor, pass on One for All, and officially retire.

*Sometimes he questions why he even bothers trying in the first place, considering the end that he already foresaw, but despite the fact that he truly believes it’s inevitable, he will continue to work in vain to save his former partner.*

*That is what it means to love, after all…*

However, All Might has been hesitant to get back into contact with him, so he hadn’t made any attempts on following up Nighteye’s request to meet Togata Mirio. That’s why when the Number One hero suddenly called him one morning saying they needed to discuss something of upmost importance, Nighteye immediately cleared his schedule for the afternoon and arranged a meeting for that very same day.

When the hour of anticipation arrived, the two of them were seated in Nighteye’s All Might-merchandise filled office, with the hero himself in his true form awkwardly clearing his throat.

“All Might started with a hesitant but polite tone.

“Sorry for the lack of warning, but I recently found out some important information that I thought you should be aware of,” All Might started with a hesitant but polite tone.

“It’s no issue, I’m just glad to have the opportunity to see you. It’s been quite a while.” Nighteye paused to readjust his glasses in an attempt to disturb some of the tension in the air, before continuing with a steady voice, “Perhaps we can try to reconcile our friendship at a later point now that we’ve reestablished communication, but at this time whatever you have to say is obviously the priority, so let’s cut to the chase.”

All Might nodded in response. “Quite right…” he trailed off awkwardly.

Hesitating a moment, He gave Nighteye a considering look, before explaining, “What I have learned is somewhat… hard to believe, so I hope you will keep an open mind. Let me start first by clarifying something though. I remember that you had once stated that when you initiate use of your quirk, you do so by looking into a golden apple inside of the person you are in contact with, that is correct yes?”

Nighteye was surprised at the introduction of this topic, but hid the feeling easily replying, “Yes. You also mentioned that you had seen a similar sight when Shimura Nana gave you One for All.
Were you able to figure something out regarding this phenomenon?”

It would be quite a feat if he did. Nighteye had investigated the matter himself once and had even renewed his efforts after All Might told him of his similar experiences, but he never found any information about the subject outside of ill-fitting mythological legends that involved golden apples.

“You could say that yes, it was explained to me by someone who had knowledge of it. He called it the Fruit of Fate, and apparently the fact that our quirks can interact with these Fruit is bad news for us…”

All Might went on to tell his story of how he had met a boy who knew of the workings of fate. A boy he had failed to save at the cost of the child’s father, and that boy in turn had forgiven his failings and granted him knowledge of the Fruit, Children of Fate, and the punishments they face. It ended with the boy’s foreboding warning.

The story sounded like something taken straight from a fairytale, but Sir Nighteye was already a man who believed in fate, and he certainly felt cursed, with his inability to change the future, so he accepted most of it without dissent.

There was one concern, though, that he voiced, “If being a “Child of Fate”, as this Midoriya referred to it, entails punishment because of their “ability to change fate”, then why is it I’ve never been able to alter the future I see, despite seeming to qualify as one?”

All Might seemed to look surprised at his question, he likely hadn’t considered it himself. “I… have no idea. Maybe young Midoriya could shed some light on the matter? It’d be beneficial for you to meet him anyway so that we can check to see for sure if you are a Child of Fate and what your punishment is.”

“However,” All Might changed the topic with a serious tone, leaning forward with his palms on the desk between them, “the thing I need to consider most at this point is the warning he gave.”

“That’s right. In a worst-case scenario, your successor may end up losing their child like Midoriya’s father…” He narrowed his eyes with a frown, there was a heaviness in the air at the subject of their talk.

“Your quirk is a power that has been the foundation of this society’s peace for years, so passing down that strength to help the next generation seemed like the obvious course of action. It’s a legacy
that has been built upon for eight generations now. But to ask someone to take that kind of risk with the excuse of the betterment of society… no matter how you look at it, that’s quite a burden to put on them…”

The thought that Mirio, a bright and shining boy filled to the brim with optimism for his future, might some day be forced to face that kind of consequence as a result of Nighteye’s attempts to guide him into the role as the next Symbol of Peace, that if he becomes the successor, the child that has brought Nighteye such joy could have his own joy broken by the sight of his dead child, gone before their time…

He never wants to see such a future.

“Exactly! It’s an unthinkably selfish request. The life of a hero may be fraught with burdens and pain, but there is such a thing as asking too much of someone…”

All Might leaned back in his chair, arms crossed over his chest while glazing aimlessly at the ceiling. He looked as though an insurmountable villain had defeated him in battle.

“Without the need to combat All for One… I just don’t think there’s enough of a reason to pass it on if that’s the cost. But at the same time, I feel that not continuing its legacy is disrespectful to the sacrifices the previous holders made to advance the quirk to this point…”

Nighteye folded his hands in front of him in consideration, and chose his words carefully, “That is logical to a certain extent, you would be giving up multiple generations worth of stock-piled power. At the same time though, the main goal of the One for All users was taking down All for One, so I don’t believe your predecessor would be disappointed if you decide to end the legacy, especially when considering the new potential consequences for continuing it.”

Because ultimately, that’s what it came down to. The thing All Might has always been most concerned about, other than helping people, is the execution of Shimura Nana’s will. Everything he does is ultimately an attempt to prove that she was right to chose him as her successor.

And his hero has suffered greatly from those attempts, so he will do his best to prevent All Might from choosing something he knows the man will come to regret.

A sigh reverberated, and All Might changed his view to stare down at Nighteye’s desk in resignation.
“I suppose you’re right… I still think I should consult Gran Torino as well before making any final decisions though.”

He ended the talk on that point. To counter the silence that filled the room, Nighteye tried to change the subject, “Was there anything else Midoriya said that needs to be discussed?”

Tension racked through All Might’s body at his question, and after an extended moment of silence, he answered without looking at Nighteye, “Nothing you need to be concerned about.” It was statement meant to end that line of questioning.

*Well, the only thing that told him, is that there is most defiantly something he needs to be concerned about.*

“Don’t lie to me. What else did he say?” he continued the questioning mercilessly. His firm words *dared* the man to sidestep it once more.

“I’m not lying,” All Might futilely maintained his defense, finally looking at Nighteye and raising his hands up in surrender, “Young Midoriya did say more, but it’s not something you need to worry about.”

Like a shark scenting blood, he followed the trail with relentless focus. “Is that so? Then please, share with me what he said, so that I may rest easy with the certainty that I don’t need to worry about it.”

All Might cleared his throat, as though he was trying to put off the conversation for even a brief instance of reprieve. His words crawled out as slow as possible.

“Well– as I explained previously, young Midoriya’s quirk allows him to transfer pieces of one person’s Fruit of Fate to another’s…”

Not being able to handle eye contact any longer, the hero shifted his focus to the All Might-merchandise at the side. “So, the boy had offered to… transfer part of someone else’s Fruit to me…”

Nighteye let the man stew in the heavy tension between them before pulling himself together enough
“Ah, yes. I can see why such a thing would be something I don’t need to worry about, since there’s no way you’d consider a course of action as logical as taking up an opportunity to increase your life expectancy!”

Trembling from uncontrollable emotion, Nighteye vehemently gestured to himself. At this point he let his frustration reign and exclaimed, “Did it even cross your mind to ask me if I’d be willing to help you with this?! I’d think that it should’ve come up at least once, considering the entire reason for our argument was that I was trying to get you to live longer!”

All Might jolted back in shock, eyes wide as he looked back to Nighteye.

“…You would offer yourself, your potential life and future, just to waste it on adding maybe a couple of years to a man who’s already doomed to die?”

“It wouldn’t be a waste.” There was no arguing with those words, he wouldn’t allow it. “Even if it is only a couple of years, even if it’s only an extra day… It wouldn’t be a waste, Toshinori. At the very least, I wouldn’t consider it one.”

He didn’t mean to use that name, it’s clear he’s lost control of himself. Nighteye leaned back in his chair in emotional exhaustion.

“But the child said it himself, didn’t he? That his quirk’s ability, that this transfer of lifespan and fate, can change a person’s fate… The one thing that I can never achieve, but want most to achieve… If what he says is true, then that thing is for the taking right in front of me! The chance to save the person I want to save the most is right in front of me…”

His body gently stilled itself as Nighteye’s desolate eyes focused on the face of the desk, and he couldn’t keep his voice from breaking as he whispered, “It’s your life and your decision in the end, All Might… but can’t you at least consider giving me the chance to hope that you can have a bright future in place of the one that I foresaw?”

*He truly believes that All Might’s end is inevitable, that fate is inevitable, but he wants so much to believe that it’s not.*
Nighteye continued to stare at his desk, refusing to face the reject he knew would come from the hero that seemed to be determined to die in the line of duty.

“…He said that it needs to be someone who loves me deeply, and that wants to keep me in this world no matter the cost.”

Hope sprouted in his chest, guiding Nighteye to glance up at his hero. “I meet both those requirements,” he reconsidered the statement and added, “as long as it’s not required to be romantic love.”

“Oh, my boy, platonic will work fine,” warmth filled All Might’s voice as he replied, and it had been years since he last referred to him in such a way–

All Might reached out to him so he could gently hold both of Nighteye’s hands in his own. Their eyes no longer strayed from each other.

“Admittedly, I hadn’t truly considered using that offer he gave me… but if it really means this much to you, I suppose refusing your help would hurt you much more than losing years of your life. If it will give you such hope, I guess it’d be okay to try and change my fate in this way.”

That answer brought tears to his eyes, blurring his vision of both the present and the future. It felt like relief.

When Toshinori made plans to meet up with Nighteye, he had absolutely no intention of introducing young Midoriya’s offer to him, but much in the same way that the man had persisted his way into becoming his sidekick, he had persisted his way into getting Toshinori to accept the offer.

*Though this time there was much more crying involved…*
But how could Toshinori have refused him when it involved something his former partner felt so strongly about? He had already known that the ability to change the future was a delicate subject for Nighteye, but he had no idea it caused him so much grief.

The decision wasn’t like the one he had to make 5 years ago, where trying to chase after the chance to live longer would result in people suffering. If anything, it should improve his ability to help people and lessen their suffering. The only person who would suffer for it would be Nighteye, and he had made his opinion on that matter quite clear.

*Despite knowing what it would cost his former partner, he couldn’t help the warmth that filled him at the thought of the depths of Nighteye’s love for him. He had always known of it, somewhere in the back of his mind, he had even rejected it on that fateful day 5 years ago.*

*But to hear a friend he also loved in turn admit to it so openly, that was another thing entirely…*

With that in mind, Toshinori arranged to meet with Midoriya at his earliest convenience, explaining Nighteye’s quirk and how he was also probably a Child of Fate, as well as their wish to take up his offer. It was on the sunny morning of a Saturday that Toshinori and Nighteye arrived at the Midoriya family home, and after asking whether they wished to view the process or not, the boy whisked them away with the words “Survival Strategy”, holding both of their hands, to his mysterious pocket dimension.

“C-Conductor can do that type of transfer just fine outside of the Crystal World, but you wouldn’t be able to see it,” he explained after they finished changing settings.

Glancing around, he noticed that they were in a completely different area than where they had appeared last time.

It was an open area, with the only discernable border being a large dome of some shining opaque material, and by large he meant *large*. The edges where the dome met the white tiled floor seemed to be far off on the horizon. He could also spot some sort of looming tower in the distance.

The thing that took up most of both his and Nighteye’s attention, though, was the huge castle structure right in front of them. Its beautiful opaque walls seemed to be made of crystal, refracting the light to showcase small but numerous rainbows that filled the walls with color. The only part of the castle that wasn’t made from that material were the many windows and single large double door, which used clear glass instead.
After examining his surroundings, Nighteye looked over Midoriya and questioned, “…what are you wearing?”

He should’ve guessed that would come up again…

“It’s a uniform that signifies I’m the owner of the Penguindrum. Please don’t ask any more about it,” the boy shut down further questioning on the matter immediately. Noticing Toshinori’s confused look, Midoriya instead answered his unasked question, “The room we were in last time, Toshinori-san, was the Crystal Palace’s library.” He pointed towards one of the larger set of windows on the castle.

“Really? From what I recall the view outside the windows showed a normal looking sky, not only that but the walls definitely weren’t made of crystal…”

“Momoka-san made the view from the library windows to seem like it looks over a normal forest, along with some of the other windows. She also made the inside walls to look normal.”

“I see…” Did Momoka-san create this entire world?

Nighteye then surprised him by asking another question, this time one that he wasn’t expecting at all.

“Why are there penguins here? They have such strange features, too…”

…

“…Penguins?” he echoed in disbelief.

He followed Nighteye’s gaze, and sure enough, there were three small, chubby, black and white penguins waddling towards them from one side of the Crystal Palace.

They did indeed have very strange features. The penguin leading the pack had freckles on its face as well as a spiked crown atop its head. The two other penguins followed behind in an arrow formation, with one penguin wearing smart-looking rectangular glasses paired with a serious expression… can penguins even make facial expressions?
The last penguin looked frighteningly familiar, featuring sunken eyes and cheeks along with two
distinct locks of blond hair falling down around its head.

By the time the penguin group had finished slowly making their way to the human group, Toshinori
reoriented himself enough to let out a stream of blood and exclamations from his mouth, “Penguins?!
And is that one there supposed to be me?!”

“Toshinori-san are you alright?! But, uh– in a sense, yes. Each Child of Fate I encounter will get a
matching penguin to go with them. I named my penguin Izu-pingu.” He pointed to the crowned
penguin, who waved a black flipper at him in response. “I think they’re generated in the Penguin
Exhibit…”

“Penguin Exhibit?!” Toshinori could no longer handle the weirdness of the situation and voiced one
major confusion he had felt since he first met Midoriya, “I’m sorry, my boy, but I must know, what is
with all the penguins?!”

He held both hands up in a questioning gesture. “All of the outfits worn by the owners of the
Penguindrum feature penguins, the Penguindrum has the word in its name, and now there are actual
penguins complete with a penguin exhibit! Why?! Penguins?!”

He couldn’t even bring himself to feel ashamed for losing it over some fat, flightless birds.

“I believe, All Might…” Nighteye interjected a response before Midoriya could answer, pushing his
glasses back into place, “that it is a pun.”

There was a single beat before he responded, “…A pun?”

“Yes, I realized it out just now, when Midoriya stated Izu-pingu’s name. You see, “pingu” is a rather
unconventional Japanese pronunciation for the word “penguin”, but it is also the way that one would
say the kanji for “apple” using Chinese pronunciation. Therefore, the penguin imagery is actually a
visual pun for apples, which in this case should be referring to the Fruit of Fate.”

“Wow, Sir Nighteye! You figured that out fast!” was the boy’s impressed confirmation.
“Jokes and humor are my specialty.”

“…This item of fate altering power, which can literally bring people back from the dead or erase their existence from the universe, was named after a pun,” Toshinori didn’t even bother to state the sentence as a question. He’d already resigned himself to never understanding eccentricities of the Penguindrum.

Clearly seeing that they were getting nowhere, Midoriya changed the topic of conversation, “Uh– We can judge Momoka-san’s life decisions another day, Toshinori-san. For now, let’s just get back what we came here for.”

It seemed the boy had already retrieved the Penguindrum itself, because he was already flicking through its pages with a simple hand gesture. The page it landed on was already marked with black ink.

“Oh! I guess Nighteye usually just considers himself to be “Sir Nighteye”, huh. Hero work must take up the majority of his life…”

Midoriya’s brow furrowed as he frowned down at what was written. “I didn’t even know a person could have a punishment like this…”

*Sir Nighteye:*

*Child of Fate*

*Punishment – Physically incapable of personally changing the fate he views using Foresight*

Despair filled Toshinori as he saw the answer to the question the two of them had previously discussed.

A bitter laugh echoed Toshinori’s emotions, “I suppose I shouldn’t have expected anything less from something as ironic as fate. To be the one Child of Fate that can’t change fate, I should have realized it myself when I’d first heard of it anyway.”

Nighteye glared at the page as though his future-seeing eyes also had heat-vision.
“Well… technically, it doesn’t say you’re completely incapable of changing fate, just that you can’t do it personally. Maybe if you tried something like— giving a vague description of the future you saw but fully leaving the matter in the hands of other people, then they could change the future in your place…”

Midoriya’s nervous tone gave the words an awkward carefulness to them, but his analysis appeared valid nonetheless.

“…Leaving the matter in the hands of others,” Nighteye repeated the phrase in consideration. “I guess that’s what I’m doing now, actually, by passing the responsibility to change All Might’s future on to you and the abilities of your quirk…”

The man nodded to himself, before stating firmly, “It seems like this truly is the best chance we have to change All Might’s fate, so I’d like to move on to transferring the Fruit now, if that’s alright with you. The two of us have already agreed that giving a third of my fruit would be the most optimal, since it should theoretically double his lifespan but take less than half of my own.”

“Sounds like a good plan, I don’t think you’ll be punished too harshly for just a third…”

Midoriya clapped his gloved hands as though to announce the beginning of a ceremony. “In that case, let’s share the Fruit of Fate!”

After exclaiming that phrase with emphasis, the boy gently took Sir Nighteye’s chin and guided him to lean down and look into his eyes. His right hand moved into Nighteye’s chest right where his heart would be, and pulled out a distinctive bright, golden apple, which was complete with a golden stem.

Toshinori noticed that it had some sort of clear sheen around the top of it extending from the stem, but couldn’t tell what it was.

The Fruit of Fate floated up above his hand, spinning around its axis. When Midoriya spread his fingers outwards, exactly one third of the Fruit split off with a resounding crack. Nighteye let out a small gasp simultaneously.

“Are you alright, Nighteye?!?” Toshinori asked in worry.

“Yes, the sensation wasn’t painful. I just… felt as though I had lost something.” Nighteye placed his right hand on his chest over his heart, grasping it aimlessly. His gaze never strayed from the boy in
front of him.

Still close to Nighteye and holding the future-seeing hero’s face, Midoriya plucked the larger portion of the Fruit from the air and returned it to its rightful place, moving through both Nighteye’s hand and chest. Releasing his lithe fingers from Nighteye’s jaw, he glided over to stand in front of Toshinori, the remaining Fruit following his movements.

Much like the last time they were in this world, Midoriya cradled Toshinori’s face and pulled it closer. His hand reached into Toshinori’s chest and pulled out the poisoned, incomplete apple. The boy held it for an extended moment, eyes closed and grasp tight around both Toshinori’s Face and Fruit. He finally opened his green eyes, and for some reason they projected incredible sadness.

The hand holding the Fruit opened with a flourish, and the Toshinori’s Fruit of Fate started to float up.

As the purple-covered Fruit rose into the air above Midoriya’s palm, Nighteye’s pristine Fruit of Fate moved to join it. They danced together, circling each other, but never touching.

“This might not be as grandiose of a gift as bringing someone back to life, Toshinori-san, but it’s still a gift that is made of love and sacrifice. This man is sharing his life with you,” Midoriya’s words were barely a whisper.

Even as he conducted the circling apples above his outstretched hand, Midoriya never looked away from Toshinori’s sunken eyes. His emerald green gaze was penetrating.

“So please, accept this gift with all your heart. For when one shies away from love given by another, it leads to both people hurting. And when one shies away from love given by one’s own self, it leads to a miserable life and an early death.

“Don’t forget this as you go forward to the destination of your fate, wherever it may be, All Might…”

All at once, the two Fruit of Fate spun together. A bright light erupted from the scene, and once it had dissipated, the two Fruit had become one.

It was two-thirds in size, with one third still missing. It also still held the purple guck of poison, but it seemed as though there was less of it. Instead of the entire Fruit of Fate being covered, the a little less
than the bottom half had receded to fully showcase the apple’s shining gold sheen.

The Fruit gently lowered itself into Midoriya’s hand, and the boy gifted it back to Toshinori. After it settled back into his chest, Toshinori felt a course of energy flow through his body. He mindlessly grasped at his heart with his right hand at the feeling.

*It feels as though he had gained something he once lost, but never noticed was missing…*

Letting go of his face, Midoriya finished with, “And so it is done…”

He snapped his fingers, and the Penguindrum glowed a soft light pink in response.

“Nighteye, how are you feeling?” The boy finally moved his gaze from Toshinori to rest on Nighteye.

“I… do not feel like I’m in pain, but I am short of breath. I’m also somewhat lethargic.” Nighteye looked down over his body as though trying to find the source of this difference.

When the Penguindrum’s light subsided, Midoriya looked over the page once more.

“Well– that would make sense, considering you’re missing a third of one lung and a third of your stomach, now…”

Once Toshinori had processed that statement, a gush of blood spurted from his mouth.

“Eh– ?!”

Chapter End Notes

Shout out to the person on the Mawaru Penguindrum's tvtropes headscratchers page who explained the "pingu" pun. I spent like 3 years wonder what was up with all the penguins before I came across it lol
quotes from this chapter: "let's/let us share the fruit of fate" is an important phrase that is used throughout the show
If someone had told Izuku previously that the Number One hero was scared of a small elderly woman, he would’ve never believed them, but going by Toshinori-san’s follow up phone call a few days after he had rushed Nighteye to the UA infirmary, he was very scared indeed.

Apparently Recovery Girl had given both Toshinori and Nighteye the lecture of a life time after confirming that the future-seeing hero was missing parts of his organs. He also happened to feature the same scar seen on Toshinori’s side. While he has to deal with the long-term health affects from the loss though, it seems there was no actual injury caused by their removal. The scar was purely cosmetic and the organs themselves were intact, they just weren’t as big as they should be.

On the other hand, Toshinori reaped great benefits from their shared Fruit of Fate. He actually gained one third of a lung and one third of his stomach. His health has improved enough that the amount of time he can spend in his All Might form has increased from 3 hours to 4 hours. Additionally, now that he has a stomach, though its only a third of the size it should be, he can eat foods he wasn’t capable of eating before.

That led to a very interesting way to find out about his punishment, actually.

Toshinori had tried eating what was previously his favorite food from before his injury, which he was unable to eat due to how hard it would be on his lack of a stomach, only to bite into a medium-rare American style steak that tasted like ashes. When he called back after checking the Penguindrum to confirm that, yes, his punishment is that “his favorite food forever tastes of ash”, the hero just let out a long sigh.

It was news to both of them that fate could not only decide the paths in people’s lives, but also apparently change their physical attributes and biology on the spot. Nighteye’s physical condition was the first example of this, and Toshinori’s follow up merely confirmed it.

That didn’t stop Toshinori from having an existential crisis over the matter though. In Izuku’s opinion, it sounded like Sir Nighteye was taking this whole situation much better than he was, and that man was the one who lost part of his organs over it.

He was worried, though, about what he saw of Nighteye’s Fruit. He could tell it was partially frozen, and after consulting Momoka-san about what he’d seen right after the heroes left, it seemed that its
location indicated that the core of the Fruit was likely completely frozen. However, Izuku had no idea whether the condition somehow came about from Nighteye’s punishment for being a Child of Fate, or some aspect of Nighteye’s thought process.

Overall, Izuku thought the two heroes had come out of the situation relatively okay. Their punishments didn’t seem to majorly hinder their lives or hero work, Nighteye just had to deal with his average physical condition being lower than it was previously. The biggest drawback was definitely the loss of Nighteye’s lifespan. There was no way of telling the total amount of time lost, since it depended on how long his life was supposed to last in the first place, but either way a third is a sizable portion to give up.

But it felt good to know that Toshinori-san has a loved one that’s so dedicated to looking out for him.

Toshinori had asked if it was okay to tell those he was close to, who knew about his condition, about Izuku’s part in it. He especially wanted to be able to tell Recovery Girl, who was endlessly trying to interrogate him about what had occurred that cause him to regrow organs. It was obvious why she wouldn’t let the matter go.

Even so, Izuku had still asked to be given some time to think about it. Luckily Toshinori was understanding about it.

Now that Izuku had completed his role in helping his hero, he had expected that they would part ways, but as it turns out, despite being busy with his work as the Number One hero, Toshinori still wanted to visit him occasionally. He was still curious over everything concerning the Crystal World, so Izuku had offered to give him a tour of its main features.

Now, almost an entire month after the death Izuku was supposed to die, he sits in his living room waiting for the man of the hour to arrive.

He glanced at the clock hung high up on the wall. “Toshinori-san should be here any moment now…”

His mother emerged from the kitchen wringing a hand towel at his statement, after looking over him in consideration she voices her thoughts, “I noticed that you’ve referred to him as “Toshinori-san” a couple of times now, but have you really become so close to Yagi-san? You haven’t known him for long, after all.”
Izuku’s face heated up in a blush.

“I– It isn’t like we _became close_ per say but… once I literally held his fate in the palm of my hand, it just felt natural…? It just seemed like formalities didn’t matter anymore. I know it’s rude to just skip to using his first name but– he hasn’t said anything about it, so I guess it’s okay?”

Mom giggled at his muttering, “It’s alright honey, now that I think about it Hisashi was like that too. I was so surprised when he just started saying “Inko-san, Inko-san” to me right out of the blue the first day we met, but I was so grateful to him it didn’t bother me…”

She gazed at the spot on the wall that would have held their family portrait.

The air in the room started feeling heavy at the reminder of their loss, Izuku looked away from his mother to stare blankly at the coffee table in front of him as a familiar sadness welled in his chest.

“…You haven’t said anything about trying to get into UA since that day, Izuku.”

He felt his teeth clench. “I know, Mom. I mean– I still want to be a hero but… Even after using it to help Toshinori-san, it still doesn’t feel right using Conductor or the Penguindrum.”

His right hand aimlessly grasped at his chest over his heart.

“I know I should use it, Dad _said_ I should use it, but… thinking about it is painful. It feels awful, but I don’t know why…”

Izuku was still looking at the coffee table but out of the corner of his eye, he could see his mother begin walking forward towards the wall.

“I think I know why that is… it’s because I’ve failed you, Izuku.”

His head reflectively turned towards her at that. “What?! No! What are you talking about?”

“Using Conductor and the Penguindrum… in a way it’s like accepting that Hisashi is really gone,
isn’t it? You have them because he gave up his life, so to fully accept them as your own, and use them as your own, is the same as accepting that they’re no longer his and that he’s gone for good.”

*He... hadn’t thought of it that way, before. But at the same time, he had.*

When his mother reached the wall, she bent down to pick up the picture that was still sitting at its base.

“You can’t bare to think of using your quirk, even if It’s to become a hero, because accepting that Hisashi is gone is too painful. Because I haven’t supported you in making it less painful…”

She hung the picture up at the center of the wall, exactly where it was before. The portrait showed the happy smiles of him and Mom, it was like they didn’t notice the space in between them where someone should be.

“I’m going to work on accepting that there is only the two of us now, Izuku. So please, do your best to work on accepting it too,” his mother’s voice was wavering, but its tone stayed strong.

“Mom…”

As he jumped up from the sofa to run to Mom and hug her tightly, he felt the pricks of a few tears in his eyes. She hugged him back with the ferocity of a mother bear. He could feel himself trembling in her arms, but she held steady enough for the both of them.

He’s heard her answer to this question a million times, the *I’m sorry, I’m sorry’s* had plagued his thoughts at night many times, but he needed to ask it one more time–

“Mom… do you think I can be a hero?”

She moved to hold his face in her hands, forcing him to look into her eyes.

“I know you can,” was her simple statement.
The powerful feeling that coursed through him at her words, *words he had never heard before once in his life*, was indescribable.

*Ever since that day, he no longer had a future, and the only certain thing was that he wouldn't amount to anything. But it's different now, his impossible dream to be a hero that can change people's fate has become possible—*

It was only after he started crying in earnest, just enjoying the warmth of his mother’s hug and love, that the doorbell ringed to signal Toshinori’s arrival.

Rubbing his back as she released him, his mom wiped her tears away and told him, “Go clean yourself up a bit, sweetie. I’ll invite Yagi-san.”

Izuku smiled brightly at her, it felt as though it had been an eternity since he had smiled like this, “Thank you, Mom.”

While Toshinori-san noticed both the portrait on the wall and the red eyes leftover from Izuku’s tears, but he tactfully avoided commenting on them.

Instead Izuku brought the both of them to the Crystal World and started showing him around. It felt a bit mean, but he absolute had to choose *this* area as their first stop. It was at the right side of the Crystal Palace, right next to its base.

“This is the Penguin Exhibit!” amusement was clearly heard in his declaration.

The look Toshinori gave him concisely communicated that he knew *exactly* why he had brought them here first but couldn’t be bothered to expend the energy to confront him on it.
The Penguin Exhibit looked like… well– a penguin exhibit. There weren’t walls surround the enclosure, but it had everything else one would expect from a zoo. There was a deep pool for the little penguins to swim, two igloo shaped white structures that had viewing windows to show little nests inside, one with an open door and the other a closed door, and real ice and snow covering the ground.

The three resident penguins went up to greet them. Izu-pingu hugged at his knees and looked up at him cutely, Izuku patted his head carefully avoiding the pointy crown.

After carefully observing the area, he felt a spring of quiet sadness flow into his chest.

*So Pingu-sashi is gone too then, huh…*

Putting the thought aside, he interrupted Toshinori’s examination of both the exhibit and the penguins, “Have you or Nighteye decided what you wanted to name your penguins yet?”

Toshinori blinked at him in surprise.

“I didn’t know we were naming them in the first place?” he ended the statement as though he was asking a question.

Izuku just shrugged in response. “Well you don’t have to name them, but I thought I’d give you the opportunity.”

“I see, I’ll be sure to let Nighteye know that…”

He sighed in the direction of his penguin, as though he if he avoided naming it, he might be able to ignore its existence. The penguin just tilted his head in response, as though asking “*What’re you gonna do about it, huh, Number One hero?”*

Toshinori sighed a second time, “ …I suppose I’ll just copy your idea and go with Toshi-pingu.”

Toshi-pingu nodded his head at the name, blond hair flowing with the movement. His beak seemed to form a grin that said “*Yeah, that’s what I thought, you coward!”*
One of human Toshi’s sunken eyes involuntarily twitched.

As Nighteye’s penguin brought his flipper up to his beak as though trying to contain laughter, Izuku deadpanned, “I have no idea why your penguin ended up being such a punk, Toshinori-san, but I think it’d be better if we left before this escalates to violence.”

“I wouldn’t start a fight with a defenseless penguin!” he yelled insistently.

“Considering that penguin was made in your image, it’s anything but defenseless, but whatever you say, Toshinori-san. Whatever you say…”

“I wouldn’t!”

The hero easily accepted leaving the Penguin Exhibit, probably attempting to put it off his mind entirely. Izuku continued his tour, taking advantage of the ability to manipulate the Crystal World as its owner that he had once seen his father use. He displaced their surroundings, scenery passing by in a blur, to quickly move them the base of the Dueling Arena’s tower that was placed far from the castle, which stretched high into the heavens.

Since Toshinori had reacted by spurting blood and shouting the English curse “Shit!”, Izuku made sure to warn him before he did it a second time to show him the actual arena. This method allowed them to avoid more curses and blood.

He continued this way, bringing Toshinori to the Workshop at the left side of the palace where the two Teddydrums are repaired – “Robots? And why are the robots shaped like teddy bears?” – and the Teddy Bombs are built – “Why are the bombs shaped like teddy bears?! Actually, why does it even make bombs in the first place?!?” – Unfortunately for both of them, Izuku didn’t have answers to any of the questions Toshinori had concerning that place.

The man was almost as eager to leave the Workshop as he had been to leave the Penguin Exhibit.

They then circled around to behind the Crystal Palace to appreciate the beauty of the sprawling Garden of Eden that was contained in a large greenhouse. It served no purpose outside of aesthetics other than acting as a place to hold the Tree of Knowledge. Toshinori enjoyed the garden much more than he had the other areas.
However, when Toshinori was admiring the Tree of Knowledge, Izuku had warned him that taking a bite from one of its apples would grant a single piece of unknown divine information at the price of facing punishment, which caused him to become weary of the place.

Finally, Izuku guided Toshinori through various rooms in the Crystal Palace including the throne room, the ballroom, and the treasury, before ending back at the room that started it all, the library.

Momoka-san greeted them from her mirror, “Hello again, Snow White, it’s good to see you.” Izuku found her teasing smile to be ill-fitting on his face.

“Snow White…?” Toshinori voiced his confusion.

“Don’t worry about it, Momoka-san likes giving titles like that to everyone. She enjoys finding connections between reality and fairytales.”

“Fairytales are made to reflect real-life issues and situations, you know, it’s only natural to try to learn about life through finding those connections. That’s why stories are made in the first place.”

“I guess you have a point…” Izuku half-heartedly replied.

Passing by the Momoka’s Mirror and the wall holding the portraits of all the Penguindrum users, he pointed out the one above the mirror featuring the little pink-haired girl, “That’s Momoka-san’s portrait from when she was still the owner of her Penguindrum, Toshinori-san.”

Toshinori looked it over with vague surprise. “Is that so… Why is it that she’s in the mirror now? She looks so young in that picture, too.”

“It’s rude to talk about someone right in front of them you know,” Momoka interrupted, but the besides the Izuku in the mirror showing a single raised eyebrow, there was no sign she felt offended. “All you need to know is that I created the Penguindrum with my quirk when I was young, making me the first owner, and that I set it up to be passed down to continue its legacy. That’s all.”

Izuku sighed at that, “As you can see, Momoka-san refuses to give anymore information concerning how all this came about other than that.”
Toshinori glanced at Momoka in suspicion. “A quirk was able to make all this… that’s quite incredible. Set it up to be passed down… How is it that your father came into ownership of the Penguindrum in the first place, young Midoriya? And how did he pass it on to you?”

Izuku moved to stand in front of his father’s portrait.

“He said that when he was around 10, the Penguindrum fell from the sky and into his hands. That’s all that was needed for him to become its owner.”

“Fell from the sky? I suppose that’s not significantly weirder than everything else in this place, but it’s still strange. I’m guessing Momoka-san won’t mention how that came to occur,” at his last sentence, Toshinori redirected his focus to the mirror.

“Exactly, Snow White!” was the cheerful reply given with Izuku’s voice.

Izuku decided to continue the conversation to avoid Toshinori becoming annoyed with Momoka’s lack of information, “In my case, Dad just gave it to me directly— or, well, my corpse technically. Then when I came back to life and exited the Crystal World, being in physical contact with it automatically made me its owner.”

Toshinori raised his eyebrows at that, and spat out in alarm, “All that’s needed for ownership is simple contact?! Does that mean anyone could happen upon it and become the new owner?”

“Only if they’re a Child of Fate,” Izuku clarified, “If they aren’t, I would just stay the owner. But obviously, it wouldn’t be good to lose it like that anyway. It could end up in the hands of a Child eventually. The only ability the Penguindrum gives its owner outside of the Crystal World is the ability to transport people and things into it, so I’d have to find it myself.”

He still hadn’t stopped staring at his father’s picture. He was trying to memorize the image that was missing in the photos throughout their apartment.

After some apprehension, Toshinori moved to stand next to him. He was also focused on the portrait.

Respectful silence filled the room, before Izuku broke it.
“I– I have a confession to make… When I took your Fruit of Fate for the transfer, before, I also looked into it, I guess you could say. Looking into the Fruit lets me learn what things make up a person’s being, in your case I was looking for what made your Fruit of Fate poisoned.”

“How so… I had wondered why you told me the things you did, at the end of it. You knew that I was distancing myself from the people around me…”

“That’s right. I’m sorry for invading your privacy like that, but I wanted to see if I could help with the poison too…”

“I forgive you, young Midoriya. In any case, I believe that meddling when you don’t need to is the essence of being a hero, so I also butt my head into other people’s personal matters occasionally. It’d be hypocritical for me to chastise you about something like that.”

Toshinori turned to look at Izuku and his voice took on a questioning tone, “But on that note, I was wondering… what were you referring to when you mentioned shying away from love from one’s own self? I don’t think I’m doing such a thing.”

Izuku blinked in surprise and felt a frown settle on his face, brows furrowing. “Ah– I guess you haven’t realized it yourself, then…”

He was quiet for a moment, pausing his viewing of his father to look over Toshinori with a judging eye.

*He’s not going to want to hear this…*

Looking back to the portrait, he gave a firm response, “This isn’t a conversation you can go into without being prepared, Toshinori-san. I think it might be better if you had more time to think about the answer to that yourself. So, consider this question, and how it relates to your love for yourself first; Why do you do things which involve ignoring your self-interests or hurting yourself for the sake of hero-work?”

When the man began to open his mouth to reply, Izuku cut him off, “Don’t answer now. Really think about it first. If you still can’t figure out what I mean, the next time I take you here we’ll talk about it, okay?”
Toshinori awkwardly closed his mouth without having said anything, before opening it a second time to confirm, “Alright… If that’s what you think would be best, my boy.”

“Speaking of hero-work,” Momoka interrupted, despite the subject having barely been touched in their previous conversation, “Don’t you have something you want to ask, Izuku?”

Izuku decided to accept her help changing the topic, but was still nervous about hearing this answer from the hero he looked up to the most.

His eyes glanced down towards his feet, before focusing on the Number One hero. In contrast to his previous attitude, he hesitantly asked, “Toshinori-san… do you think I could be a hero?”

Toshinori blinked at the question, before his mouth formed a gentle smile.

“Based on the little I know of your capabilities with the Penguindrum, as well as your will to help people, I think you certainly can become a hero, my boy.”

He walked forward to meet Izuku at the wall and placed a thin but large hand on his shoulder. “As for being a hero who can change fate… You’ve already taken the first step towards that by changing my fate, haven’t you?”

Izuku’s eyes widened. After a moment, he gave a large, open-mouthed smile.

“Y-you– You really mean that…?!” he asked in wonder.

“Of course! You’ve really done quite a lot for me, my boy!”

Toshinori then took on a serious tone, “You see, Nighteye had once looked into my future, and had seen me dying at the hands of a villain. It’s part of what made him so angry about me returning to hero-work after the… incident which caused the injuries for my punishment. I knew that continuing work with such a poor physical condition would just be inviting this fate, but I couldn’t step down as it would disrupt the peace of society, so I accepted this eventual death.”
Izuku lost his smile and felt dread well up after processing this prophecy.

*For Toshinori-san, All Might, to be defeated and killed, that’s—!* 

Toshinori’s other hand grasped at his chest, “But now, with this bit of improvement to my health and increase in my lifespan, I feel like there may be a real chance to avoid this fate. Nighteye thinks so as well. You’re the one who gave us that hope, my boy! And even now, you’re still trying to help me by looking into the poisoning of my Fruit of Fate. That’s just further proof to me that you’ll be a great hero.”

The dread only subsided halfway, after all there was no way to know for sure if that fate had been changed, but a small smile grew back on his face.

*There’s nothing to be done but wait to see where fate takes Toshinori-san, at this point. He’ll just have to try and be there so he could create a miracle if need be.*

An elating sensation of power gathered inside him, like it had after his mom had answered that question. For the first time since his father had been Erased, he really felt *okay* about using Dad’s quirk and the Penguindrum.

Riding the high, he straightened his spine and marched to stand directly in front of Momoka’s Mirror.

“Momoka-san,” Izuku’s green eyes firmly held Momoka’s pink in place, “please, accept me as the successor to your Penguindrum! I want to use it to become a hero!”

In place of her usually more sardonic grins, Momoka formed a fond smile, it very much suited Izuku’s face. That warmth was reflected in her words, which also suited Izuku’s voice, “You’re already my successor, little Izuku. I was just waiting for you to catch up.”

Momoka pointed at him with Izuku’s hand, demanding his attention. “Imagine! The spells and unbridled power of this book that you’ll come to learn! Imagine! The feats you’ll come to achieve with your little book of fate!”

Izuku’s left hand in the mirror reached forward, open palm held up like it was offering something intangible. “May those who accept their fate be granted happiness.”
Izuku’s right hand in the mirror moved to match the left. “May those who defy their fate be granted glory.”

“I think, in different ways, you can achieve both this happiness and this glory, my dear Prince of the Crystal…”

Izuku’s hands in the mirror clapped together once, then spread out wide with a flourishing gesture encompassing Izuku himself, as though he were being presented to an audience.

“Rejoice!” Momoka declared, “For the new Prince of this land has been born!”

Chapter End Notes

Quotes from this chapter:
There is a character in the series called the Princess of the Crystal that I derived "Prince of the Crystal" from, "Imagine!" is a catchphrase she uses often.
"May those who accept their fate be granted happiness. May those who defy their fate be granted glory." is actually a quote from the anime Princess Tutu, which I just recently finished watching the 1st season of. Don't be fooled by the name that show is deep.
After committing to his role as the successor of the Penguindrum and resolving to use Conductor to change people’s fate, Izuku fully set his sights on becoming a hero. The high school that he wanted to attend to help him achieve this goal was, of course, the school that only took the best of the best, UA High School.

It’d also be more convenient for him to go there, since apparently the principal was one of the people Toshinori wanted to inform about his quirk, along with UA’s nurse Recovery Girl.

In the official quirk registry, he’d actually written the Penguindrum’s transportation power for his quirk description instead of Conductor’s actual abilities, just like his father had. So there’d be no way for his future teachers to know about his real quirk unless he tells them himself. Knowing that it’d be helpful to have people in authority aware of the power his quirk had to offer, and trusting Toshinori’s assessment of their character, he allowed the hero to finally inform both them and two other trusted people about what happened.

UA was a school which had produced some of the greatest heroes society had to offer, including the Number One hero, All Might. Whether the course one took was in heroics, support, business, or even general education, UA provided a high-quality experience, and as such, only accepted high-quality students. When it came to the heroics course, the practical portion of the entrance exam was said to be quite brutal, only passing the very top scoring examinees out of the thousands that apply.

It was definitely a case where those who were naturally born with physically enabling and flashy quirks were at an extreme advantage over their competition. Spinning a jackpot on the quirk wheel of fortune was nothing to scoff at in this society. When he had been quirkless, it would’ve been impossible to get in.

Now that his fate has been changed, though, the impossible has become possible.

Even with a quirk he was still at a disadvantage in this case. While his father’s quirk was unmistakably a quirk that created miracles, it couldn’t help him in a fight.

The Penguindrum could make up for this disadvantage.
In the Crystal World, the owner’s quirk was actually enhanced, that’s what let him physically remove the Fruit of Fate from Toshinori’s and Nighteye’s chest, and would let him bring someone back to life when the time for it came. But the real advantage he’d have would be all the other abilities and objects that could be accessed by the owner. If he was able to transport his opponent to the Crystal World, as the Prince of the Crystal he could smite them with all that the crazy world had to offer.

It was an instant win condition for him. The problem was getting to that point, since he would have to do it of his own human power.

Luckily for him, Momoka-san was dedicated to setting up the Crystal World as a roleplay fairytale kingdom, though it’d definitely be the weirdest fairytale he’d ever heard, and as such, created features to enhance this roleplay.

One of these features regularly kicked his ass in the name of training.

“Come on, Izuku! The mannequin is already on easy mode and you still can’t land a hit on it!” he could hear Momoka jeering with his voice from the portable Momoka’s Hand Mirror that Izu-pingu was holding between his little flippers.

“Didn’t you say that you made it in the image of a first-class duelist—” he paused his complained to drop himself to the floor and just barely dodge the lithe sword blade that passed right over his head. He rolled to the side to try and swipe at its legs with his own sword, but the mannequin simply jumped over it. “—You even named it “the Champion of the Rose Bride”! You wouldn’t give that kind of title to something unless it lived up to it! Obviously, its easy mode is still just too hard!”

At that point he wasn’t allowed room to breath anymore, let alone talk, too busy trying to desperately block and dodge. It ended once he had exhausted himself and the Champion of the Rose Bride had pinned him in place with its foot on his shoulder and its sword impaling one side of the puffy-looking coat tails on his Prince of the Crystal uniform.

He complained about it a lot when he’d first seen it, but by now he doesn’t think it looks too bad on him...

The Champion of the Rose Bride was a tall, slim mannequin wearing long pink hair. It wore a princely-looking black long-sleeved shirt with red should pads that ended at form-fitting red shorts. The sword it had used looked like the one he had still in his hand, featuring a slim blade and curved handle that held a beautiful silver gleam.
Momoka had said that she made the Champion to match the image of a strong and beautiful princess. The princess had once met an inspiring prince who promised they would meet again one day, but instead had decided to become a prince herself.

Its face, smooth and blank, looked to him as it removed its sword and it held out its hand to him. He accepted the offer, grabbing its hand, and it helped him to his feet. “Thanks,” some might have thought it was unnecessary to thank a mannequin, but from what he knew of the Penguindrum this thing might actually have sentience. It couldn’t hurt to be polite.

As though proving his thought right, the Champion of the Rose Bride nodded at him. It then bowed at him respectfully with its hand over its heart.

Izuku nodded awkwardly at the formal bow. “I think that’ll be all for right now, you can go do as you please.”

The Champion nodded once more, before turning and leaving the training room they were in. It was likely headed through the rest of the Crystal Palace to go back to guarding the treasury.

*He doesn’t know why the treasury would ever need a guard though, since the only way people can come to the Crystal World is if he brings them himself.*

“You made the Champion, but did you even learn sword fighting from it yourself? That should’ve been something you wanted to do, right? Since “All princes should know sword fighting”, as you said.”

“One, I was a princess not a prince. But I wanted to be a princess who didn’t need a prince, so technically your point still stands.” She counted off fingers as she spoke. “Two, I really enjoyed just watching the Champion of the Rose Bride wreck everything that I threw at it, so I never really wanted to fight it myself since I would be too distracted to watch.”

He rolled his eyes at her, before his mood turned and he just sighed at his efforts, “Being able to use a sword will help with after I get clearance to use it as a support item, but for the entrance exam they probably wouldn’t even let me take one in, right? Maybe I should focus on something else for the time being and return to this after I get in…”

This time Momoka rolled her eyes at him. “You think they’ll just let you stand in place and throw stones everyone? You have to increase your physical condition if you want to do anything in that
exam, whatever it is.”

He blinked in confusion at her words.

“Stones…?”

“That’s right,” she confirmed, amusement started gathering in her voice, “Part of the Survival Strategy spell allows you to transport things by summoning a small crystal stone and willing its shards to break. Whatever the shards hit is what you bring along with you. It makes mass transport much more convenient.”

He took a beat to process this before sputtering, “W-What?! I never heard of Dad using something like that! Why didn’t you tell me about this before?!”

“He never needed to use it before,” Momoka easily replied, “And I figured you would need it for your exam, so I decided to tell you about it earlier than I planned.”

“You were going to wait even longer to tell me?!”

After that revelation, Izuku split his time between school, at which he was still pretending to be quirkless since he didn’t want to deal with the drama of suddenly gaining a quirk out of nowhere, practicing sword fighting and improving his physical condition in the Crystal World, and practicing manifesting crystals for the Survival Strategy spell in his home.

Momoka referred to it as a spell, but it was more like technique that was granted to the owner of the Penguindrum. She had created them in such a way that they required verbal incantations similar to the way magic spells would be done, but in the end it was an ability created by a quirk, not magic.

It took a while to figure out the proper way to visualize the crystal into existence, he spent who knows how long just glaring at the palm of his hand, but eventually he was able to force his will upon reality and summon a marble sized stone in his hand. Its opaque form glittered in the light, rainbows coloring its insides.

Momoka had assured him that as he gained more practice with it, he would be able to make larger stones to increase the range effected by the spell.
He kept himself busy, trying to progress as much as he could before it was time for the UA entrance exam. It seemed that Toshinori was also busy with something, only being able to meet up with Izuku at short café outings along with staying in touch by text. They hadn’t had the chance to follow up on the conversation they’d had previously in the library.

That was for the best, though, since his schedule was jam packed. By the end of it all, he had even been able to start learning more “spells” he could use in the Crystal World. Those were actually much easier to learn despite being more extensive than the relatively simple Survival Strategy. His mind had already accepted the Crystal World as a strange, weird place where the laws of physics only existed because Momoka wanted it to mimic reality to some extent. Having “magic spells” there was really par for the course.

Months after the day he was supposed to die, the day that would decide his fate had finally arrived.

After being harassed by Kacchan, who was sure to get accepted with his jackpot of a quirk, and being saved from an embarrassing fall by a cute girl, fate had proven its love for irony by having him sit right next to the aforementioned explosive boy. He even got called out for his mumbling in front of everyone by a stranger.

Ultimately, though, it seemed that God was merciful to him regarding the practical exam itself. He wouldn’t know for sure until he’d seen them for himself, but Izuku thought that the Teddydrums were both bigger and stronger than the villain bots UA was using for the exam. He would be limited in the number he could transport at once, but taking too many might overwhelm the Teddydrums anyway.

After being confronted by the stranger who had called him out for trying to wish the nice girl good luck, the pro hero teacher proctoring the exam, Present Mic, suddenly announced the start of the test.

“Well, what are you waiting for?! There’s no countdowns in real-life!” Present Mic loudly explained, his voice was as colorful as his personality it seemed.

The was a single beat before everyone started rushing through the gates of the fake city before them.

Izuku frantically ran alongside the crowd, splitting off once he had hit the maze-like city streets, until he came across his first robot.
A 3-pointer, he noted absentmindedly, as he summoned a marble-sized crystal in his right hand. He threw it towards the robot with all his might.

“Survival Strategy!”

At his incantation, the stone burst into a multitude of tiny crystal shards. They scattered around a small portion of the area, several of them striking the gray robot as little pin-pricks which did nothing to stop its move to attack Izuku.

But that didn’t matter, since an instance latter they were already in the Crystal World. The circular dirt ground and two sides of stands, one side black and one side white, featured by the Dueling Arena surrounded them.

The moment they appeared, a giant teddy bear-shaped black robot rocketed into the other robot, with actual rockets spouting flames from its feet. It raced towards one of the sides lacking stands and suddenly stopped once it reached the edge. There were no safety features to prevent people from falling out of the arena, so the villain bot went flying off the tower the Dueling Arena was on top of, falling down in an arc.

Izuku looked over the edge to see that it kept falling.

And falling.

And falling...

He couldn’t see the body anymore by the time it landed, but a small crashing sound echoed up to the arena.

After hearing the sound, clapping started. It came from the Champion of the Rose Bride, Toshipingu, Nighteye’s penguin —come to think of it he still hasn’t gotten his name from Nighteye yet— and Momoka’s Hand Mirror, who all had their own seats next to each other in the white VIP box. Instead of clapping, Izu- pingu raised a large point card showcasing the number 3.

He looked up at his robot. It stood at least 4 people tall and had the kind of rounded limbs and head that one would see on a stuffed animal, a rather slim torso, and dark pink accents. Its glowing red eyes watched him intently.
“Uh… good job, Teddydrum Black. But– do you think next time you could just… beat up the robot regularly? It sort of took a while for it to land…”

Teddydrum Black hung its head in shame. The second Teddydrum in the arena, which had white coloring and black accents, hit the black robot on the back of its head with a metal clang as if to scold it.

“N-No! Don’t do that, Teddydrum White! And Teddydrum Black– it’s okay, you were just excited that’s all! A-And I didn’t give specific enough instructions anyway, so really it’s my fault– ”

Both of the robots cut him off by vigorously shaking their heads in denial and crossing their arms together to form X’s.

“Umm– Why don’t I just leave and bring back more robots, okay? Make sure you’re prepared.”

When he arrived back in the fake city, he was standing within the range of where the crystal shards had spread out. A pile of decimated bulky, gray robot parts appeared in the same spot the 3-pointer had been.

That definitely looks like it fell off a cliff…

He continued running around and transporting robots with crystal stones. Teddydrum Black followed his advice and, with the help of Teddydrum White, smashed, laserbeamed, and tore apart the robots he brought instead of throwing them off the edge of the Dueling Arena.

The biggest problem was that the robots tended to stay rather far apart from each other. The only times he had been able to take more than one at once was when a pair of them had happened to be close to each other.

After watching one of these pairs, a 1-pointer and 2-pointer, get demolished by the Teddydrums, he ignored the clapping to read the score Izu-pingu held up for him.

35 points… He has no idea if that’s enough to qualify, but he has to get as many as he can if he wants to be sure that he beat out the jackpot winners.
His thoughts were interrupted when, upon returning to the exam site, giant steps caused the city to shake around him.

Looking up into the heavens, what he saw was that a villain bot taller than the buildings around him was way too close for comfort. It approached slowly, causing total devastation to the streets it walked through.

“What the hell– Is that supposed to be the 0-point robot?! UA is crazy!” a voice he didn’t know screamed.

_Not as crazy as Momoka-san, but they’re certainly trying!_ He couldn’t help but think as panic burst inside him.

The yell from the random examinee kick started the exodus out of the area. He began to flee with them, but stopped when he heard a cry of pain.

Examining the grounds, he found the girl who had helped him earlier was crushed under some debris and unable to run away from the giant robot that seemed close to treading on her.

Izuku didn’t even think about what he was doing, his body just moved on its own.

Running _towards_ the 0-pointer, he summoned a crystal, and threw it up at the robot hard enough that he felt like his arm might fly off his shoulder.

“Survival Strategy!” he desperately screamed.

A cluster of shards hit the villain bot, and the next thing he knew, Izuku was standing in front of the giant robot in the Dueling Arena. It stood much higher than the stands around it.

“Teddydrums, distract the 0-pointer for me! I need it to stay standing it one place!”

His robots were quick to follow his command, flying up around the face of the opponent robot and
swarming its head. They were dwarfed by the villain bot, which tried to swat at them like they were annoying bugs.

“Little Izuku, my beloved Prince of the Crystal,” he could barely hear Momoka’s sardonic words in Izuku’s voice coming from the hand mirror seated in the VIP box, “what the hell is this literally gigantic waste of time?”

“It was about to kill someone, okay! I had to do something!” Izuku shot back firmly, “And it’s not like it’ll be hard to take care of it now that it’s here!”

As Izuku steadied himself, his deep red cloak bellowed around him, reacting to the Penguindrum’s power as it surged through his body. His right arm stuck out straight towards the stationary robot as he called forth what Momoka had referred to as “the signature spell of the Crystal World”.

“Will of the Crystal Princess!”

All around the 0-pointer’s feet, opaque crystal stone broke out of the arena’s ground, causing dirt to fly into the air. It grew up the robot’s bulky legs, casting rainbows on its body and encompassing the entirety of the surface it passed.

*If this was a person, it would have covered them instantly, but on something this big it’s just not fast enough—*

The robot finally realized something was wrong once the crystal had reached its pelvis, but by that time it was incapable of using its legs. Izuku willed the crystal to detach from the ground with a flick of his hand.

Then, he locked away his fear and ran to stand as close as he could to one giant, crystal-covered foot. The Teddydrums were still distracting the 0-pointer even as it tried to free its legs.

Izuku felt his teeth bare themselves, forming a mean grin.

“You know what they say, the bigger they are— ” He mentally thanked Teddydrum Black for this brilliant idea, as he displaced the surroundings around him and the villain bot the same way he had when moving Toshinori around for his tour. After the blur passed, he was just at the edge of the arena, while the robot was in the air beside it, “ –*the harder they fall!*”
The giant robot plummeted to the ground. Its arms flailed about in vain as it fell.

And fell.

And fell...

Once it reached the base of the high tower, it collapsed under its own weight and momentum with a roaring crash. Izuku could vaguely hear the sound of the crystal encasing it cracking apart as well.

The small audience applauded furiously, even the Teddydrums and Izu-pingu had joined in.

“Prince of the Crystal indeed!” Momoka declared with excitement, “If this school of yours doesn’t accept you after this, everyone running it must be lowlifes who will never amount to anything!” That statement was extremely unsuited for Izuku’s voice.

Izuku rolled his eyes at her insult, “The robot isn’t even worth any points, so who knows if they’ll take it into consideration.”

“Like I said– if they don’t, they’re lowlifes who will never amount to anything!”

He just sighed in response, “Survival Strategy Complete”

With those words, he left the Crystal World, only to find himself up in the air.

Oh, that’s right... --Gravity took hold and he began falling-- He’s been appearing wherever the stone shards go, and he threw it quite high this time. The shards probably hadn’t reached the ground before he transported them... Shit!

His fear grew as he began to vaguely hope that he’d get out of this with just a few broken bones, he hadn’t been able to throw it too high after all, only to be cut off by a sudden slap to his arm.
Gravity stopped working, and he floated in place a little above the ground.

“What– ?”

When he looked around to see the gravity quirk girl floating on a piece of debris above him, hand stretched out, he finally understood what occurred.

“Release…” her voice sounded strained as she brought the tips of her fingers together. They plopped down to the ground in unison.

Izuku glanced over the pile of robot pieces that came along with him, and noticed that giant chucks of crystal had come along with it for the ride.

Wait... Could he actually take things out of the Crystal World too?! Momoka-san, please, explain more of the basics!

He was distracted when the girl who had saved him promptly threw up.

“Ah! A-Are you okay– ”

“TIME’S UP!” Present Mic’s loud voice resounded through the speakers, “THE EXAM IS OFFICALLY OVER!”

After a moment of surprise, Izuku gulped at the proclamation. *He just has to hope 35 will be enough then...*

The attitude in the observation room for the heroics practical exam is what Toshinori will now
officially name “Post-Penguindrum Astonishment”.

Unfortunately for the rest of these teachers, they’ve barely glimpsed the tip of the iceberg that is the Penguindrum. The giant robot disappearing only to return as a giant heap of scrap metal still surprised him though.

It had all started after they had noted that both young Midoriya and the 3-pointer robot he had been facing suddenly vanished.

“Huh, what happened there? Where did the examinee and villain bot go?” Snipe pointed to one of the monitor screens.

Midnight flipped through the school’s information on the exam candidates. “Let’s see… Looks like the quirk that boy, Midoriya Izuku, has is called Conductor. It allows him to transport himself and other things to some kind of pocket dimension! That’s probably where they went then.”

“A pocket dimension quirk? How interesting, I wonder if he put anything in there that would help him with the villain bot?” Cementoss wondering, raising his hand to his chin as he thought to himself.

Principal Nedzu let out a laugh from his seat, “Haha! Oh, I’m sure he probably has something up is sleeve in there.” Toshinori hoped that the others failed to notice the bear-dog-rat’s knowing tone.

Seeing Eraserhead subtlety move his eyes to examine the principal with suspicion, he knew at least one teacher had caught it though.

It was then that Midoriya finally popped back into existence, his placement slightly off from where he had been previously standing. Instead of a robot, he was joined by a pile of destroyed robot parts.

This time Power Loader commented, “He really managed to do a number on that thing! What does he have in that pocket dimension exactly?”

Nedzu just let out another laugh, which Eraserhead again observed with suspicion.
Watching the green-haired boy, Toshinori couldn’t help but think of the question that had plagued him for months.

“Why do you do things which involve ignoring your self-interests or hurting yourself for the sake of hero-work?” – Isn’t that just something that’s necessary for being a hero? But the boy wants to be a hero as well so there must be something more to it...

But it wasn’t the time to think of such things, so he put it off his mind.

Throughout the exam, everyone continued observing Midoriya along with the other examinees.

The boy kept on disappearing with robots and reappearing with broken robots, though none of them looked as bad off as the first one had. It became clear that he was throwing something towards the robots before he transported them, but it was too small to see on the screens. Sometimes he was even able to bring two robots in one go.

“So he can bring more than one thing with him at a time… It seems like he has a limited range, but it’s still a range nonetheless, that would be useful if he faced multiple opponents at once,” Ectoplasm observed.

“Only if he could handle multiple opponents at once,” Eraserhead’s monotone voice cut in with a characteristic critique, “and if they were too spread out, he’d be forced to leave some behind that he wouldn’t be able to keep track of.”

“Oh! The 0-pointers’ are all coming out now!” Midnight pointed at the screens showing the giant robots.

As expected, most of the examinees fled at the sight of the seemingly insurmountable and pointless obstacle. Midoriya, however, ran towards it.

“Looks like he’s about to get some rescue points, what’s he going to do though…” Blood King noted, eyeing the girl stuck in the rubble by the giant villain bot.

In the screen showing Midoriya, the boy made a powerful throw, and he could almost make out his lips forming the expected words “Survival Strategy”–
Only air filled the huge space the robot had stood in, the 0-pointer disappeared just like the rest of Midoriya’s opponents.

“Woah! Does he not have a limit in the size of the stuff he brings with him?! That’s incredible!” Snipe exclaimed in shock.

“Haha! Let’s see how it looks coming back out…” Nedzu watched the screen intently, waiting for the moment of truth.

It took more time than it had for the regular villain bots, but eventually he reappeared in the air and started falling to the ground.

The teachers noted his rescue by the girl, but their focus was taken by the pile of scrap that had been the 0-pointer.

Toshinori noted that there appeared to be large opaque pieces of crystal stone within the rubble that had once been a robot.

_Prince of the Crystal indeed…_

“What on Earth did he do to that thing?! It’s completely busted!” Power Loader exclaimed, “This just makes me want to know what’s in that pocket dimension even more!”

“Damn, I really wish I could’ve seen what he was doing during his disappearing act too, this is ridiculous!” Snipe echoed Power Loader’s thoughts.

“Such energetic youth and mystery!” Midnight admired, “He’ll be a great student to work with for sure!”

Cementoss added, “I think it’s safe to say he can probably handle multiple opponents at once wherever he’s bringing them…”
Eraserhead failed to give a comment on the situation, but stared intensely at the screen in frustration as though if he looked hard enough, he might be able to figure out what happened.

Out of the corner of his eye, Toshinori could see Nedzu give a creepy grin that showed too many teeth as he laughed with glee once more.

*Maybe it wasn’t a good idea to tell Nedzu about Midoriya’s quirk after all, the amount of entertainment he got from this observation is concerning…*

Chapter End Notes

References from this chapter:
The Champion of the Rose Bride is entirely based on Utena from Revolutionary Girl Utena, the Dueling Arena and tower is also partial based on the dueling arena from that show.
"Lowlifes who will never amount to anything" is a common phrase said by the Princess of the Crystal character from Mawaru Penguindrum
“...With the combination of your 35 villain points and your 60 rescue points, you have achieved 95 points total for the practical exam, the highest score out of all the examinees!” the All Might in the projection cheered, “As such, you have earned your spot in the heroics course! Welcome to your hero academia!”

The trembling and crying, Izuku was caught in a torrent of emotion; the fact Toshinori-san will be one of his teachers, the girl who had tried to give some of her points to him, his acceptance into the heroics course, placing first in the exam– It was all so overwhelming, he had to share it with the person he loved most immediately–

“M-Mom!” Izuku cried, running from his bedroom into the living room of their home, “Mom! I-I got in! And I got first place in the practical exam!”

His mother ran into him with a big hug, and started crying with him, “Oh, Izuku! I’m so proud of you, my baby!”

As they shook in excitement together, his mother lowered her voice and bit adding, “Your father would’ve been so proud…”

Izuku started to cry even harder.

“What the hell, Deku! What kind of tricks did you use to pull an acceptance into UA out of your quirkless ass!”

After meeting with their homeroom teacher about their acceptance into UA, Izuku had been
immediately confronted by a murderous-looking Kacchan just outside their school building.

“I-I didn’t use any tricks!” *The Penguindrum was much more powerful than a simple trick.*

The explosive boy just pushed his body into the school wall harder, holding him by the collar of his shirt.

“You ruined my plan to be the only one to get accepted into UA from this shitty school! There wasn’t supposed to be anyone else besides me! *Why the fuck did a useless, quirkless loser like you even bother trying, you should know you’ll never amount to anything– ”*

–*There are those born wealthy, those born of beautiful mothers, and those born into war or poverty. If everything is caused by fate, then God must be incredibly unfair and cruel. Because ever since that day, he no longer had a future, and the only certain thing was that he wouldn't amount to anything–*

“I’m not quirkless anymore,” Izuku interrupted, his tone was frigidly cold, “I’m not someone who’ll never amount to anything anymore. *You don’t even know what I lost to get to this point– to earn my place at UA!*”

His words caught Kacchan by surprise, causing his grip to loosen. Izuku took advantage of it to pull himself out and step away sideways so he was no longer boxed in.

He could feel himself tremble in anger. For the first time ever, Izuku’s reaction to Kacchan’s words was *rage*.

“I ruined your plan? There wasn’t supposed to be anyone else? Well guess what, Kacchan, *that’s just how life works!*”

He held out his hand in a gesture towards the suddenly quiet Kacchan, as though presenting this new world order to him.

“Why are you even complaining, when you’ve just succeeded in getting into the *top high school in the country*?! You’ve literally got your life lined up to become a successful hero, just like it had been since you were four! Unlike me, you’ve been *so blessed* by fate and whatever God or gods exist in this universe, and all you can do is whine about how it’s not *absolutely perfect*– Well tough shit! *Deal with it!*”
Taking satisfaction in the bully’s gobsmacked expression, Izuku turned his back to him and stormed away. He felt pricks of tears in his eyes.

Standing in front of classroom 1-A, Izuku prepped himself to enter the first stop on his path down the line to becoming a hero.

–Please put Kacchan in 1-B, Please put Kacchan in 1-B, Please put Kacchan in 1-B–

Slowly, he reached his hand out and turned the door knob. He opened the door to see Kacchan arguing with the examinee who had confronted him before the exam.

He doesn’t know why he even bothers asking for anything from fate anymore…

“As a student of a high school as prestigious as UA, you should be ashamed for treating the school’s property with such disrespect!”

“Shut the fuck up you stuck up elitist, does it look like I care?!”

“Such vulgar language–!” The tall, glasses wearing boy cut himself off when he saw Izuku standing in the doorway.

As the boy power-walked over to him, Izuku nervously stood his ground, preparing for an onslaught.

Instead, the boy caught him completely off guard. “Hello, my name is Iida Tenya. I apologize for my behavior before the exam. After I saw you go back to rescue a fellow examinee, I realized that you had perceived the true nature of the test, while I had been completely unaware! I misjudged you, you were clearly the superior between us!”
Eh… a good surprise? What a nice change of pace!

“A-Ah– I’m Midoriya Izuku! I-I really hadn’t known anything… I just wanted to make sure she got out okay, you know– ”

“Hey! You’re that boy who saved me and took out the 0-pointer!” a familiar feminine voice called to him. Turning his head, he saw the gravity quirk girl from the exam. “You made it in! I’m so glad!”

“T-Thanks! I’ glad you made it too–”

“If you’re hear to socialize, then leave.”

Ah– There it is, he knew things were going too well…

The students by the doorway, along with the students seated close to the doorway that could crane their heads enough to get a good look, turned their gazes down to the floor of the hallway to see a grown man in a bright yellow sleeping bag lying on the floor. He was sucking on some sort of jelly packet, though not using his hands to hold onto it. With his limbs firmly tucked within the sleeping bag, he looked very much like a caterpillar.

It definitely wasn’t a sight one would expect on their first day of high school, but Izuku wasn’t put off by it.

It isn’t that strange, really, he thought to himself, Not exactly normal, but things could definitely be weirder.

As the caterpillar got off the floor and started to move into the classroom, Izuku glanced around at his fellow classmates, and saw that they all looked vaguely weirded out. Or maybe it is strange and he’s just too desensitized to notice…

Rising out of the sleeping bag, the caterpillar who turned into a man started speaking in a monotone voice, “It took 8 seconds for you to quiet down. Time is a precious resource, don’t waste it uselessly like that.”
Now that the yellow eyesore was gone, it was easier to look over the man’s features. He had a generally unkempt appearance, with his long black hair and light dusting of facial hair, and the bags under his eyes suggested many sleepless nights. The only notable aspect of his plain black clothes was the white scarf-like cloth he wore around his neck. He doesn’t look like one would expect a hero who doubles as a teacher to look, but if he’s here he must be–

“I’m your homeroom teacher, Aizawa Shouta. Pleased to meet you,” was his uninspired introduction.

His fellow classmates again seemed surprised, despite Aizawa’s role as their homeroom teacher being the most logical explanation for his presence.

Then again, he supposes most people wouldn’t find a man like Aizawa being a hero or a teacher to be logical in the first place.

“Now, quickly change into your gym uniforms, and follow me down to the field.”

The rest of the students awkwardly shuffled about, caught off guard by the lack of average school procedures such as something as basic as going to the school orientation on the first day. But Izuku just felt happiness at hearing the orders.

A teacher who doesn’t ignore my existence as someone who’ll never amount to anything and gives clear and concise instructions! UA is just as great as everyone has said it is– or is it that his standards are just too low…?

Even during this sense of hope though, Izuku could feel Kacchan’s glare burning into his back.

After the usual complaints about missing orientation and guidance sessions, followed by an explanation on UA’s “freestyle” education system with its teachers, Shouta began describing the quirk apprehension tests. At this point, though, he had to deviate somewhat from his usual
proceedings. He’s always used the student who scored the highest in the practical exam to
demonstrate the purpose of the tests, but this year, he doesn’t actually know what the fuck that
student can do besides disappearing into thin air–

So, he has to investigate first to make sure he can actually apply his quirk for a demonstration.

“Midoriya, you were first in this year’s practical exam– ” The freckled mystery boy jumped at being
addressed, while a blond, red eyed student let out an enraged choking sound, he’ll have to watch that
one for anger issues, “However, due to the nature of your quirk, the faculty still doesn’t have a clear
idea as to the full extent of your capabilities. We know you must have some destructive or physical
abilities, but since it all seemed to occur in your quirk’s pocket dimension, their nature and
parameters are unknown.”

“A pocket dimension quirk!”

“That sounds so cool– ”

“Silence,” Shouta didn’t raise his voice, but his tone offered no room for disobedience. The teens
ceased their gossip immediately.

He gave the nervous student a considering once-over, before asking, “Do you have a way to apply
these aspects of your quirk outside of your pocket dimension for the apprehension tests?”

Midoriya glanced his eyes to the side, as though trying to think his answer to the question through
carefully. After a beat, he hesitantly replied, “U-Uh… That sort of depends– for the tests that involve
movement I’d probably be able to use it on its own, but to get the most optimal results– um, i-it
would be best if I could bring something out of the dimension to help me…”

He answered the boy’s unspoken question, “As long as it’s something you would’ve had access to
with your quirk regularly, you could bring out whatever you like.”

Shouta swiftly threw the softball in his hands at Midoriya, eager to get some answers to the mysteries
concerning his quirk that had risen from the practical exam. Although the boy was still nervous, he
catched the ball easy enough, showcasing good reflects.

“Get whatever you need to boost your score out and throw the ball into the field without leaving the
circle over there.” He pointed at the designated area for the softball throw test.

Midoriya straightened up at those words. “Y-Yes, Aizawa-sensei!”

After running to stand in the circle, he muttered an interesting phrase, “Survival Strategy” – And promptly disappeared from his spot, leaving only empty air.

“Woah! He’s gone– ” the pink skinned girl with horns and black sclera, Ashido Mina cut off herself at his glare, “Ack! Sorry, Aizawa-sensei…”

Less than a minute passed before the boy returned to the same spot he had been standing in before, but now he was resting his hand on–

…

“Midoriya…” Shouta could almost feel his soul leaving his body, already utterly done for the day, at the sight of the giant teddy bear-shaped robot his student had brought out. “What, exactly, is that… ”

At the entirely unexpected sight, the students’ intrigue over the robot trumped their fear of their homeroom teacher.

“Oh my God, what is that– ”

“Is it allowed under UA regulations to bring giant robots to school?”

“Is that robot shaped like a teddy bear– ”

“It’s so cute! It looks like it gives good hugs– ”

“Its head is fairly large for its body, I wonder how it manages to stay stable?”
“An intriguing mystery for the ages! Its body may be cute and white, but its red eyes exude a sense of madness…”

“Kero, isn’t anyone going to ask why he has a teddy bear robot in his pocket dimension—”

While he agreed with the sensible frog girl Asui Tsuyu’s assessment, he needed to cut them off now if they wanted to get anything done, “If everyone doesn’t stop talking right now, I will expel all of you. I am completely serious.”

Silence reigned through the field.

“But you, Midoriya, start talking!”

The boy next to the teddy bear-shaped robot jumped at his command. “Y-Yes! Aizawa-sensei! Um…” He pointed up at the aforementioned robot. “T-This is a robot that is referred to as a Teddydrum, m-my pocket dimension sort of just… came with two of them on its own? They follow my orders absolutely, since I’m the owner of the—pocket dimension. Its name is Teddydrum White.”

Midoriya then turned to the robot, and politely stated, “Teddydrum White, this is my homeroom teacher, Aizawa-sensei, and the rest of my classmates. Please be on your best behavior for them.”

Teddydrum White nodded its large head at Midoriya, before facing Aizawa and the rest of the class to lower itself in a small bow.

He didn’t even know how to respond to that information, let alone the robot itself. The pocket dimension apparently “came with two of them on its own”? Shouta is starting to really regret trying to look more into this kid’s quirk. Why couldn’t he get stuck in 1-B instead…

He had a responsibility as a teacher though, and thus gallantly continued his questioning, “So these “Teddydrums” as you referred to them are the ones who took out the robots once you had transported the bots with your quirk during the practical exam?”

“For all the regular ones, yes! But—uh, the 0-pointer was too big for them, so I had to take care of it myself…”
“Take care of it himself” – exactly what kind of kid did he get saddled with, that when his giant robots couldn’t get the job done he just takes care of it himself?!

Suddenly wanting to avoid learning more about Midoriya’s abilities, Shouta gave a long sigh. He decided to give on the situation entirely. “Just… do the softball throw, please.”

The boy nodded at him seriously. He then pointed out into the field and addressed his giant robot, “Teddydrum White, please go out about 30 meters into the field. When I throw the ball at you, catch it and throw it farther in the same direction for me.”

It followed his instructions to a T, turning on the rocket boosters on its feet to fly down the field and hover in the air. It waited for Midoriya’s throw with the same air as an obedient pet dog that was eager to play fetch.

At least he knows how to give it detailed and concise instructions…? Shouta thought to himself, attempting to enforce some effort into maintaining his role as the abnormal boy’s teacher.

Midoriya then threw the ball at Teddydrum White, who caught it with its perfectly rounded nub of a hand, drew back its arm, and launched it into the horizon.

After a moment, Shouta showed the class the distance measuring device, which read “705.3 meters”, before trying to get the class’s focus back. “It’s important for us to know our limits. That’s the first rational step to figuring out what type of heroes you’ll be.”

“705.3 meters! Well, I guess that makes sense since a giant robot threw it, even if it is shaped like a teddy bear– ”

“Deku…” the angry blond-haired boy, Bakugou Katsuki, finally emerged from his shock to rage at Midoriya, “What the fuck is this pocket dimension-quirk-robot shit! And you fucking beat me in the practical exam?! What the fuck!”

Bakugou launched himself at Midoriya with his explosions raging, only to be wrapped up by Shouta’s capture gear and have his quirk suppressed by Erasure. “Calm down! Threatening fellow students with violence and quirk use is not accepted here!”

“T-Teddydrum White, calm down! Just leave it to Aiza– Oh! Aizawa-sensei is the underground pro
hero Eraserhead? Look, Teddydrum– he already stopped Kacchan from using his quirk, see!”

After seeing that Bakugou had stopped trying to use his quirk, Shouta turned his head to look back at Midoriya.

The Teddydrum had responded to the threat on its master by hovering up in the air between the two. It had what looked like energy cannons charged with glowing red light on its shoulders and ready to fire at the raging boy. Shouta felt a renewed appreciation for his fast response time.

“I’m serious, disengage now!” this time Midoriya managed to be firmer with his order.

The cannons lost their glow, then moved back into the shoulders of the robot. However, it still precisely landed itself between his master and the offender, standing as a physical barrier in case Bakugou had anymore bright ideas.

Looking back to Bakugou, Shouta saw the boy was shying back with hesitation while eyeing the Teddydrum with a sneer on his face. Good, he had enough sense not to challenge the obviously protective and dangerous robot to a school-yard brawl at least.

Shouta released Bakugou from his bonds and sighed, “Let’s just move onto the tests now…”

The spikey red-haired boy Kirishima Eijirou, who from what Shouta remembered from the student profiles used to have black-hair, watched the scene with apprehension and attempted to lighten the mood among the students, “W-Well, trying to attack a classmate like that wasn’t manly at all! But–Let’s focus on the good things, yeah? Having the chance to use our quirks in tests is awesome! The heroics course is great!”

Shouta narrowed his eyes at those words, sensing the perfect opportunity to put his plan into action, “…Awesome”, huh. Do you think the heroics course will be all fun and games? In that case, the person who scores the lowest will be deemed hopeless and expelled.”

Shock moved through the students at his words. He let himself show a crazed grin. Things were finally slotting back into order.

“Your fate is in our hands. Welcome to the heroics course of UA…”
From behind the robot, he heard a quiet but bitter mutter from the student who he *knows* will be his problem child, “I’d certainly trust their hands with my fate more than God’s…”

He stowed the statement away for later; *problem child indeed.*

A girl with short brown hair, Uraraka Ochako was the one with enough guts to voice the opinion that was surely shared by most of the other students, “The lowest scorer will be expelled?! It’s only the first day, that’s totally unfair!”

Shouta replied with a cold tone, “Natural disasters, highway pileups, rampaging villains… Calamity is always right around the corner. I’d say Japan is full of unfair things…”

Strengthening his voice, he emphasized the main point of his words, “*Heroes* are the ones who correct that unfairness. For the next three years, UA is going to run you through the wringer in order to train you for this.”

He motioned his index finger towards himself in a “bring it on” gesture and gave a small smirk. “Go beyond. *That’s Plus Ultra!* Use your strength to overcome these obstacles!”

The students in front of him visibly steeled themselves with determination for their upcoming trials. Midoriya, fists clenched and eyes sharp in what seemed like an attempt to probe Shouta’s soul, looked as though he was prepared to face all of the unfairness this world had to offer.

Just when he had successfully changed to atmosphere to an appropriate level of seriousness, the giant teddy bear robot apparently decided that the danger had fully passed and relaxed its guard. It hunched up and its red mechanical eyes looked expectantly at the problem child, waiting to be scolded.

Midoriya, shifting out of the serious and tense attitude he had previously at the sight, smiled gently at his robot. His tone matched his smile, “It’s okay, Teddydrum White. I know you were just scared for me. Next time I tell you to disengage please do so immediately though.” Midoriya held out his hand, palm forward. “Great job with the throw. High-five?”

Teddydrum White wiped its hand over its brow as though it were wiping off sweat from the metal, obviously relieved that its master was still pleased with it. It leaned down, and carefully pushed on Midoriya’s small hand with its overwhelmingly larger nub to return his “high-five”.
Midoriya then seemed to blink in surprise at its hand. “Wait, that’s right… you don’t have fingers—How do you even hold things like the softball, anyway?”

The Teddydrum shrugged its shoulders in response.

Shouta pinched the bridge of his nose with his fingers and took a long breath in, followed by a long breath out.

_There’s no way he’ll be last, and he has so much potential, but Shouta can’t help but wish that Midoriya got himself expelled somehow so that Shouta can hold on to what little sanity he has left…_

As expected, Midoriya was not last place.

Overall, this year’s batch of hero-hopefuls had a lot of potential. They were certainly more suited for the rigger and discipline of the course than last year’s class had been and showcased various impressive quirks as well as creative quirk uses for the tests.

Of course, the problem child still attracted the most attention, with his literally impossible to miss giant robot aiding him throughout the tests.

For the 50-meter dash and endurance running, Teddydrum White carried Midoriya in its metal arms and flew over the track, inciting a couple of students to ask for the chance to ride the robot themselves someday. Midoriya just vaguely answered that if a good time for it comes up, they could try then.

_Note to self: Keep an eye on Kirishima, Kaminari, Uraraka, and Ashido to make sure they don’t get themselves killed riding Midoriya’s giant robot._

For the long jump, Midoriya jumped and had the Teddydrum pluck him from the air to throw the boy further, but it was careful to throw him gently so that he could land safely. It still seemed to fret over him in worry after the landing though, nervously hunched over and arms half-way stretched towards its master as though it wanted to move him around to look for injuries. Midoriya kindly assured Teddydrum White that he was unharmed while patting its oversized leg.
And for the side-step test, the boy just let the robot manhandle him, moving Midoriya side to side with its hands. In this case the Teddydrum just didn’t have the kind of motion precision necessary to quickly move him without jostling, causing Midoriya to suffer from nausea by the time the test was over. The robot looked absolutely beside itself, cradling its master as if it had killed him. Midoriya just gave reassuring strokes to its arm, and softly ensured Teddydrum White that he was alright and that it didn’t do anything wrong.

At these two instances there were some returning squeals about how “cute” the robot was, and some new ones on how “adorable” the problem child’s interactions with it were. Hagakure Toru was a particularly frequent offender for these comments.

Lord have mercy on Shouta’s soul, cause clearly these kids won’t.

The grip test, seated toe-touch, and sit ups were all performed by Midoriya without the use of Teddydrum White, but his other scores made up for it. After the last test, Midoriya transported the robot back to his pocket dimension with the same phrase he had used before. More than one student looked sad to see it go.

Despite the robot shenanigans, Shouta had come to the decision throughout the process of the tests that all of the group had potential, and thus informed them before displaying the results that his threat of expulsion was a logical ruse. The last placing student, the abnormally short and grape-haired Mineta Minoru, looked so relieved he might pass out on spot.

After dismissing his students to go back into the school building, Shouta walked over to the hero who had been stalking them for most of that time, “All Might, what do you want? Do you really have so much time to waste?”

The bulky hero cleared his throat nervously at being caught. “Ah– Well, I wanted to see how young Midoriya would handle these tests, and after seeing that he brought out… Teddydrum White, I wanted to observe the robot’s capabilities for myself.”

Shouta thoroughly examined the hero’s face, he was nowhere near surprised enough by the sight of a giant teddy bear robot.

“You knew,” he couldn’t keep the agitation from his voice, “You knew about Midoriya’s so called Teddydrum. How did you know?”
The Number One hero started sweating. “Well you see… I’ve actually had the chance to go to the boy’s pocket dimension. He showed me around and introduced me to it then, along with the other one.

“Is that so…” Shouta narrowed his eyes at All Might. “Does this have something to do with whatever Principal Nedzu knows about the kid’s quirk?”

“…Yes?”

He just gave a long sigh at that, then complained with exasperation, “As the kid’s teacher, I should really ask to go see the place for myself, but after he brought out… that thing of all things– I just want to put it off as long as possible now…”

“It would be good to see everything for yourself to accurately gauge his abilities, but… feel free to allow yourself a little time to adjust to all this first. You’ll need it.”

When All Might looked at him with pity clear in his shaded eyes, Shouta knew once and for all that he was truly *fucked.*

Chapter End Notes

References from this chapter:
I took some of the other characters’ dialogue straight from the anime/manga, especially Aizawa's spiel about unfairness.
Just a small thing, but 95, the amount of points I gave Izuku for the practical, is an important number that shows up a lot in *mawaru penguindrum* as a reference to the year 1995.
“–It’s understandable that the school would fail to comment on the subject of bringing giant robots to school in the regulations stated in their student handbook, besides the support department’s regulations of course. However, as a responsible student of an academy as prestigious as UA High School, I believe you should take the initiative to address this issue soon with the principal if you plan on using your robots in the future–”

“Come on Iida, lighten up a bit! Robots are supposed to be fun, aren’t they? Teddydrum White was so cute too!–”

Iida had been going on about trying to get some “official regulations” made about the Teddydrums for a while now. Izuku had interacted with him and infinity girl –whose name he still doesn’t know how embarrassing– throughout the school day after the quirk apprehension tests. Once they had resolved Iida’s previous behavior with him, Izuku just found himself clicking with them. They were just leaving school now, walking towards the entrance gate together.

*It was so different from how his life was like when he was quirkless. No one wanted to be friends with a person who would never amount to anything.*

“–And don’t think I’ll forget about your promise to let me ride a Teddydrum one day, Midoriya-kun! Come to think of it, I don’t think I ever introduced myself to you! How rude of me!”

“You’re right, that is quite rude!”

“Eh!” Izuku frantically waved his hands back and forth in denial. “I-Iida-kun, don’t say something like that! It was just a mistake, don’t worry about it, uh–”

“Uraraka Ochako!” Uraraka gave a cheerful smile, her hands grasped her backpack straps. “And you two are Iida Tenya and Midoriya Deku, right?”

Izuku’s body involuntarily jolted and stopped walking towards UA’s gate. He turned a wide-eyed look to infinity girl that matched his bewildered tone, “D-Deku?!”

She just blinked at him in surprise. “Oh, is that not your name? I heard Bakugou-kun call you Deku before, so I assumed it was…”
How was he supposed to explain something like this? “No! U-Uh, that’s just K-Kacchan’s mean nickname for me…”

“So, it’s a derogatory insult,” Iida expanded, pushing his glasses up his face and his eyes narrowing at his thoughts. “How crass. Bakugou’s behavior throughout the whole day has been completely unacceptable!”

“I’m so sorry, I’ve been thinking that was your name the entire day!” Uraraka placed her hands on her cheeks in embarrassment, Izuku noted that she was careful to keep her pinkies lifted. “But, I was just thinking it sounded like “dekiru”, you know?”

She removed her hands to pump one arm up in a cheer. “To me, it was like a “You can do it!” Deku!”

Izuku felt his mouth open and close a bit without any words passing through his lips. He stared at Uraraka with wide eyes. His world turned upside down–

–To be “Deku” is to be “useless”, because it seemed as though ever since he was 4, he no longer had a future, and the only certain thing was that he wouldn’t amount to anything, he was such a useless Deku that Dad needed to sacrifice his life and existence to save him–

But what if it doesn’t have to be that way? What if him being “Deku” doesn’t mean him being “useless”, doesn’t mean him being worthless and without a future? After all, his fate has already been changed hasn’t it? Now that he has a quirk, he has a future–

–All men are not created equal; Even so, he still wanted to be a hero–

“I’m not quirkless anymore, I’m not someone who’ll never amount to anything anymore”

But that wasn’t quite right either. Hadn’t Izuku decided he was going to be a hero even when he was quirkless? That he would find a way to amount to something? Wasn’t the only reason he believed that the quirkless him would never amount to anything just because that’s what society planned to confine him to–
“I’m not someone who’ll never amount to anything anymore”

No, that’s wrong.

This whole time, he had truly believed he wouldn’t amount to anything, that he had no future, that he was worthless, and useless, because he was born a “Deku” that was fated to have no quirk.

That would make sense, wouldn’t it? That’s what people have told him since he was 4. He had heard it so many times, had it said right to his face so many times, of course he would come to believe it himself...

But what he had believed was wrong, right? The quirkless him was still him; he still had the same dreams, the same emotions, the same sense of love... Society might tell him that he’s only worth something now, after getting a quirk, but the Izuku without a quirk wasn’t worthless. He still had everything that made Izuku a good child, who had big dreams and a big heart, he had everything that made up who Izuku was as a person.

A person’s quirk makes up the core of their Fruit of Fate. It’s an important part. Everything else, their experiences, their beliefs, their emotions, is built around it, but in the end it’s much smaller than the rest of the Fruit. To dismiss the rest of the Fruit as worthless just doesn’t make sense– that’s the part that actually makes up the person’s life.

“May those who accept their fate be granted happiness”

He hadn’t understood what Momoka-san had said at all. How could rolling over and accepting fate, especially if that fate is incredibly unfair and cruel, ever lead to happiness?

But, isn’t accepting fate just what people do? If a child is born to wealthy parents, born to a beautiful mother, or born during a war or to a family facing poverty, it’s not like the child is physically able to change that. Perhaps for somethings, like being poor, later on they can change those situations themselves, but many things are just physically impossible to change.

For example, what if a person wishes that they had been born with blue eyes? They can wear colored contacts if it makes them happy, they might even find a way to permanently color them, but in the end they weren’t born blue. If they were unable to accept that their eyes weren’t naturally blue, it would only make them miserable. They would never be happy about their eyes, even if they wore contacts. They would be much happier if they said, “It’s okay that I wear contacts to have blue
Izuku had never accepted that he had been born quirkless, he had never said, “It’s okay that I am quirkless”, and so he had never been happy about himself.

Isn’t that what it means… to not love himself?

If Izuku could accept that he was born to that fate, that he had been born quirkless, wouldn’t that make him happier? Wouldn’t that mean that he could love the quirkless Deku Izuku that he had used to be?

If “Deku” doesn’t have to mean “useless”–

“Midoriya-kun, do you need assistance? You haven’t responded in quite some time,” Iida inquired with a worried tone.

“M-Midoriya-kun… Are you okay?” Uraraka’s brows were furrowed and her brown eyes shined with concern.

Izuku blinked to waken himself, emerging from his thoughts.

“Uraraka-kun, do you think “Deku” can even mean… “You can do it, no matter what!”? That I can be a Deku that “can do it, even if it’s impossible”? A Deku that can do it, even if it means defying fate…

“Yeah! Exactly!” She pointed at him in emphasis. “That’s exactly the kind of Deku I was going for!”

“Oh…”

A complicated mixture of emotions welled inside his heart. Izuku felt tears come to his eyes, they blurred the world around him.

His voice broke as he decided, “Then Deku… is okay. You can call me Deku…”
“Midoriya-kun, why are you crying! What’s wrong?!”

“M-Midoriya-kun, I’m so sorry! You really don’t need to let me call you Deku, especially if it makes you so upset– “

“No, I’m serious,” tears started to fall down his face, but he managed to make his tone firm. He wiped them away with his hand. A small smile formed on his face. “Deku is okay. “Deku” can mean “You can do it, even if it’s impossible!””, so… you can call me Deku, Uraraka-kun…”

“Deku” can mean “dekiru”–

Izuku can be a Deku that can do it, even if it means defying fate–

Izuku can be a Deku that changes fate.

If Izuku can be that sort of Deku, instead of “useless” Deku– Then he can try to accept and love the quirkless Deku Izuku that he used to be, and that he still is, by every other metric besides whether he has a quirk or not.

Deku is useful

Deku is worth something

Deku has a future

Deku can amount to anything

It’s okay to be Deku

It’s okay… to be Izuku
Izuku’s tears failed to stop, and his two new friends fretted over him without pause. But Izuku thought that, for some reason… he couldn’t help but feel happy in that moment. It was a very melancholy happiness. But even so, for the first time since he was four, Izuku is happy to be Deku.

Izuku is happy to be Izuku.

The next day at school, Izuku noticed that Uraraka and Iida were carefully watching him, looking for signs that he was still upset from yesterday. Uraraka had also started referring to him as “Deku-kun”. It made his heart feel a little lighter to finally have friends that cared for him like this.

During the beginning of the day, things at UA ran as though it was a regular high school, with the only exception being that the teachers were pro heroes. The 1-A students sat through various classes on normal curriculum.

Present Mic gave an energetic but normal English lesson, though it seemed like most of the other students hadn’t found it as engaging as Izuku had. In his opinion, Present Mic’s presentation of the material and feedback on their answers may have been showy, but his praise and interest in their learning all felt genuine. What does it matter if it was a little over the top?

In a way, it sort of reminded him of Momoka-san’s personality. Except Mic-sensei was kinder and actually answered his questions. No matter how he looked at it, it was an improvement. Similar to how Aizawa-sensei was an improvement, though that “logical ruse” thing very much felt like something Momoka-san would do as well...

But in the afternoon after a delicious lunch made by Lunch Rush, Basic Hero Training helped to remind them all that this was the UA’s heroics course. Toshinori, in his All Might form and hero costume, exclaimed that they would kick off Basic Hero Training with a Battle Trial in the fake city that the practical exam had been in, in an area referred to as Ground Beta.

Leaving the changing room, Izuku couldn’t help but feel self-conscious about his hero costume.
“Wow, Deku-kun! Your hero costume looks good on you, it makes you look like a prince!”

“Y-You think so, Uraraka-kun? I think your costume looks good too, very spacey!” His hand rubbed at the back of his head as he looked down at himself.

He styled his hero costume to look similar to his father’s Penguindrum outfit.

It had a princely looking long-sleeved black shirt, with double breasted gold buttons connected in horizontal lines with gold trim, a high stiff collar, and golden shoulder pads. The shirt ended in long coat tails, leading into stark white pants that were topped with a gold colored utility belt that he planned to have filled with various items that could be used to help Izuku immobilize his opponents to whisk them away to the Crystal World, such as smokescreens and tear gas. He also plans to add a place to hold a sword on the belt later. The shirt and pants have elbow pads and knee pads for safety.

The outfit also featured pristine white gloves, knee length black steel-toed boots, and a dull orange visor shades that fit over his forehead, eyes, and the top of his nose ending in an angular shallow V shape. His curly green bangs fell over the top of the visor. Additionally, the visor was connected to a pair of black and white over-ear headphones by his ears, which showcased the stylized images of a penguin’s face on the ends and was secured with a normal headphone band that fit snugly around the top of his head. They should be able to connect to radio and communicator frequencies. He also had a watch with a penguin face that doubled as a timer. He finished it off with a deep red cape that was attached to his shoulders but could easily be removed if necessary.

In the end, he couldn’t resist making his hero costume prince/penguin themed as well. It’d also be better since it wouldn’t be such a drastic change for people to see him in his Prince of the Crystal uniform after transporting them with his hero costume on, since they were styled fairly similarly.

“C’est magnifique!”

The sudden French catching him off guard, Izuku looked up to see a sparkling blond boy with a hero costume that was similar to shining knight’s armor. It had a long glittering blue cape and a sweeping-winged red visor over his eyes.

“I underestimated you, Midoriya! Not only do you possess a mystérieuse quirk, you also have a fabuleux sense of style like moi~☆!” The boy gracefully placed a hand on his chest to gesture to himself, and at the same time used his other arm to bellow his cape out dramatically. “I shall formally introduce myself to you, monsieur pingouin, so rejoice! Je m'appelle Aoyama Yuga~☆!”
Oh God. Are people going to think this is what Izuku’s like, when they see his prince-themed costume or when he accidentally starts giving soliloquies on fate? Izuku thought as he stared at literally everything about the other boy, from his outfit to his speech. Also, he can never, ever let Momoka-san meet this guy… And did he just call Izuku mister penguin?

“A-Ah! Nice to meet you, Aoyama-kun! My name is Midoriya Izuku.” He stuck hand out to Aoyama, who stopped dramatically posing to return his handshake.

“I was aware, yes. I remembered it from the quirk apprehension test yesterday, monsieur pingouin~☆!”

He’s still calling him mister penguin!

“Monsieur pingouin?” Uraraka said to herself, finger tapping at her chin. She then brightened with a smile and pointed at Izuku, cheerfully declaring, “That’s right, with your color scheme and visor you do look like a penguin, Deku-kun! You’ve even got those cute penguins on it! Monsieur pingouin is a cute nickname for you!”

“Oh!”

Not you too, Uraraka-kun! Please stick to Deku!

Izuku then heard creepy giggling somewhere below him and to the side. He glanced down to see an abnormally short boy whose costume looked like grapes in a bowl that he remembered to be Mineta Minoru, the last placing student from yesterday’s tests.

While Uraraka’s attention was focused on his penguin headphones, Mineta leered at her costume’s curves unpleasantly, “The heroics course really is best, hehe…”

Izuku glared at him in displeasure, immediately judging that he needed to thoroughly investigate this classmate’s character, and subtly activated Conductor. He can’t interact with other people’s Fruit of Fate without physical contact, and he can’t look into it without having physical contact with either the person or their Fruit in the Crystal World, but he could still see the Fruit when the quirk was on.

Mineta’s Fruit of Fate, while mostly normal, had an obvious and concerning imperfection; A small
portion of the very bottom of the Fruit was covered in black rot.

*He’s only in high school, how on Earth has this guy managed to corrupt his being and future to the point where it rotted his Fruit of Fate?! Izuku needs to watch this guy carefully when he’s around the girls…*

“What an interesting choice for a costume design, Midoriya-kun, very regal! Though I do wonder why you chose to add penguins to it…” Iida’s arrival took Izuku out of his thoughts. His costume made him look similar to a Gundam robot. “But now’s not the time to dillydally, let us meet up with All Might-sensei once more!”

Right on cue All Might’s booming voice interrupted them, “Gather around students, it’s time for me to explain the In-door Anti-personnel Battle Training!”

Izuku glanced over Uraraka and Iida, and took relief at the sight of their whole and golden Fruits, complete with normal brown stems. He was about to turn off Conductor, but noticed some light in the corner of his eye, causing him to reflectively turn towards it—*Oh…*

His eyes are on Kacchan, who is glaring at him the same way he has been all of yesterday and today, but instead of making eye contact, Izuku just stared at his *literally on fire* Fruit of Fate.

*Kacchan’s Fruit… is burning. It makes sense in hindsight, his desire to be Number One was certainly toxic, but if it’s like this then—*

Iida’s armor-plated hand rested on his shoulder and his voice was gentle but firm, “Midoriya, I understand how Bakugou’s attitude towards you must be upsetting, but I believe the best way to put it off your mind for right now would be to ignore him and place all your focus on the classwork for today. Let’s go to All Might-sensei now.”

Uraraka solemnly nodded beside him, brows furrowed in determination. “That’s right, Deku-kun. Don’t worry, we’ll help you figure out something for Bakugou.”

“*A-Ah, thanks. Iida-kun, Uraraka-kun.*”

*If it’s like this then Izuku needs to do something to help him. It’s one thing if its partial, that would be bad for his mindset still but at least it wouldn’t be outright dangerous in the long run, but the entire*
Izuku will put the information off his mind for now, but it definitely wasn’t forgotten.

Izuku turned off Conductor while following his friends to the large group of students ahead of them. Noticing that Aoyama was walking at the edge of their group, near them but not quite with them, he realized that Aoyama had still been with them during their discussion about Bakugou. He must have tactfully decided to stay silent through it.

After everyone had collected around All Might, he explained the basics of the exercise. It was simple enough, they would be divvied up into pairs and then assigned to be villains or heroes. The villains would protect a paper mâché bomb, while the heroes would have 15 minutes to apprehend either both villains or the bomb in order to win. If they fail to do this, or both heroes are apprehended themselves, the villain team wins.

“What about basic training?” the girl with the frog themed costume, who Midoriya vaguely remembered to be named Asui, asked with her head tilted to the side and finger on her chin in a questioning manner.

“How about practical experience will teach you the basics!” All Might explained proudly with a thumbs up.

Izuku blinked at that.

*Red flag! Red flag! Toshinori-san, that’s exactly the kind of logic Momoka-san uses! Please think your lesson plan through more and teach more of the basics! Isn’t this class literally called Basic Hero Training?! Why are you skipping basic training?!

The students were randomly paired into teams, but somehow Uraraka and Izuku ended up together, while Iida had the misfortune of ending up with Bakugou.

“Woah, it’s like fate!” Uraraka had exclaimed happily when paired with him.

*Definitely. A very kind fate too–*
Then Izuku’s team was randomly set to fight against Kacchan’s.

*Never mind. It was all for the sake of dramatic irony. He should’ve known better… However…*

Izuku could feel Kacchan’s glare on his side but didn’t return his stare.

*This was way too good of a chance to miss, maybe fate did have a reason for this besides dramatic irony?*

“Uraraka-kun,” Izuku quietly spoke to his partner, “Kacchan is definitely going to come after me as soon as he can, so during that time look for the bomb, okay? I’ll meet back up with you after capturing him.”

She glanced nervously in Bakugou’s direction through her pink face shield. “Are you sure you’ll be alright fighting him? I don’t think a Teddydrum can fit in there…”

“Yes,” he responded with confidence in his voice, something which was usually abnormal for him concerning anything involving Kacchan. Izuku has the feeling it’s going to be his new normal someday. He fiddled with his watch to prepare the timer. “As long as he acts the way that I predict he will, then I’ll have finished with him in 5 minutes.”
To Become a Hero who Always Wins

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Katsuki has always been the biggest fish in his pond, the top of the top among the merciless hierarchy of the youth. He was born with a quirk that was guaranteed to give him a career as a pro hero but wasn’t so cocky that he didn’t realize that he still needed to work on his abilities if he really wanted to make it to the top. His battle prowess was born of both natural talent and hard-earned skill, that’s why he knew he would follow All Might’s steps and reach the top of the ultimate social ladder to become the Number One hero. In the end, everyone else would be extras compared to him.

But if that was the case–

“Wow, Kacchan, your quirk is so amazing! I hope I get my quirk soon!”

Then why the fuck–

“I ruined your plan? There wasn’t supposed to be anyone else? Well guess what, Kacchan, that’s just how life works!”

Was that shitty Deku–

“Why are you even complaining, when you’ve just succeeded in getting into the top high school in the country?! You’ve literally got your life lined up to become a successful hero, just like it had been since you were four!”

In his fucking head–

“Unlike me, you’ve been so blessed by fate and whatever God or gods exist in this universe, and all you can do is whine about how it’s not absolutely perfect– Well tough shit! Deal with it!”

Repeating bullshit to him constantly–
“Are you alright, Kacchan? Can you stand okay?”

Why is he looking down on him, as if he’d ever need a useless Deku’s help!

“I’m not quirkless anymore, I’m not someone who’ll never amount to anything anymore. You don’t even know what I lost to get to this point— to earn my place at UA!”

What was even up with him?! Katsuki’s never seen him so anger in his entire life! But all of a sudden he grows a backbone and starts spewing words about fate and God and how Katsuki was apparently blessed and even fucking cursed at him!

Of course Katsuki’s path through life and Katsuki himself have to be absolutely perfect, how else was he supposed to be the best?!

And just now before the Trial, he had been looking at Katsuki weirdly, what was Deku thinking—

The thoughts exploded from Katsuki’s head and turned into action.

“Four-eyes, I’m going on ahead to deal with the nerd!”

“Bakugou wait– !”

He didn’t bother listening to the rest of his partner’s complaining and was already running through the hallways headed towards the ground floor.

He’ll show that useless Deku, he’ll prove to him that he’s better than him! That he’s the best! That he was meant to be the best, he has to be the best—

Once on the ground floor, he rounded a corner to deliver a surprise attack to Deku and his extra of a partner. The nerd predictably pushed the girl to the ground and avoided the attack. He wasn’t able to keep Katsuki from glancing his face with the blow though. His stupid orange visor was cracked on one side but still whole.
“Don’t dodge, *Deku!*”

Deku looked at him in a cool manner, *the nerve of him*– “Kacchan, I knew you would come for me.” He pressed a button on his watch, which upon closer inspection, Katsuki realized had a *fucking penguin* on it, and took out his capture tape to hold in his left hand.

Katsuki ran at him full speed, swinging his right hand back and punching it forward. It would give a devastating blow when combined with an explosion.

Katsuki’s teeth gave a wide grin, “I’ll mess you up just enough to not get disquali– ”

Deku moved within his guard and grabbed his arm– “Survival Strategy!”

Suddenly the colors of their surroundings were all wrong. The moment of speech had given him just long enough of an instance to rip his arm out of Deku’s grasp. Wary of the abrupt changes, he backed away, hearing the sound of gravel under his feet–

Katsuki wasn’t in the gray walled building within Ground Beta. Around him was a huge circle of dirt-covered ground, and black and white stands facing each other on either side of the area. The two sides with no stands didn’t look as though they continued past the them. It was off-centered in a giant dome of crystal high above their heads, and the place they were at was high up enough that he could see a gleaming building on the ground in the distance.

*Fucking shit! That’s right– Deku was touching his fucked up, cutesy, murder robot when he came back with it! Katsuki shouldn’t have gotten so close–*

Just a few feet away, Deku seemed to look down at him despite them being eyelevel. For some reason, he seemed to be looking *into* Katsuki with *sadness* of all things. *He’s still looking down on him–*

Also, his costume had changed and gotten even more stupid somehow.

The sight of the shining penguin-like crown *enraged* him.
Katsuki sneered, “This is that pocket dimension shit Sensei was spouting about, isn’t it… But what’s up with those almost fucking *booty shorts* and almost fucking *skirt*, at least *make up your goddammed mind*! And you gave yourself a damn *crown*?! How high up do you think you are compared to me, *Deku*?!”

Even though his words were full of fury, Deku just looked exasperated. “Kacchan, please just ignore my outfit and start trying to beat me up…”

“*Trying*?! *I will beat you up dammit!* *Useless* Deku, *Stop looking down on me*!”

His righthanded punch had been predicted, in hindsight it’s not surprising with how much time the nerd wasted on random analysis of shit, but it burns Katsuki nonetheless.

*He’ll just feint the asshole then!* Katsuki burst forward pretending to prepare his right arm for a punch. “How the fuck did you even manage to get a *quirk*– ” As he approached, Deku stood his ground. Once in range, he switched to using his left hand. “–*like this*?!"

Abruptly, the scenery around him inexplicably blurred, making him disoriented. When his sight fixed itself, he was moving forward into a drop that could easily be the height of Mount Fuji. He felt the sensation of falling and instinctual fear rise.

He forced his body to turn back and barely got a glimpse of Deku standing on the edge Katsuki was falling off, still looking down on him and moving a hand to his chest. As Deku got farther and farther away, Katsuki could hardly hear over the sound of wind rushing past his ears, “Don’t worry, I’ve got *Teddydrum Black* ready to get you just in case– ” before he lost sight of him.

–*got Teddydrum Black ready to get you*–

Looking around, he saw a black shape a few ways away keeping pace with him.

The fear of the fall was easily masked over with his anger; If he was mad before, now he was a human container of *unbridled fury*.

Forcing his arms back behind him through the extreme wind resistance, Katsuki slowly revved up his explosive propulsion using multiple explosions to start breaking his fall while insuring he wouldn’t fall into his own ball of fire forming behind him.
“If you’re going to throw me off a damn cliff, Deku,” he growled into the wind despite knowing the boy had no way to hear him. His explosions building, the fall slowed to a stop. “–at least have the fucking decency to let me catch myself or die trying!”

He rocketed up with a blast. He had fallen a good amount, but slowing his fall had kept the distance from becoming overwhelming. Once he flew past the edge of the cliff, he adjusted his angle to push himself forward towards the ground.

Deku was standing at ready farther away from the edge with an entirely matte black sword in his grip. The only spot of color on it was an eerily glowing green crystal embedded in the metal curve surrounding the main portion of the handle. Floating in the air around him were four stark white swords, all pointed at Katsuki. Deku’s matching eerie green eyes stared at Katsuki intensely.

_Fuck that shit! Trying close range combat was already shot to hell–_

At the same moment Katsuki released a roaring inferno with his right grenade bracer, Deku regally pointed the black sword towards him, causing the floating white swords to launch at him. They were caught up in his blast, which formed a mass of fire and force so great it completely blocked Deku’s form and everything around him from Katsuki’s sight. He didn’t trust those freaky swords for a minute, so he swerved sideways to ground to dodge them. He was proven right when they emerged from the dispersing fire glowing red with heat, streaking through the area around where his body would’ve been.

_Was that bitch not even fucking aiming for him– A swoosh through the air and the cracking of his right grenade bracer interrupted his thoughts._

Katsuki turned his head towards his right hand, pressed against the ground to brace himself. A fifth white sword had punctured straight through the bracer just to the side of where his arm would be in it, pinning it to ground. “Shit!” He tried to get up, pulling on the sword, but like the sword of legend Excalibur, it refused to budge now that it was in position.

_“Will of the Crystal Princess!”_”

Glittering opaque crystal burst from the ground like one of his explosions, completely encasing him within seconds. The hand he was using to pull at the sword, which was covered with him, was stuck grabbing the handle and the other was still stuck lying on the ground, leaving him in an awkward position. He couldn’t move his body at all, let alone trigger his remaining bracer explosion, only his
face and ears were left open to the air. Glancing at what he could from his position, Katsuki saw that the crystal had basically formed a solid jagged rock around him, the areas around his arms and hands seemed especially thick.

*With this kind of encasement, his normal explosions will almost certainly cause backlash and whether or not it can successfully crack through depends on how hard the crystal is. Trying to struggle in it doesn’t seem to work at all, so there’s a good chance it won’t be enough. Maybe he should risk burning off his hands anyway though if it gets him free and lets him win—*

Out of nowhere, Deku’s stupidly almost thigh high black boots filled his vision where he was still half-crouched half-pinned on the ground. Useless capture tape was wrapped around the cocoon of crystal.

“I win,” Deku’s statement was void of any emotion.

Katsuki’s eyes widened in shock and he felt his teeth grit as he choked on his breath, the crystal was so tight around his head that he couldn’t even force his jaw open to scream at the sentence.

Katsuki didn’t feel like he thought he would, though, when he had imagined the day he might hear those words said to him instead of the other way around. All the anger that had built in him throughout his match had been sucked into a void in his chest, and all that was left was a crushing sense of defeat and despair.

Even though Katsuki could feel his chest move slightly from his inhales and exhales, just a bit inhibited by the crystal casing, even though he was breathing so hard he could hear it echo in his skull, Katsuki felt like he couldn’t breathe.

The human container of rage had emptied to leave a hollow shell.

*Why? How? How could this of happened? He was supposed to be the best, he had to be the best, if he wasn’t the best what was he?*

Katsuki strained his eyes to try and look at Deku’s face without the ability to move his head, but the effort became unnecessary when Deku came down to his level on one knee. The red cloak spread out behind him like he was some fucking fairytale prince kneeling gracefully in his throne room instead of in the fucking dirt. The green eyes were still intensely staring at him.
“This might take away some of our time in the Battle Trial, but it might also be the only chance I ever get to imbed this message into your think skull. So, I’m going to ramble on forever like I always do, okay?”

Why would he even bother asking, it’s not like Katsuki can complain about it right now. He’s just the conquered loser–

“There were many ways I could’ve fought you, Katsuki,” –and that caught his attention, because throughout all these years; despite the cruel words he had said, the tears he forced from those eyes, and the bruises he put on that body, Izuku had never called Katsuki anything but Kacchan– “That spell with the swords I just used was an inconvenient choice; it takes time to set up, which is why I had to make you fall off the tower, and I haven’t practiced it enough to summon a lot of swords or use them in complicated ways. It was a risk to fight you purely one on one, you proved that with the enhanced explosion I had no idea you could use just now.”

The black gloved fingers of Izuku’s left hand ghosted against the skin at the edge of his face. He wouldn’t be able to look away from those green eyes even if he wanted to. Izuku’s voice was steady and not raised at all, but it resounded in Katsuki’s ears like a speaker with surround sound, “I could’ve had the Teddydrums fight you, I could’ve had the Champion of this arena we’re in fight you, I could’ve first had one of them fight you and then come in with this crystal when you were distracted and stuck in place, hell, I could’ve had penguins fight you. But I didn’t do any of that.”

Izuku brought his face closer to Katsuki’s to the point where he could almost feel the other boy’s breath.

“And that’s because,” Izuku’s eyes beseeched Katsuki to listen, “I wanted to prove to you that I could beat you. Even more than that, I wanted to prove to myself that I could beat you. No third parties, no tricks outside of the abilities I have as the Prince of this Crystal World, just me.”

“Are you alright, Kacchan? Can you stand okay?”

The green eyes finally glanced away, giving Katsuki a reprieve. The tension in his body had nothing to do with his forced confinement.

“I’ve realized, Katsuki, that I don’t need to believe in your meaning of the name “Deku”. Deku can mean “dekiru”. Deku “can do it”, no matter if it’s impossible, even if it defies fate. I can be the Deku who changes fate and not Deku the useless child with no future. That’s what I want Deku to mean, from now on. And that’s all I wanted to show you originally, after I had attained this power, but– ”
Izuku jerked his eyes back to Katsuki, his fingers still ghosted Katsuki’s face. “I saw it, when I looked at you before the Battle Trial, and when I was still grabbing you right after I transported you here, I looked into it to know how it came to be; the state of your being and future–”

Incomprehensively, Izuku’s right hand slipped through the crystal and Katsuki’s chest. He felt it grabbing something, and when it pulled out, there was fire in his palm surrounding an oddly colored apple in a thin layer.

“This is your Fruit of Fate, Katsuki, the culmination of their entire being, life, and fate all rolled together. And it is burning.” Izuku removed his hand from Katsuki, using it to gently cradle the apple and small flames with both hands. “Conductor, the quirk that was passed to me from my dad, who I know you don’t remember, lets me see and interact with these Fruit. The power of this pocket dimension is related to it but ultimately comes from another source.”

Izuku backed up using his knees, ending with both knees on the ground a couple steps away. He released the Fruit to let it hover in the air between them. Katsuki stared into the fire instead of his eyes. It crackled and glowed just like the real thing, he even felt heat coming off of it.

“Normally, the Fruit of Fate don’t have fire on them. This is a sign that you are burning Katsuki. It represents the burning of your desire, the desire to be the best, to never lose, to be Number One. And normally, ambition is nothing so dangerous that it would affect the Fruit, but in your case, it’s just too much. When a person burns with desire, it burns both them and the people around them. It inflicts pain on both yourself and others, that is what it means when your Fruit of Fate burns. It’s desire that has reached obsession, and it’s unhealthy.”

–he’s better than him, he’s the best, he was meant to be the best, he has to be the best–

Katsuki’s stomach felt sick. He forced his eyes to stare down to the ground, so he couldn’t see the eerie burning apple or Izuku’s eerie green eyes. He wanted to discard everything that was said as garage, utter nonsense that wasn’t even fit to be put in a fucking fairytale. Honestly, fucking “Fruit of Fate” what is this shit even?!

But if that was the case–

“Let me catch myself or die trying!”
Then why was his empty feeling of despair at losing to a person who had always just been a pebble in his way – *No he was a threat, he was always a threat, even if he didn’t have a quirk he just wouldn’t bend to Katsuki’s will like everyone else, Katsuki was better than him wasn’t he so why wasn’t Katsuki able to just bend him too– becoming a feeling of encompassing dread?*

“I saw how your ambition had become so unhealthy, when I looked into your Fruit of Fate.” Izuku was still talking, but Katsuki refused to look up from the ground, his red eyes felt like they were burning up along with the Fruit. “It started innocent enough. You just wanted to be a hero like All Might, a hero who always wins, so you turned yourself into a person who is never supposed to lose. But perfect people don’t exist on this Earth, Katsuki, and at some point while growing up you realized this.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Izuku take his Fruit of Fate into his right hand.

“You took joy in the ways you were superior to everyone, all of your “extras”, including me. You took joy in my pain and failure to manifest a quirk, because the lower people are compared to you the better you must be. You truly believed every single instance where people would tell you that your quirk was amazing, and therefore you were amazing, with all your 4-year-old heart, and you loved that feeling of being “amazing”.”

–*I’m awesome, I’m better than everyone else!–*

“You truly thought that since you were “better than everyone” that you should never need their help, after all, *All Might* doesn’t need anyone else’s help. And that’s where you faced your first real challenge to your mindset, *me*– I had no idea what you were thinking, that day you refused my help in the stream, but you saw my concern and desire to help as a threat, since if you ever needed the help of the *useless quirkless Deku* then how could you ever hope to be like All Might?”

Katsuki felt his teeth grind together.

“But it didn’t stop there, it just got worse and worse. You refused the possibility of losing. And how could you lose? You were born with the perfect quirk, you *worked hard* with that quirk, *everyone says* this is what you were meant to be and where the destination of your fate would lie. For you to lose after all that, for you to ever need help, for you to fall short, even if it’s just by ending up in second place as the Number Two hero instead, it could only mean that you’re a *complete failure*, right?”

Katsuki felt his body tremble within the confines of the crystal that he couldn’t win against.
“It was all or nothing; either you always win, or you’re a complete failure. Even if it was only one battle you lost, less than a perfect record wasn’t acceptable. Losing would be the end of everything you desired and worked for. But you know what, Katsuki, you were wrong—”

There was a moment where his mind just went blank, as though he had heard the words but couldn’t comprehend what was said. Katsuki was still trembling, but finally he looked straight into Izuku’s eyes. They easily met his own.

“You were wrong about me, Katsuki, and you were wrong about you. Do you think just because you lost this fight, that All Might is going to think you’re a complete failure? Because if you do, I can tell you right now that he won’t. None of the teachers or students will think you’re a failure, your parents won’t think you’re a failure, I don’t think you’re a failure.

“The only person who thinks you’ll be a failure is you, Katsuki. Because you aren’t a failure.”

Izuku’s left hand, instead of ghosting Katsuki’s face like before, held it firmly by the side of his forehead, bringing his face closer.

Izuku’s next words were a soft whisper, “You lost, Kacchan, and that’s okay—”

Katsuki harshly breathed in air through his teeth. He gawked at Izuku, eyes widening.

Still speaking softly, Izuku continued, “It’s okay to lose. It’s okay to need help. Neither of those things mean you’re a failure. Neither of those things mean you’re useless, or worthless, or have no future, or will never amount to anything. You lost just now, but you’re still at UA, you’re still on your way to becoming a hero, and you can still become the Number One hero, because you’re still here. It wasn’t the end of the world or your life.”

Katsuki felt trail Izuku’s fingers down the side of his face in a steady stream. Right now, Katsuki could stop breathing and die but he wouldn’t even notice, the only thing he could see was the emerald green of Izuku’s eyes. They looked like they were trying to give him strength.

“Throughout all these thoughts that you had, you only liked yourself when you were “amazing” and when you always won. You only wanted to be you if you were “amazing”. But you can’t always win, you can’t always be amazing, and you can’t always stand on your own…”
“So, if you only love yourself when you’re amazing and when you win, is that really loving yourself?”

Katsuki couldn’t think right now. There was no way for him to even begin asking himself such a heavy question. Izuku’s hand stopped moving once it reached the bottom where his chin was stuck inside the crystal. He readjusted it so his hand was back in the middle.

“You don’t have to have an answer to that now, but there’s a reason why I’m telling you all this, besides the fact that I do want you to have a healthier mindset in general. Like all things that burn, if the fire is given the opportunity, all that’s left of its fuel will be ashes. A fate that is left to burn will eventually become ashes— well, the actual Fruit won’t literally turn to ash, but metaphorically the person’s future and desires will.” –Panic burst in his chest– “But that won’t happen to you! Your fate can change, look.”

Izuku leaned back from his close proximity to Katsuki and held up his right hand to bring his attention to his Fruit of Fate. Examining it thoroughly, he found that the flames around the Fruit had become thinner after Izuku’s one-sided conversation.

Izuku smiled at Katsuki in that way he always hated. “You can stop the burning, Kacchan. It will take a long time, maybe even years, but it will go out eventually. You probably could’ve done it on your own, once you realized the things I told you for yourself, but– All Might actually told me once that meddling when you don’t need to is the essence of being a hero, so– ”

After an entire speech of fucking perfect eloquency, Deku just left off his words with a shrug.

“I wanted to help you, so I did…” Deku said this as if it were a simple fact of life.

The right hand disappeared back into his chest holding his Fruit of Fate, Katsuki could feel it going back into place –fucking creepy– before Deku pulled his hand back out. Then he finally let go of his face with his other hand.

“Just think about what I’ve told you, okay?”

“You lost, Kacchan, and that’s okay”
“It’s okay to lose. It’s okay to need help. Neither of those things mean you’re a failure. Neither of those things mean you’re useless, or worthless, or have no future, or will never amount to anything”

“You aren’t a failure”

Katsuki knows for a fact that he will be thinking about what Izuku told him, whether he wants to or not.

“I’ll just adjust the crystal a bit, so you can at least talk and move your head around, then we can go…”

He didn’t even need to touch the crystal, it just seemed to recede from Katsuki’s head of its own accord. It stopped at the middle of his neck.

Even though he could move his jaw fine now, Katsuki didn’t speak a single word. While his mouth might be free, his brain was incapable of speech.

His silence seemed to catch Deku off guard, causing him to glance away from Katsuki after a moment of awkward quiet.

“Survival Strategy Complete”

The two abruptly switched locations, the gray walls telling Katsuki that they were back in Ground Beta.

“Bakugou Katsuki from the villain team has been captured!” All Might’s declaration echoed throughout the building.

–he was meant to be the best, he has to be the best–

“You lost, Kacchan, and that’s okay”

Deku checked his stupid penguin watch “Wow– the timer could actually keep going wherever it gets
transported to when I switch outfits. That took 6 minutes instead of 5 but considering I really did ramble a lot there, it was pretty close…”

Katsuki choked on his breath at that, and suddenly found himself capable of words, “Just– fucking go, Izuku!”

Deku turned to him in shock, but his glare was enough to convince him to heed Katsuki’s words and go after his partner. “Uraraka-kun, I’m back. Where’s your current location– “ Deku’s voice trailed off as he ran down the hallway away from Katsuki.

Katsuki sulked in his stupid-ass crystal for maybe 4 minutes tops before his surroundings instantly changed back to the arena he had been in previously. Deku was there with his team’s fake-ass bomb a few feet away from him, again in the outfit he had on previously with the crown. He looked at Katsuki in surprise, then held up his hands with a shrugging gesture. He sheepishly explained, “Uh– Oops? I didn’t know you’d come back with me…”

Katsuki growled at that, “Do you not even fucking know how to use your fucking not-quirk power?! Learn the damn basics!”

Deku motioned his hands towards Katsuki as though trying to calm him down. “I know, I know! It’s just that I have to do a bunch of trial and error with it cause Mo– uh, the person who knows everything about it hardly tells me anything, including how any of the abilities function. It’s been going slow cause of that…”

“Then “trial and error” faster, dumbass!”

Rubbing the back of his head in embarrassment, Deku shuffled around awkwardly –Was this really the same guy who just psychoanalyzed the shit out of him with the grace and brilliance of fucking royalty?– before placing his hand on the bomb to officially “capture” it –as though literally capturing it by bringing it to his fucking Crystal World or whatever he called it wouldn’t count– and repeated the phrase “Survival Strategy Complete!”

Then All Might’s voice reappeared to declare, “As a repeat for those who have just returned to us; Since the nuclear bomb was captured, the hero team wins!”

At those words, Katsuki still felt emptiness and despair and dread and all the other emotions that had welled inside of him after his defeat and through Izuku’s words, but he didn’t feel worse. So, guess
Chapter End Notes

Quotes this chapter:
“Wow, Kacchan! Your quirk is so amazing! I hope I get my quirk soon!” and “Are you alright, Kacchan? Can you stand okay?” are both things Izuku said to Bakugou during the flashbacks to when they were four.
"I’m awesome, I’m better than everyone else!” is something Bakugou thought to himself during these same flashbacks.
The Truth is Always Hidden Within

*He has no idea if he made things better or worse for Katsuki, but considering he called him Izuku and not useless Deku, he guesses things got better? At least a little? For both of them? He basically just gave Katsuki his first real loss and then told him everything he needed to hear to accept it. So Izuku’s hoping that by building off this experience, Katsuki will eventually come to not mentally freak out at the thought of losing.*

Finishing his Battle Trial was fairly simple once Kacchan was out of the picture, no offense to Iida. Two on one was a great advantage to have, and by the time he got there, Uraraka was already distracting Iida by swinging a huge broken off concrete pillar at him that she had used her quirk on and batting rubble towards him — *He hasn’t known her for long but Uraraka-kun can actually be pretty scary huh, a good match to team up with in Izuku’s opinion*— All it took was waiting until Iida had distanced himself enough from Izuku’s path towards the nuclear bomb and throwing his crystal stone at it to transport it to the Crystal World with him. When he came back, All Might decreed that the hero team had won.

He heard from Uraraka that the moment he had vanished with the bomb, All Might had declared the bomb to be captured and confirmed the hero team’s win.

During this, Izuku found that the crystal he had encased Kacchan with took him back to the Crystal World when Izuku took the bomb despite being a whole 5 floors away. But then again, throughout the entirety of the practical exam the robots had always automatically come back with him when he left the Crystal World without the need for physical contact or crystal shards, so it makes sense for the opposite to be the same way.

It was rather embarrassing to be chewed out by Kacchan for not knowing the details behind how his abilities work, but he certainly had a point. Izuku needs to set aside some time to investigate his spells in depth along with practicing his new ones.

After seeing Mineta’s and Kacchan’s Fruit of Fate, Izuku realized it would be prudent of him to examine the rest of his class as well to make sure there were no more people with partial corrupt morals, unhealthy desires, Children of Fate, or unhealthy mindsets that inflict self-pain.

*On that note, he really needs to have that talk with Toshinori-san, the man has put it off long enough.*

Thus, when they moved back to the observation room to hear critique on their battle, Izuku activated Conductor and scanned all of his classmates. The rest of them all had normal golden Fruits with
normal brown stems, except for one.

That’s... Todoroki, right? Isn’t he Endeavor’s son? Izuku carefully inspected the scarred boy’s Fruit of Fate, it was completely covered in a shining layer of ice. His Fruit is totally frozen! Not as potentially dangerous for him as poison or burning, but– he won’t be able to move on with his life if it stays like that...

“All right! Well, this is probably plain to see for most of you, but I pick young Midoriya to be the VIP of this battle! Would someone like to have a go at explaining why?”

All Might’s words caused Izuku’s face to heat up in embarrassment. He deactivated Conductor and looked at the Number One hero in surprise. “E-Eh? But, you couldn’t even see what I was doing for most of it, right?”

All Might pointed a large finger at him. “That’s right. However, even without being able to see your face-off with young Bakugou, the actions that we could see were sufficient to decide this!”

“All Might-sensei is right, Midoriya-san,” a refined feminine voice cut in, Izuku turned to see that it came from the girl with a high ponytail and somewhat revealing hero costume.

“Yaoyorozu,” All Might swung his pointed hand around towards Yaoyorozu, “it seems you have a clear idea of what I was thinking of! Would you like to give your answer to the class?”

She nodded her head slightly.

“Yes, All Might-sensei. Firstly, Bakugou-san ran off from his partner to take on Midoriya by himself without proper communication with his partner, and his emotional and reckless choice to use close-to-mid range combat led to him easily being transported by Midoriya to his pocket dimension, which most likely led to him being at a disadvantage for their fight, resulting in him being captured.

“Iida-san, on the other hand, gave a much better performance. He adapted to his partner’s whims and formed a counter-strategy to put Uraraka at a disadvantage by clearing their battlefield of objects for her to use her quirk on. He was just late to react to Midoriya’s sudden move to secure the bomb.

“Uraraka-san did her best to work on her own while Midoriya was preoccupied and get around the constraints Iida placed on her, however, her way of doing so would never be permissible in a real-life
scenario. It was too haphazard to be safe to use if the nuclear bomb had been real.

“Finally, Midoriya-san clearly took advantage of Bakugou’s near-sighted focus on him to take him to his pocket dimension and give himself an environmental advantage. Additionally, this had the positive side effect of limiting the damage that could have potentially been done to the building during a fight with an opponent that had explosive abilities. After securing Bakugou, he properly coordinated with his partner to set up an ambush to take the bomb and waited for the right opportunity to do so. These factors all make his performance the best of the group.

“The only concern that I have is whether transporting the bomb with his quirk might have set it off if it was real, and the fact that Bakugou had been transported with both him and the bomb. Technically he seemed secure enough to not be a problem, and he had the capture tape on which officially removed him from the match, but there was the possibility of reintroducing him as a problem with that.”

…”

“I-I’d also add that Iida was somewhat stiff, but, w-what an excellent analysis by Yaoyorozu!” Even though All Might was giving her a thumbs up, he looked a bit intimidated by her.

Midoriya was also intimidated by Yaoyorozu’s extensive analytical abilities, probably more than All Might was too, but thought it would be good to address her concerns, “A-Ah, unless the bomb was sensitive enough that it could be triggered by being hit with a few pieces of very small shards of rock, I don’t see a way for it go off during transporting it. Transporting things merely changes their location, it doesn’t have any other effect on them.”

He carefully didn’t look at Kacchan, who was abnormally quiet through the critique of his actions, when Izuku continued with, “A-And it would be hard for someone to escape that crystal, but– if they had some way to remove themselves that didn’t require moving their body, they might be able to escape once they had left my pocket dimension. The only way Kacchan would be able to do that is if he’d been willing to severely hurt himself with his own explosions, and it would’ve been for nothing since he was out of the match anyway, like you said.”

Yaoyozoru accepted his reasoning with a firm nod. “I see, it seems you thought of those factors as well. You put the prior knowledge you gained through your familiarity with Bakugou to good use for this exercise.”

“Quite right, Yaoyorozu! Take note students; knowledge is power, especially on the battlefield! Next up is team B and team I!”
After watching Todoroki single-handedly earn team B’s victory with his overwhelming ice abilities, Izuku couldn’t help but feel thankful that he had talked to Kacchan about his Fruit and forced his first loss already. Kacchan was glaring at the screen during Todoroki’s battle, likely feeling threatened by his power and comparing himself to him. There was no way Kacchan would’ve been able to feel secure in his position as “the best” here at the heroics course. All of the student here are also “the best”, it’s how they made it into the course in the first place.

What Izuku noted during that fight, though, was that although Todoroki’s other side seemed to produce heat, he hadn’t used it for anything but melting his ice.

*Is that because that’s all it can do, or because that’s all he wants to do with it… His entire Fruit of Fate is frozen, so how he feels about his quirk must contribute to some aspect of its condition.*

The Battle Trials continued in that manner, with Kacchan glaring at the screen whenever someone showed powerful potential, and Izuku trying to keep track of everyone’s quirks. Well, and also keep track of Mineta’s behavior when it was his turn.

*He’s in the middle of preparing for a fight and all he can do is stare at Yaoyorozu’s body, is All Might really not noticing this? Midoriya needs to make sure the hero gets some training on how to look for these things…*

Eventually, the Battle Trials came to an end, and everyone changed out of their costumes and prepared to go home. Kacchan left without a single glance at him, probably trying to work through everything he had been told by Izuku.

All Might caught Izuku before he could leave the classroom himself. “Young Midoriya! Can I trouble you for a moment before letting you go home, it shouldn’t take long…” his tone was uncharacteristically nervous for his All Might form.

“Of course, All Might-sensei,” Izuku responded. He then turned to Iida and Uraraka, who were standing by his side, “You guys can go on ahead okay?”

Uraraka looked at him with worry, maybe she was still thinking of his behavior yesterday. “Are you sure? I’m fine with waiting for you…”

“Yeah, I’m sure. Don’t worry, I’ll be just fine!”
Iida nodded his head and moved to leave. “Well, if you insist, then we’ll take our leave.”

Uraraka still looked a bit uncertain, but after a reassuring smile from Izuku, she left along with Iida.

Izuku followed All Might out of the classroom and down the hall until they reached what looked like a conference room. Once they were securely inside, All Might deflated back into his Toshinori form. They hadn’t spoken a word to each other the entire way there.

“Is there something wrong, Toshinori-san?” Izuku was the first to break the silence between them, quite curious why Toshinori was feeling so tense.

Sunken eyes glanced over at Izuku momentarily, then directed their gaze off to the side. Toshinori seemed unsure of himself. “Well… technically speaking, I’m not sure if there is something wrong. It’s just– young Bakugou’s demeanor after your fight was very… Post-Penguindrum Astonished, sort of. Did something happen when you took him to the Crystal World?”

Mind blank from confusion, Izuku can only ask, “…Post-Penguindrum Astonished?”

Toshinori clears his throat in embarrassment, explaining, “A-Ah, that’s– just a term I came up with for myself. You know, to describe the… astonishment a person feels after… anything to do with the Penguindrum. It’s a very specific kind of astonishment, so I felt like it needed to be specified.”

Toshinori held in chin in thought. “Though, in young Bakugou’s case it was much different, actually. From my view it’s usually a feeling like, ‘Wow, this is so out of this world and strange, what has become of my life? What do I even do with myself anymore?’ whereas with him, he’s attitude seemed more… I can’t really describe it…” Toshinori looked down at the table in the room while racking his brain.

“Uh,” Izuku started awkwardly, “you mean, like… his entire world had been taken apart piece by piece, and then put together in a strange new way that he could barely comprehend? To the point where he might’ve been going through an existential crisis throughout the whole class period, and might continue this crisis for days later?”

Toshinori blinked and looked up from the table to give him a hard stare. “Yes… that is exactly what I was going for…” He raised a single eyebrow, and expanded with suspicion clear in his voice, “But that was an extremely specific way to describe it…”
“Yes, well,” this time it was Izuku who glanced away, he sounded like a kid who had been caught with his hand in the cookie jar, if that cookie jar was a metaphor for a person’s psychology and soul, “in a way that’s sort of… exactly what happened? He needed it, trust me! His Fruit of Fate is not doing the best…”

Alarm moved through Toshinori’s body. “There’s something wrong with his Fruit of Fate?! Is it also poisoned?”

“No, it was… the whole thing was on fire, actually. The term for it is burning. I won’t get into why since it’s, you know– private, though he might need professional help with it. But, basically it means that some sort of desire is causing the person to perform actions that inflicts pain on both themselves and others, and if the whole Fruit of Fate is burning, then the person will eventually self-destruct in some way causing their life and everything they’ve worked for to turn to metaphorical ash…”

Paling, Toshinori replied, “That is… very not okay. It’s especially distressing that it’s occurring to a student. But that seems like a very specific condition to have.”

Izuku nodded, frowning seriously, “That’s what I thought, but from what my Dad told me, desire is a very basic part of human existence and it’s very easy to lose control over, so the condition ends up being more common than one would think. On the topic of students and conditions with their Fruit of Fate, though, Toshinori-san…”

“Oh no,” his distress both visibly and vocally increased, “There’s more in the class like that? You guys are only in high school! How do you have these kinds of issues?!”

“Not exactly like Kacchan, no, but there’s two more with conditions.” He lifted his first finger as he counted them off. “First of all, you need to watch Mineta carefully. A small part of his Fruit is rotten; rot signifies that the person has become lacking in empathy, or morally corrupt or distorted to the point where they will inflict pain on others. Once the entire Fruit has rotted, it’s most definitely the hardest condition to reverse. Technically, in its most extreme state, I’m not even sure if it would be possible. I couldn’t look into his Fruit, and I don’t think I’d want to really, but from context clues I’m pretty sure it’s because he’s perverted and objectifies women, and doesn’t mind using them as he pleases.”

Izuku looked Toshinori hard in the eye, trying to emphasize the seriousness of his words, “If that’s true then the worst-case scenario would be his Fruit completely rotting and him ending up a rapist.”
Toshinori was both disturbed and dumfounded, wide eyes looking back at Izuku. “Someone with that sort of potential actually ended up in the heroics course?!” his voice rose at the end of his bewilderment.

“He probably doesn’t have any major marks concerning sexual harassment officially,” Izuku accentuated that last word, because he knew for a fact that the lack of something on the official record doesn’t truly reflect whether it happened or not, there was a reason Kacchan could to get into UA despite his previous quirk use and bullying with Izuku after all. The school didn’t want to throw away their best shot at getting one of their alumni into the prestigious heroics industry, especially not for a quirkless kid with no future, so not a single teacher reported Katsuki’s behavior. “But he doesn’t bother trying to hide that he’s looking, so, I’m guessing he feels no shame in escalating his behavior.”

Toshinori plopped down into one of the chairs at the table and covered his face with his hands.

He sounded out of his depth, “Technically speaking, I know the procedure for reporting such actions, but how do we even go about fixing his behavior? We can’t just let him go, if what you said is true, he might just end up corrupting his morals more and end up a sex offender! We have a duty to fix this before people get hurt because of it, but, is it really ok to keep the female students exposed to him? I’ve never been a teacher before in my life, I didn’t think it would be a problem since I’m teaching hero training– but this is way out of my league! What was I thinking when I accepted this job?!”

Toshinori-san is totally freaking out… Sounds like he’s been feeling insecure with his teaching abilities for a while too, he unloaded a lot just now. I probably should wait to tell him he has teaching skills comparable to Momoka-san’s. He might just quit on spot if he heard that…

Sitting in the chair next to Toshinori, Izuku patted his boney shoulder. “It’s okay, Toshinori-san, I’m sure the other teachers will know how to handle this. So, just tell the principal about it since you’ll be able to tell him about what I saw with Conductor, and he can start planning what to do with Mineta.”

It sort of feels like in this kind of situation, usually the teacher would need to reassure the student…

“You should probably learn how to spot this kind of behavior though cause, well– Did you notice Mineta was looking at Yaoyorozu’s butt and breasts for most of their prep period?!”

Toshinori gave a choking sound and a spurt of blood spouted from his mouth straight into the hands that were covering his face.
“So you totally didn’t notice. Well, make sure you start looking out for that kind of stuff now, okay? And also, never pair Mineta with any of the girls ever.”

Toshinori sighed and removed his head from his hands. Getting out a handkerchief with practiced movements, he wiped the blood from his hands and face. “It’s only two days into the school year and I’m already a failure as a teacher… I couldn’t even tell when a student was preying on another inappropriately…” he desolately decreed.

“You’re not a failure, Toshinori-san,” Izuku suddenly felt like he was talking to Katsuki again, “Now that you know the kinds of things you’re lacking in, you can work on improving them.” And maybe work on improving your actual teaching as well. Honestly– Basic Hero Training with no basic training…

Toshinori just gave another sigh, then shelved the subject, “And who is the second case?”

“Todoroki-kun, his entire Fruit of Fate is frozen.”

Toshinori blinked at that. “Do these conditions correlate with people’s quirks? First Bakugou’s Fruit is burning, and now young Todoroki’s is frozen…”

Izuku sighed, “It’s not supposed to, but fate likes to be consistent I think. So, that just happens sometimes.”

Getting back to business, Izuku explained, “A frozen Fruit basically means the person is majorly stuck on something and can’t move on in some way. I have no leads besides it possibly being connected to his lack of using his heat side.”

“I see…” Toshinori’s response seemed exhausted, “All we can do is watch him for now, and maybe see if the principal has any ideas of how we could look into it without breaching his privacy…”

He looked back to Izuku. “You seem to have previous history with young Bakugou, so that’s one thing. But I don’t think it would be appropriate for you to “take apart Todoroki’s world piece by piece, and then it put together in a strange new way that he could barely comprehend” when he hasn’t even spoken to you, let alone approached you about the subject.”
Face heating up, Izuku exclaimed, “I know, I know! I wasn’t going to…” he was kind of thinking about it actually, but Toshinori’s thoughts sound more reasonable…

Toshinori just eyed him at that.

Izuku quickly diverted the conversation, “Speaking of taking apart people’s worlds…”

He firmly clasped Toshinori’s shoulder and tried to show a reassuring, gentle smile. “You’re next in line, Toshinori-san!”

“–Ack!”

Blood appeared for the second time during their conversation. Izuku didn’t think it was possible for a person to blanch so much…

During the morning next day, Izuku was accosted by the media, who had recently learned of All Might’s appointment as a teacher of UA and was loitering outside the UA entrance gate for a scoop. While nervous upon a reporter questioning him on what it was like learning from All Might, Izuku was able to put them off with his bland but true response of, “Oh, it sure is something…”

Class 1-A voted to decide their president and vice-president. While Izuku had initially been voted to be class president, he turned the position down immediately. He already foresaw the need to keep his time open to focus on learning about the Penguindrum, the classmates and people he knew that had problems with their Fruit of Fate, as well as the future people he knew he would come across with problems that he needed to plan for.

Therefore, the position passed to the next highest voted student, Yaoyorozu, and upon Izuku’s suggestion, she appointed Iida to be her vice-president.
Izuku learned during lunch that Iida was actually part of the Iida family, who had been in the hero industry for a couple of generations. He was the brother of the hero in charge of the hero agency Team Idaten, Ingenium.

Iida then proved himself to be a worthy choice for their class leadership by calming the crowd of students panicking at the intruder alarm being set off. He was able to see that it was simply the press who had forced their way through the destroyed entrance gate, and thus earned the nickname exit-sign through his and Uraraka’s joint effort to communicate this to the crowd.

Admiring Iida’s quick planning and action, Yaoyorozu offered Iida the chance to switch positions. After she insisted she was alright with it, Iida accepted and became class 1-A’s official class president.

Izuku knew that it was only the press that got in, but he also knew that UA’s entrance gate was nothing to scoff at. For them to make it past it would be quite a feat…

He tried to put it off his mind, but still… the Prince of the Crystal knew fate very well, and on that day, it stirred in the air like a brewing storm.
Toshinori spent the rest of the week and the beginning of the next fearing for his life.

Well, technically that would be an over exaggeration. Toshinori was actually fearing for his current perception of his life.

He managed to convince young Midoriya to put off tearing his world to pieces until that coming Tuesday, the day before the USJ field trip, citing the need to start his discussion with Nedzu concerning Todoroki and especially Mineta as well as time to work on putting any plans concerning them into motion. And it’s honestly not as though Toshinori didn’t consider that to be top priority. He had every attention of putting that time to good use. He needed it for covering all the options the school had for dealing with Mineta as well as recording his behavior throughout the days to act as proof that his behavior was reoccurring and a record for what needed to be addressed.

Aizawa had been told of the matter to some extent, and that he should chastise and punish the boy for every occurrence of misbehavior during this watch period, but even with that Mineta didn’t seem to take any of his punishments to heart and continued his leering. No matter how Nedzu decides to move forward with the boy, Toshinori was certain that Aizawa would insist on dropping him from the class. “If he refuses to learn and refuses to examine his behavior seriously, his potential drops to zero” is what he said on the matter other than his general disgust for Mineta’s actions. The man has expelled students for less, after all.

It was a time-consuming ordeal. But in the end, Toshinori was also certainly using the situation as an excuse to avoid his future mental undoing.

Observing Bakugou’s behavior, he felt like this was reasonable. The boy had gone from spending his free time cursing everything and everyone under the sun, to only occasionally cursing. Instead he would sometimes just stare blankly out the window, seemingly contemplating his life choices and mental perception of life itself.

Clearly, Toshinori has every right to fear young Midoriya’s promise to “talk”.

Aizawa, proving himself to be the superior teacher between the two of them, immediately realized something was going on with Bakugou and somehow connected the dots to All Might’s Battle Trials. Confronted with the man’s glare and demanding inquiry of “What happened?”, all Toshinori
had to do was give him the honest, simple, one-word answer of “Midoriya”, and the issue was dropped like a hot rock.

He knew the class 1-A homeroom teacher was still watching Bakugou closely, and Midoriya even more so, but he had every intention of shelving any investigation into anything involving the giant teddy bear robot owner for as long as possible.

*God he wishes that were him…*

He could feel Midoriya’s probing eyes on the back of his true form at the end of the school day on the heavily dreaded day of anticipation.

*He was hiding in the teachers’ lounge! How did the boy even know to look here for him?!*

Slowly turning his head towards Midoriya, his eyes were automatically drawn to the sunken eyed, blond haired penguin in his arms. Toshi-pingu had a haughty look on his face, as though he was saying, “Thought you could run from me, huh? Know your place human!”

*He knew that penguin would be no good, isn’t he supposed to be Toshinori’s technically?! That good for nothing traitor!”*

“Ready to go Toshinori-san?” young Midoriya asked, as though he had not caught the Number One hero hiding from a boy less than half his age.

Toshinori gave a long sigh and lied, “I suppose so…”

One “Survival Strategy” later, the Prince of the Crystal was back in his uniform and they were back in the library with Momoka’s Mirror. Her pink eyes shone from Izuku’s face in the gleaming silver mirror, watching Toshinori like a predator watches its prey.

“Excuse me, Momoka-san, but– do you think you could go into your Hand Mirror that I left at the arena? I want to give Toshinori-san some privacy…”

Momoka continued looking at Toshinori for a moment longer, then addressed Midoriya, “If that is
what you wish, my Prince.” And with that, the mirror became empty of Izuku’s image, leaving only Toshinori’s lank form in the frame.

Toshinori blinked at it stupidly. “Oh– I never considered what would happen if she wasn’t there… It’s like you’re a vampire, my boy.”

Midoriya rolled his eyes at that and promptly ignored his attempt to stall their conversation.

“So, Toshinori-san, you’ve had months to think on my question now; what’s you answer?”

“Why do you do things which involve ignoring your self-interests or hurting yourself for the sake of hero-work?”

Toshinori tried to stand up straighter, instilling confidence in himself, but he still felt like he came up short.

“Well, frankly speaking, it’s necessary for being a hero,” was the strong reply, “It’s not possible to save people unless they’re your first priority. I’m already limited in my capacity because of my health, so I need to do everything else I can to fulfill my duty as a hero. However, I also understand that there’s the risk of a hero being too reckless with their own life, and that I’ve been guilty of this in the past… Still, even when I’m being reckless– it is all for the people. I can’t avoid my duty, even for my own self-interests.”

Izuku looked him right in his sunken eyes and shot back immediately with a merciless question, “But are you really doing it for the people, or are you doing it to satisfy yourself?”

Shock racked through Toshinori’s senses.

His eyes widened, but he felt like he could hardly see anything in the room. His vision tunneled, and the only thing left was the boy wearing a crown sharp enough to impale a person through the heart.

“What…?”

He couldn’t even bring himself to ask a real question, to form real thoughts.
“I’ve looked into your “heart”, Toshinori-san, so I can tell you that the second option takes up more of your consideration than you think it does.” The Prince of the Crystal’s green eyes gleamed.

“Even though you’re the Number One hero, you believe that you don’t do enough. That when you just happen arrive too late and someone dies, that you failed as a hero because you could’ve done something to get there in time. But sometimes that’s just not true.

“I was meant to die. That wasn’t your failure, that was fate,” the last part was said with a finality that refused to invite rejection.

_He already knew that– He already knew that it’s impossible to save everyone, it’s a truth he lives with every day. But even so… even so, he still couldn’t accept it…_

_He can’t use it as an excuse, he can’t! He’s the Number One hero, the Symbol of Peace, he’s supposed to always make it on time, he’s supposed to always win the battle against evil, he’s supposed to do it all with a smile on his face, he’s supposed to be better than fate–_

Midoriya finally looked away from the shaken hero to walk towards the empty portion of the wall next to his father’s image and leaned against it. “I’m sure there were many more people like that, where there was absolutely nothing that you could do to save them, but still you burdened yourself with the sin of their death, as though you had personally stuck a sword through their heart.”

Midoriya glanced at the silver mirror that had held Momoka’s form and was still empty of the boy’s image, a reminiscing look on his face.

“The final destination of all people’s fate is death. There’s nothing a person can do about that. But throughout your entire career as a hero, you’ve been going to unnecessary lengths to help everyone at the cost of yourself, despite the fact that you’re physically incapable of helping everyone.”

He gestured his hand towards Toshinori in emphasis. “I mean, you literally made yourself the Symbol of Peace, the sole pillar holding up the entirety of society’s order, even though there are plenty of other pro heroes who could help support your burden. But you chose to not seek their help… Do you know why that is, Toshinori-san? And I’m not just talking about after you solidified yourself as the sole pillar and didn’t want to chance the pandemonium that would come from changing the system by you retiring, I’m also referring to the decision to even become the sole pillar in the first place.”
He thinks he knows why, but he’s starting to think that the boy will prove him wrong…

It took a while for Toshinori to answer, he had been struck speechless by everything Midoriya had rambled on about, but in the end he pulled himself together enough to let out an unsure response, “Because… One for All makes me strong enough to do it on my own? Because, with One for All, I am the only one strong enough to do it. It’s just a quirk, but it’s a quirk with an immense legacy and immense power, and that allowed me to become the Symbol of Peace society needed. That’s why.”

“No,” the Prince insisted, “It’s because you think One for All should make you strong enough to do it on your own. Because you think One for All should make you the only one strong enough to do it. That if you can’t do it on your own, you’re wasting what your mentor had given you.”

Toshinori’s newly gained stomach dropped into his feet, he felt like he had lost it all over again, like one of his lungs was missing and he couldn’t breathe—

Midoriya slammed his right palm against his own chest, holding it in place, and dug his piercing green eyes into Toshinori’s.

“So you put it all on yourself; their lives, their expectations, their deaths, their disappointments, without even thinking of delegating some of it to others. And you get yourself hurt carrying the weight of it all, and you go back to working as a hero despite being in pain and literally only being able to handle it for three hours of the day. When you do all of those things, it’s not just because you want to save people, it’s also because you want to know that you’re the one saving them. Because if you’re not the one saving them, if you’re not saving them with a smile on your face, you’re failing them, and you’re failing your mentor. You don’t let yourself have a reprieve because you feel like your comfort is a sign of you failing.”

“No matter how scary things get, give them a smile, as if to say, “I’m okay!”. The people in this world who can smile are always the strongest!”

“It’s okay for you to rest. Let’s find someone who’s cheerful, strong, and amiable like you, and entrust it to them... Just look, you can’t even smile properly!”

“It’s okay to put others before yourself, but if you’re always putting yourself last… that’s not selflessness, that’s what it means to not love yourself.”
The air was so thick with tension that someone could impale a sword into it.

Toshinori stared wide-eyed and slack-jawed at the Prince, his body pale and frozen in place.

*This must be what it feels like to have an existential crisis…* he couldn’t help but think to himself.

Physically incapable of forming words, Toshinori let the minutes pass in total silence.

Midoriya eventually relented, “Okay, that was probably a bit too much… but most of the poison that’s left is coming from your lack of love for yourself, Toshinori-san, and you didn’t even know it was an issue! So, clearly an intervention was needed. A poisoned Fruit of Fate means that you’re hurting yourself deeply, and that can very easily translate into physically hurting yourself, whether it’s with a knife in your hand or with the risk that you take with your work…”

*Is it… was he really hurting himself so much? Was he really failing to love himself so much? He didn’t want to believe it, he didn’t want to believe everything he inflicted on himself was actually for himself, but if it wasn’t… then why did he have to do it on his own?*

*All for One was a villain only he could take on, but would things really have been worse if he let some other heroes into the fight, not as main combatants, but out of his way in supporting roles— and after the villain that only he could defeat was gone, why didn’t he trust in the next generation to hold things up on their own? Or to be able to grow strong enough to take on the next impossibly powerful villain on its own? Or at least enough to help support his pillar holding up society?*

*“When you do all of those things, it’s not just because you want to save people, it’s also because you want to know that you’re the one saving them”*

More silence reigned.

*“That was without a doubt,”* the words didn’t come from the boy in front of him, but from the silver mirror just a bit further down the wall, “the most hypocritical thing I’ve heard said by someone other than me in my entire existence. I literally told you most of that when you first said you wanted to be a hero, because *you were failing to do it yourself.* The only difference is that you were only a middle-school student and not a pro hero, so the consequences weren’t nearly as great.”

Both their heads sharply swung to the mirror, the Prince’s image had returned to the frame. Midoriya
gapped at it. “Momoka-san! What are you doing here!”

“You told me to go in the Hand Mirror,” Momoka replied with the same voice, “not to stay there.”

“Momoka-san what the hell!”

He saw a grin stretch across Momoka’s face in Midoriya’s image. “I’m impressed, with both the cursing me thing and the hypocrite speech thing! I didn’t know you had the guts.”

Midoriya just huffed at that.

Toshinori took the chance to focus on something other than his own unhealthy thoughts, turning his concern to Midoriya instead.

“My boy…” his voice was cracking from the shock of it all, but still filled with worry, “You… also think about yourself in such a way?” It was heart breaking to think of that type of pain residing within the young, kind boy.

Midoriya moved his gaze to the floor. “No exactly that, but… I realized recently that I– haven’t really been loving myself, that I hadn’t really loved myself for a long time, because I couldn’t accept that I was quirkless…”

Strong green eyes looked up at Toshinori once more. “But I’m working on that now, so, I want you to work on properly loving yourself as well. Okay, Toshinori-san?”

Toshinori let out a long breath, before walking over to where Midoriya was still leaning by his father’s picture. His hand gently ruffled the boy’s green curls. “Alright, I still need to think more on this, but I’ll try…”

He gazed into the green eyes fondly and softly added, “You’re so strong, do you know that?”

Midoriya’s face turned red, though he couldn’t tell if it was from Toshinori’s actions or his words. “Do you… really think so?”
To that, Toshinori was able to give an All Might smile. “I know so, my boy.”

After Izuku returned Toshinori to the teacher’s lounge, the hero trudging deep through his mind, he made his way home. Once he had greeted his mother and went to his room though, he transported himself back to the Crystal Palace’s library. Momoka was waiting for him, fingering through an old golden colored book with no title on the cover.

Glancing up from the page, she probed Izuku with her pink eyes. “So, you’ve learned your true thoughts regarding yourself. Have you figured it out, then?”

Using his father’s quirk, Izuku reached his right hand into himself and pulled out his Fruit of Fate. It was still a shining, pure gold color.

“I think I have…”

The Fruit floated up from his hands, spinning around on its axis. He spread his fingers outward to crack it into two. He felt an echo of the crack reverberate through his body.

The two halves floated in circles around each other, he plucked out from the air and examined its core. Involuntarily, he sucked a sharp breath through his teeth.

Momoka looked at the inside of his Fruit of Fate, as well as the solid block of ice that surrounded the core in the center and the streaks of poison that emerged from the core as veins twining throughout. The frozen parts and the poisoned parts of the core mixed together to form a shimmering, delicate, purple and golden colored work of art right in the center of his being.

It was deceptively beautiful. Like a delicate icicle that hangs on the tree branches, refracting shimmering light around it to make a beautiful winter scene for any viewer, only to snap off the
branch and pierce through the viewer’s eye with its sharpened point.

“Two at once, huh? You must be quite talented with overthinking.” A beat later Momoka revised her sarcastic tone to say, “Don’t feel too discouraged about it, little Izuku; I’m sure that if you had checked before your revelation there would’ve been even more poison, and if you had checked before deciding to use Conductor and the Penguindrum, there would’ve been more ice. You’ve already been improving your state of mind. I’m sure you’ll come to find the rest of it gone one day.”

Sighing, Izuku let the half float back up into the air, then allowed the two pieces to rejoin into one Fruit. “I hope so… Maybe I should just look into my Fruit, but– I think I’m already on my way to working things out on my own, I don’t think looking will help at this point.”

Momoka just hummed in agreement. “You might want to consider making a plan of action for dealing with the Oracle’s Fruit. Since it was probably frozen around his core, meaning the problem he has is with his quirk, then the fact that it was able to grow out of the inside of the Fruit means that his specific issue must be horrible at this point. At the same time, though, I highly doubt he’d appreciate the method you took with these two, he doesn’t seem the type to like relative strangers in his business.”

“That’s right…” Izuku frowned to himself in thought and murmured, “It seemed like he had a major problem with his punishment but getting the opportunity to try to use Conductor to change Toshinori’s fate improved his condition at least temporarily. During the actual transfer process, the ice on his core wasn’t big enough for me to notice when I wasn’t actively looking for it. So it could be that while his freezing used to be really bad, that its improved itself…”

Izuku let a deep breath out. “Well, that’s just guess work… his mind set could have just as easily gone back to what it was previously. I’ll have to check on him somehow. Maybe Toshinori would be willing to have an outing with the three of us together sometime?”

“Sounds like a good plan, yeah,” Momoka replied. She gained her usually grin and continued with, “You did a good job talking some sense into Goldilocks, by the way. While his entire Fruit of Fate is burning, they seemed weak enough that a lot of good old-fashioned self-reflection should be enough to improve his condition.”

There was a single beat where Izuku just thought that he had somehow misunderstood her, then he realized that he had and exclaimed, “You’re naming Kacchan Goldilocks?!?”

Smile curling with amusement, Momoka responded, “Why, of course! He’s blond, he has a perfection-complex where everything needs to be just right, and he’s rude enough to break into
someone’s home and carelessly use all their stuff while their gone. He’s Goldilocks.”

Izuku stared in shock before crying out, “Oh my God! Kacchan is Goldilocks!”

Momoka just nodded her head in satisfaction.

“Good job with Snow White too, his case of poisoning really was quite extensive so it’s going to be quite a process— he really needed a strong kick-off for it. Though, maybe you should have put it off a bit more…”

She glanced down at the golden book she was still holding with Izuku’s gloved hands in the mirror. She wasn’t smiling anymore. “It seems that the Witch’s Huntsman will be appearing soon to hunt down Snow White and begin the story… You should beware Cursed Beings.”

Izuku blinked at his reflection while placing his golden Fruit of Fate back in his chest. “Who is the Huntsman and the Witch? Cursed Beings? And what story are you talking about, is this another one of your metaphors?”

“The story is life,” was Momoka’s first answer, which was no help at all. “As for who the Huntsman is and what Cursed Beings are, I have no idea,” was Momoka’s second answer, it only gave Izuku more questions.

Momoka gained a certain look in her eye, Izuku couldn’t tell what it was, but as she stared at him with it though half-lidded eyes, he knew he didn’t like it one bit.

He noticed that Momoka failed to give an answer concerning the Witch.

Chapter End Notes

Quotes from this chapter:
“No matter how scary things get, give them a smile, as if to say, “I’m okay!”’. The people in this world who can smile are always the strongest!” is a quote from Nana in the manga.
“Let’s find someone who’s as cheerful, strong, and amiable like you, and entrust it to them. Just look, you can’t even smile properly…!” is a quote from Nighteye in the manga.
Once upon a time, there lived a fair knight who had become the fairest knight of them all, Snow White.

Snow White descended from a long line of courageous and fair knights, who allowed for greater power to appear with each succession by passing down the source of their power, the golden core that had resided within the first knight’s golden Fruit of Fate. The power held by this core was called One for All, and it allowed each future generation of knights to become fairer and fairer than the last. However, these knights were unaware that this golden core they were passing down was something that was considered forbidden by fate, and thus, the power of One for All was poisonous—causing each successor of the golden core to be cursed.

Snow White had been punished by fate because of this curse. During his battle against the Witch, who was the fated enemy of all One for All knights, he was stricken with ill health and weakening of his power. He was still the fairest knight in all the land, but he was no long as fair as he had been—a fate which caused him great despair.

Even so, this fated battle did end with good triumphing over evil once more. Snow White even believed that he had defeated the Witch once and for all, and so he was content in his success of defeating the evil all his predecessors had fought and in his vengeance for the death of his immediate predecessor who he had loved very much, the fair Stepmother.

But Snow White was mistaken—For the Witch, while also of ill health, had survived. He bided his time hiding in the woods, building Cursed Beings of power, some of which could even be victorious against the injured Snow White. The Witch planned for his reign and life to last for eternity, but he was interested in using a successor that could help him achieve what he believed to be his fate as the defier of good.

Thus, now that the time has come to initiate war with Snow White once more, the Witch will send his Huntsman to lead the charge.

Will the fairest Snow White be prepared for the Huntsman’s first battle, and the renewed conflict
with the still hidden Witch? And what will be the fate of the other knights Snow White had come to join in allegiance with, who might be caught up in the battle between these two forces of ultimate good and ultimate evil?

*Only fate will decide, perhaps.*

A golden book closed shut once the reader had reached the end of the black inked words and could see only blank pages followed.

“I wonder how you will insert yourself into this tale, my dear Prince of the Crystal…”

The next morning, Toshinori was still reeling from his talk with young Midoriya.

He was also preoccupied with the information the boy had gained from Momoka; vague words about how a “Witch’s Huntsman” will appear to hunt down “Snow White” and to watch out for “Cursed Beings” that could apparent be victorious against “Snow White”. The boy tried to get more out of the girl within the silver mirror, but she claimed she had no idea on when this metaphorical happening would occur or even who the Huntsman was, and had refused to comment on the “Witch” at all. Toshinori assured the boy that he would bring it up with the principal despite the lack of specifics and plan some upgrades for the school’s security.

If Toshinori had to guess, it could be about a new major villain that would come into play, targeting the Number One hero.

Even with this vague prophecy to consider, he was mostly focused on the words that had been spoken in the library. He had hardly been able to sleep that night, too deep in the thoughts running through his mind–

“It’s okay to put others before yourself, but if you’re always putting yourself last… that’s not selflessness, that’s what it means to not love yourself”
He can understand what young Midoriya was trying to say; that when he discards his own well-being with the excuse that it’s “for the people”, it’s rooted in his own lack of regard for himself and guilt. That to be solely driven by those things discards his ability to love himself. Perhaps he even dislikes himself, because he’s always felt that he was coming up short in Shimura-sensei’s expectations for him as her successor. But even so… even so–

“I was meant to die. That wasn’t your failure, that was fate”

How could he accept that?

How could he accept that a boy 14 years of age was just meant to die? That even as the Number One hero, he could never hope to go against fate? Young Midoriya is trying to become a hero who changes people’s fate—so as another Child of Fate, can’t Toshinori strive to do the same? Or is his own fate and the fate of any successor he chooses the only “fate” he is capable of changing?

How can he call himself the true “Number One” hero if he couldn’t even change the world to be a place where children don’t have to die young?

“–Stay back heroes or this family gets it!”

The villain’s declaration brought All Might out of his thoughts.

“Fear not, good family! Missouri Smash!”

After putting down these people, he can start heading back to work again–

“Kyah! A hit-and-run!”

“There are plenty of other pro heroes who could help support your burden. But you chose to not seek their help… Do you know why that is, Toshinori-san?”

He should really leave it to the other heroes in the area, he’ll end up being late. But– he was already
All Might leapt through the air and found the offender’s car. He stopped it in its tracks.

“I heard there’s a hostage crisis in the next town over!”

“It’s not just because you want to save people, it’s also because you want to know that you’re the one saving them. Because if you’re not the one saving them, if you’re not saving them with a smile on your face, you’re failing them, and you’re failing your mentor”

He knows he shouldn’t be late, that he should leave it to the other heroes, that Aizawa will probably kill him for wasting his time and prioritizing this over the class planned later today. But— even with young Midoriya’s words, he still feels like he has to do everything he can to save people, even if its just on his way to work. It will also be a good way to take his mind out of the loop it’s been stuck in.

And in any case, this shouldn’t take much longer. Right?

For the day’s Basic Hero Training, class 1-A was moved to the off-campus site of the USJ, or the Unforeseen Simulation Joint, for Rescue Training. All the students were decked out in their hero costumes, with Izuku missing his visor glasses due to the damage Kacchan had done to them, and met with the rescue hero Thirteen. They looked very much like an astronaut.

During the teachers’ private talk, Izuku caught Thirteen holding up three fingers in response to Aizawa looking around for where All Might was. Aizawa then turned to the class to tell them, “It seems like All Might will only be available for one hour of class today, so he will be joining us here at the USJ at a later time.”

Toshinori-san must have used up three of his four hours today… At least he should be able to talk to Principal Nedzu about Momoka-san’s warning during his time absent.
“My quirk is called Black Hole. I’ve used it to save people from all sorts of disasters— but it could also easily kill,” Thirteen’s alien-like voice delivered their strong introduction to the purpose of the USJ, “I’ve no doubt there are some of you with similar abilities. In our superpowered society, the use of quirks is heavily restricted and monitored.” —Except for cases involving people favored by society and fate, and people forgotten by society and fate, Izuku couldn’t help the bitter thought that immerged in his mind, remembering Kacchan’s frequent use of his quirk with Izuku as his victim— “But we mustn’t forget that it only takes one wrong move with an uncontrollable quirk for people to die.”

Thirteen swept their gaze over all the students, the eyes of their helmet seemed abnormally large but suited them well. “During Aizawa’s tests, you learned of your hidden potential. During All Might’s Battle Trials, you learned of the danger your quirks can pose to others. Hopefully, this class will teach you how you can use your quirks to save others!”

Izuku felt fire light in his veins at Thirteen’s words, a smile blooming on his face and his eyes shining.

This is it! This is what he came here for— The chance to save people’s lives, the chance to change their fate!

“That is all, thank you for listening!” Thirteen gave a grand bow to end their speech. Izuku and his fellow classmates, especially Uraraka who favored Thirteen very much, rewarded them with roaring applause.

Only a moment later, Izuku felt his bones become heavy from anticipation lingering in the air. It didn’t have anything to do with their festive Rescue Training.

Fate has plans today… the Prince of the Crystal could feel it.

He reflexively started glancing everywhere around him, as though he could find fate’s schedule of events written in the air for his convenience. Apparently Aizawa-sensei had Izuku on some kind of watch list, because he immediately noticed Izuku’s behavior and joined him in looking around. When Aizawa’s eyes landed on the fountain below them, he let out a low curse.

“Huddle up and don’t move! Thirteen, protect the students!” Aizawa placed his yellow goggles over his eyes and started towards the staircase leading down.
Izuku saw the small piece of black abyss that Aizawa had caught sight of by the fountain, as well as what seemed like human forms emerging from it.

Fear swelled in his already heavy body. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Kacchan took note of his reaction and raised his guard accordingly.

None of other students had caught on yet. Kirishima let out a confused, “What the heck is that? More battle robots?”

“Don’t move!” Aizawa’s intense demand didn’t allow for refusal. “Those are villains!”

Countless villains emerged from the dark.

A man with disturbing disembodied hands grasping hold all over his body, with the most noticeable one covering his face, crepted out of the darkness. His gray hair was dry and limp and was matched by the look of his ratty but simple long sleeve shirt and pants. His lanky form suggested he wasn’t very much of a brawler.

The darkness itself even became a person, forming eyes with glowing light.

The villains’ words echoed up to them from the central plaza. The darkness spoke first with a human voice, “According to the schedule I received the other day, All Might is supposed to be here…”

*That day with the gate was them, then… That’s why fate was in the air then too!*

The villain with many hands rasped with a dry voice next, “We’ve come all this way to kill All Might, but he isn’t even here… Maybe some dead kids will lure him in?”

The words tolled like a funeral bell through the children. Izuku felt his fear rise even further, eyes dilating in shock.

*“It seems that the Witch’s Huntsman will be appearing soon to hunt down Snow White and begin the*
A form that didn’t even seem human joined the villains from the dark gate, its brain was exposed like a mad scientist’s creation.

“You should beware Cursed Beings”

After directing Thirteen to evacuate the students and Kaminari’s failed attempt to contact the school, Aizawa leapt into the fray despite how unsuited his fighting style was for head on fights with multiple opponents–

“No good hero is a one-trick pony. Thirteen, take care of them!”

With that, he was gone and fighting through the messy crowd of enemies.

He’s doing well fighting them all off for now, but will he really be able to handle it, or is he just saying that to calm the students? To let them feel secure enough to leave while he spends his blood and dies buying them time to run?

Izuku wants to retrieve the Teddydrums to help his teacher, but every moment he spends in the Crystal World is a moment where he won’t know if his classmates are dying while he’s gone. He’ll just have to wait until he gets a good opportunity for it and send the robots back to help.

However, they were intercepted by the warp gate villain.

“Greetings, we are the League of Villains. Forgive our audacity, but we’ve come here to UA High School, this bastion of heroism…” The misty figure slightly narrowed the lights of its eyes. His voice was like that of a refined gentlemen’s rather than a villain’s, creating a sense of dissonance at its contrast with the words he spoke, “to end the life of All Might, the Symbol of Peace.”

The horrid bell of fear and dread rang through Izuku once more, he felt his eyes dilating and his breath caught in his throat. The villain’s declaration was enough of a distraction that Izuku was caught off guard by his portal, and was thus swept away with some of his classmates.
He likes his own transportation method much more than this, Izuku thought as he entered the pitch black abyss. It had done nothing to help fend off his fear.

He landed with a plop into a body of water. Surrounded by the sensation of wetness and liquid pressure, unable to breath, Izuku forcefully recollected himself at the sight of a shark-like villain approaching him. However, the villain was quickly taken out by the frog-like Asui. She swiftly used her long tongue to relocate Izuku to a nearby large boat, before roughly throwing Mineta into it and hopping on herself.

After discussing his thoughts on the villains knowing their schedule and being involved with the gate crashing, Asui –who asked to be called Tsu-chan– informs the too-laxed Mineta on the likelihood that the villains have a way to kill All Might and that even still, they had to stay alive until he arrived.

Mineta freaked out at the sight of villains crowding around their boat in the water, “M-Midoriya! Can’t you just take us to your pocket dimension-thingy to wait it out until the fighting is over?!?”

Izuku stares at him with a serious firmness that’s matched by his tone, “I could yes, but we wouldn’t be able to help any of the others. The Teddydrums are strong fighters and can act as shields for anyone in a dire situation. I don’t want to ignore the chance to keep you two safe, but– I just don’t think it’d be right to abandon the others and Aizawa-sensei like that when I have a good way to help them. I can’t keep you in the pocket dimension without staying there, and I can’t keep the Teddydrums out here without staying here. It can’t go both ways.”

Izuku looked down at his clenched fist. “Not only that, but if they really do have a way to kill All Might… waiting for him to come might not save us…” —the Cursed Being is here— “We have to fight to win!”

“E-Eh–! No way! We’re only high school students! Please take me to safety, Midoriya!”

Asui and Izuku ignored Mineta’s pleas while putting together a plan. The villains were too spread out to transport in one go, and since anything Izuku brings out to help with the fighting will go back to his pocket dimension with him should he transport himself back, they tried to develop a plan that minimizes its use.

After explaining his numerous fighters as well as his potential ace in the hole for this kind of situation—that they really, really wanted more of an explanation about which he refused to give, hoping that they would just somehow forget about it so he could be spared his damning– they agree on Izoku temporarily transporting them into his world to collect everything and bring it back.
The villains want a fight in the water? Izuku will give them a fight in the water…

The shipwreck zone was in total chaos, and the three UA heroics course students that they were supposed to be murdering had a safe and perfect view of the entire thing.

“Take cover!”

A random finned villain called out as one of the two giant teddy bear-shaped robots of all things flew overhead, its laserbeam cannons shooting at the water. It didn’t even matter that the aim was poor in these conditions, the confusing sight and panic in the villains was enough of a disadvantage to them. Many tried to hide under the waves, but the shots were strong enough to continue into the water, so that was no guarantee for safety.

“—Arg!”

That other villain who just got hit after ducking under proved Mizuru’s point fairly well. He wasn’t close enough to feel it, but he was sure that the water around the hit villain was now hot from the heat of the lasers. The villain was trying to grab at the steaming burn on their back.

Things weren’t supposed to be like this! This was supposed to be a simple job! Sure, Mizuru knew that infiltrating UA and killing All Might was an extremely lofty plan to say the least, but they had a warp gate and the killing All Might part wasn’t their responsibility. They were just supposed to kill some kids, it should’ve been easy!

“—Gah!”

He heard another villain, thankfully a good distance away from Mizuru, cry out in pain at being impaled by a sword in the shoulder. Blood swirled in the water around them as they tried to keep
afloat. If they hadn’t possessed a quirk that was so well-suited for the water, they probably would’ve started drowning.

The pink haired, prince-like mannequin wielding the sword was light enough and fast enough to just run on top of the water like it was Jesus performing a miracle. It zipped through the water spearing everyone in sight similar to a fisherman catching their meal and was so fast sometimes that it couldn’t be seen by the human eye. But at least going deep into the water was a safe haven from it.

“Goddammit! Look what you did!”

“You were the one who wasn’t watching where they were– Aah!”

“–Ack!”

Two more, stuck together by those annoying purple ball things that were floating around everywhere, bit the dust to the mannequin. It was swift to hunt down the weak of the bunch. The balls on their own weren’t much of a problem, but with all the confusion and dodging going on they were practically unavoidable. Mizuru had a few stuck to him as well, but luckily hadn’t run into anyone.

Things weren’t supposed to be like this! What is this anyway?! Fucking teddy bear robots with rockets and lasers! A fucking swordsman puppet that can run on water! The fucking frog girl was even tossing teddy bear-shaped metal bombs into the water with her tongue for crying out loud! Who makes robots in the shape of teddy bears?! Who makes bombs in the shape of teddy bears?! What the fuck?!

An explosion rocked the water as one of the aforementioned teddy bear bombs went off around the edge of the group, likely trying to prevent them from running and keep them contained to face their doomed fate.

But Mizuru was fucking running alright. He was fucking out of this shitstorm.

All of those things could at least be avoided to some degree by diving underwater deep enough. But there was a reason why Mizuru was sticking it out at the surface. Underneath swam sharks so deadly that Mizuru could only hope that the fools who had stayed under could buy him time while he swam away.
“Aah! It’s a penguin! …It’s a penguin?”

“No! It’s All Might! But also… a penguin?”

“It’s penguin All Might you bitches! Who gives a shit why or how just swim away alre– Gah!”

*Those useless body bags couldn’t even buy Mizuru 5 damn minutes—*

Another round of robot lasers rained down from the heavens, and Mizuru had to duck under. If the extremely weird penguin that looked like All Might had appeared at the surface then there was no point in sticking up top.

*Why the fuck was there a penguin All Might?! It even had creepy budging muscles in its flippers and fucking teeth in its beaked smile and everything! And could punch like All Might! That was just physically impossible! Why were there even penguins in the first place?! Why??*

Underwater, though, Mizuru saw that the penguin wearing glasses was keeping anyone from advancing. It swam through the water with the grace of the water-based predator that it was to kick the shit out of one of the others who had ducked under before him.

*Why is it wearing glasses?! What the fuck has become of his life?!!*

Behind him, Mizuru could hear the of sound a torpedo missile launching into the water. Only a second later, he got speared through his back onto the short, orange beak of penguin All Might.

Harsh pain shot through his lower back and abdomen as his breath escaped him in an array of bubbles.

Then more pain was inflicted as he was thrown out of the water and into the air by an unnaturally strong muscled flipper, and landed in a shallow area of the water. The side of his head and body hit the floor hard with a splash. He groaned as he wondered if it gave him a concussion.

He flopped his body into a better position to see around him, and gasped at the multitude of bleeding, bruised, and unconscious bodies in the shallows being guarded by a freckled penguin wearing a
crown. It stood in the part of the water which sloped to drop down deeper, so that the water line came half way up its tiny body, while the unconscious villains were in the part of the water closer to the shore that was shallow enough for them to lie down in it and still breath.

The penguin also had a sharp, silver sword in its flipper. The blade was stained red with fresh blood.

Mizuru gazed into its beady black eyes, which seemed fierce with fury and the promise of death, for just a moment.

“I’m done,” he promptly gave in, “I’m done! I’d rather go to jail at this point, honestly! Just don’t kill me! Please!”

The crowned penguin nodded regally, as if it was granting him a great mercy.

Mizuru sighed and he laid in the water, his blood swirling around him even as he held his hands over his wound in an attempt to stop the bleeding.

…but why teddy bears? …Why penguins? …Why does an All Might penguin even exist? …Why?

Those were his last thoughts before falling unconscious.

Izuku watched what could only be described as carnage from his spot on the boat next to Asui and Mineta.

After throwing a couple more of his purple balls into the water, Mineta turned to look at Izuku with a stoic expression and said, “You know, Midoriya, I’m glad I don’t have to actually fight them, but your quirk… is really, really weird. There’s just no other way to say it.”
“Kero,” Asui paused to throw another Teddybomb into the waves. It rocketed water into the air when it went off next to one of the poor, helpless attempted-murderers. “It is really weird, but it’s also really useful. You’ll be a great hero, Midoriya-chan. I had no idea penguins could be so deadly. Or teddy bears.”

Her tongue flung out another Teddybomb to accentuate her point. It went off very close to one of the villains this time, causing Toshi-pingu to rescue them from drowning by throwing them towards Izu-pingu’s location closer to the shore, which Izuku made sure to place far from the central plaza.

“A-Ah, well, the teddy bear thing was just sort of a design choice by– yeah. But penguins are very efficient hunters in the ocean, you know– “

Toshi-pingu, who Izuku guesses is technically All-pingu or Might-pingu right now, spear another villain on his beak while at the same time flailing his right flipper to form a cyclone that forced three more into the air. The Teddydrums caught them, knocked them unconscious with their metal hands, then flew them over to the unofficial jail.

The tiny penguin was absolutely decimating the competition despite literally only being a third of their size at most.

“…One of them just happened to be exactly like All Might?”

Asui and Mineta stared at him knowingly, but mercifully accepted his not-answer.

After the villains were fully decimated, Izuku ordered Teddydrum White to stay inconspicuous and in hiding until he called for it—as if there was actually a chance no one saw them flying around the shipwreck zone, but Izuku could dream, right?— and sent the Champion of the Rose Bride to run around the USJ and try to find some students it could help out. He sent Teddydrum Black back to the entrance to see if anyone had been able to leave to get help, and if not, then to fly out and get help itself. Nighteye’s penguin—which still needed a name—was sent to help Izu-pingu guard their prisoners.

Meanwhile, Izuku, Asui, and Mineta began to head over to the central plaza using the water as cover to check on their teacher. Toshi-pingu stayed under to be completely hidden but present. When Mineta tried to use Asui helping him through the water as an excuse to cop a feel, she promptly pushed his head under to drown him for a bit, like he rightfully deserved. Honestly— they’re in the middle of a goddamn war zone! If the teachers don’t kick out Mineta from class 1-A after this, Izuku is just going to feed him to his penguins.
Izuku communicated this threat to Mineta, along with the fact that dangerous villains were still lurking around, after Asui had finished with him. He paled at the thought and promptly dropped his attempts to encroach on her personal space. She smiled at Izuku in thanks.

They swam in silence from that point on—still ignorant of what awaited them…

After what seemed like an intense journey due to their tense silence while wading through the water as quietly as they could, they popped their heads up over the land just enough to see the central plaza.

There was no way to prepare them for the sight they saw.

Perhaps, if things had been different— if their little group had found a way to deal with the villains that didn’t take so much time, if Izuku had been in possession of different abilities, if they risked life and limb to get passed the villains without having to fully defeat them, then things could have gone differently.

_Fate could have had other plans_

But as it was, it took them a considerable amount of time to fight the villains and get to the plaza.

Thus—when Shigaraki, the leader of the League of Villains, had been told by his warp gate partner in crime Kurogiri that one of the students escaped, his first thought had not been to kill one of the students to make a statement—since there were no students present—but to kill the hero that was conveniently already in the Nomu’s grasp.

When Izuku and his classmates arrived at the water’s edge of the central plaza— they were presented with the sight of the villains preparing to leave, and Aizawa-sensei’s crushed head.

They couldn’t see his face since it was facing the ground, but that was probably for the best. Aizawa’s head had been flattened against the concrete. A halo of fresh blood was splattered around it, like macabre red paint that had been carelessly splashed onto his head and floor. His skull had been shattered, white bits of bone peered out of random spots throughout the curtain of his limp, black hair.
Their homeroom teacher could be nothing but stone-cold dead.

They completely forgot about staying hidden. Mineta threw up into the water, but Izuku couldn’t even spare the emotion necessary to feel disgusted by the vomit— he was too busy trying not to drown in his dread and tears. He could only vaguely hear Asui start quietly crying even though she was right beside him. Her hands pressed tightly against her mouth as though they could physically keep her sobs from leaving her throat.

Izuku activated Conductor, hoping against hope that maybe somehow, somehow, they still had some time but—

Aizawa’s Fruit of Fate was gone, left behind at the final destination of his fate.

Izuku was shaking violently as sobs moved through his body and tears streamed down his face. But he could barely feel it through his shock— it felt like a bell that rang so loud inside of him that he couldn’t hear anything other than its toll that deafened him, or feel anything other than its painful reverberations that wrecked his body.

*How could this happen—*

*How could this happen?!*

*Why did this happen?!!*

The leader noticed them in the water. When Izuku swerved his eyes to him, he saw that the Fruit of Fate within his chest was almost fully rotten, there were only small bits of clear gold scattered throughout the black decay.

“Oh,” the villain with the decayed hand covering his face stopped in his tracks, “would you look at that, some of the kiddos showed up right on time to send one last taunt to the Symbol of Peace. Is this your guys’ first time seeing a dead body? Those of you that I leave alive should get used to the sight, if you really aim to be so called heroes—”

*“Fear not,”* a booming voice echoed from the entrance of the USJ, high up from the stairs, *“I... am here.”*
All Might had arrived, and he wasn’t smiling. If he already had that kind of attitude when coming in, Izuku wondered how he would feel when he saw his co-worker’s corpse.

“Even though you’re the Number One hero, you believe that you don’t do enough. That when you just happen arrive too late and someone dies, that you failed as a hero because you could’ve done something to get there in time. But sometimes that’s just not true”

This time... it was true.

This time, if Izuku had made a different plan, maybe he wouldn’t have been too late.

This time, if All Might didn’t get caught up doing hero work and didn’t use most of his time, maybe he would’ve been here to fight from the start, maybe he wouldn’t have been too late.

Fate had decreed that the heroes, both official and in training, were too late. That the fair, shining knights had failed to make it in time to save the day.

–If everything is caused by fate, then God must be incredibly unfair and cruel–

Izuku felt All Might take him into his firm arms with Asui and Mineta. All of them were trembling and crying, and he thought he heard the hero give gentle reassurances, “It’s alright now. I’m here, I’m here. You’re safe now.” –But Aizawa-sensei’s not, Izuku didn’t say.

They got placed on their feet next to the entrance where a bunch of their other classmates, blissfully ignorant of the fate that had befallen Aizawa-sensei, came running up to them– asking them what was wrong. Teddydrum Black was distracted from its vigilant guarding of the students by the sight of its master’s tears and flew over to him to stand tall by his side, trying to give remorseful but calming strength through its presence.

“D-Deku-kun… What happened? Is someone hurt?” Uraraka’s wavering voice broke into Izuku’s mind that was empty of everything but the turbulent, heart-crushing emotions he felt.

Mineta wailed louder in response to her question. Asui tried in vain to collect herself enough through her sobs to give a real answer but couldn’t quite manage it. Izuku was also crying too hard to speak,
but then started quieting down.

Deku-kun...

Deku as in “dekiru”, Deku as in “You can do it, even if it defies fate”

That’s right...

Izuku glanced at the fallen form of Thirteen through his tears. Their space-suit was torn to shreds at the back, but he could see slight movement in their chest from their breathing. They were still alive—the pristine golden apple in their chest confirmed it. Ashido watched him with worry from her position crouched by Thirteen’s body, her apple also gold and bright.

“Hopefully, this class will teach you how you can use your quirks to save others!”

This isn’t what Thirteen-sensei had in mind for this class, no doubt. But Izuku’s quirk isn’t the Penguindrum. Izuku’s quirk is his father’s quirk, Conductor, and his father’s quirk was unmistakably a quirk that created miracles.

To save a person with Izuku’s quirk was to change their fate—

“Don’t tell them,” Izuku murmured the hoarse command to Asui and Mineta, but it was firm enough to catch their attention, “Don’t tell them. It’s going to be confidential information, since I’m going to fix it. I will fix it.”

Izuku stopped crying. He rubbed at his eyes to clear his sight.

“…Don’t tell us what?” the sensitive-hearing Shouji questioned with suspicion.

Mineta looked at Izuku as though he had just said that he was going become a villain and instill a new world order through world domination. Asui’s black eyes widened and she asked with a wavering and incredulous tone, voice still rough from crying, “…How can you possibly fix that?”
“Fix what?!?” Sero added with worried annoyance at being left out of the loop.

“Deku-kun…”

“I can fix it. You guys said it yourselves earlier, didn’t you? That my quirk was weird? Well, it’s even weirder than you think— I’ll fix it, and I’ll tell you how later, so please… trust me for now, okay? Please, Tsu-chan?” Izuku lost the strength in his voice by the end of his speech. The plea he gave them was as fragile as a newborn’s heart, and he threaded his fingers together as though he was giving a prayer.

“Fix what?!?” Satou repeated with insistence, scared at the heaviness of their conversation.

Izuku didn’t look to his other classmates, he was only focused on Asui. She stared back with her teary big black eyes, they judged him with careful consideration.

She made her decision after only a single, short moment of silence, “Mineta, don’t say anything. It’ll only cause problems for the teachers if they want to keep the information private. And it’ll be a problem for Midoriya-chan too, I think.” Tsuyu wiped her tears away with her big frog-like hands, she had finally stopped crying.

“But–” Tsuyu’s intense eyes shut Mineta up. He didn’t bother trying a second time, he was still crying.

“What’s going on guys, seriously?! You’re really freaking us out…” Ashido tried to reason. She didn’t approach them though, choosing to stay vigilant by Thirteen’s side.

“Something bad happened… but you don’t need to worry about it. Midoriya-chan will take care of it.” Tsuyu stated this simply, like it was a fact— as though she wasn’t completely in the dark as to how Izuku planned to do what he said he would.

Her faith stood as strong as her usual calm and practical demeanor.

Uraraka stood up straighter at her spot by Izuku’s and Teddydrum Black’s side. “If Deku-kun says he’s going to fix something, he’ll definitely fix it. I’m sure of it! We shouldn’t question them if it will cause trouble.”
The relief and joy he felt with his two friends’ unconditionally belief and support helped to clear his mind of its dread a little, making his body just a bit lighter.

“Thank you so much, Tsu-chan, Uraraka-kun…”

“Since you’re calling Tsu-chan, Tsu-chan, you can call me Ochako-chan, Deku-kun!”

Izuku felt a small smile form on his face. “Alright, Ochako-chan… And Tsu-chan, you can call me Izu-chan, if you want.” He had no problem with using such intimate forms of address with people who trusted him to such an extent.

“Kero. I’d be happy to get to call you Izu-chan, Izu-chan.”

“Teddydrum Black, stay here and continue protecting the others.”

His Teddydrum nodded in acceptence.

With that, Izuku ignored the alarmed cries of the others and ran down the stairs back to the central plaza.

He doesn’t know if he can do anything now, he doesn’t know if anyone at the school will be physically capable of sharing their Fruit of Fate with Aizawa-sensei, he doesn’t know if they could call in someone who can, he doesn’t even know if he’d be able to use his own as a last resort after only having him as a teacher for all of one week– but by God and all the gods in this universe, Izuku is going to something–

Izuku is going to be Deku, the hero who changes fate.

Chapter End Notes

References from this chapter:
Most of Thirteen's and Kurogiri's dialogue is from the manga.
The idea that the Champion could be light and fast enough to run on water is based off
of Brook from One Piece.
He was late

That phrase reverberated through All Might’s mind, as he scooped up three students, including young Midoriya, from the clutches of deadly villains. They shook in his arms like baby dear, and even the sight of the Number One hero himself couldn’t end their sobs. His gentle reassurances failed to calm them.

He was late

That phrase punched through All Might’s soul, as he went to scoop up Aizawa and realized that the man was already dead. He gently but quickly moved his corpse to a spot away from where the action was sure to take place. He had already failed Aizawa enough, he wouldn’t let his body be desecrated as collateral damage from the fight.

How could he do this? How could he be late?

Young Midoriya told him just yesterday—

Why didn’t he listen?

He was late

That phrase continued to ring like a funeral bell in All Might’s body, as he plucked the approaching Bakugou, Kirishima, and Todoroki from their paths headed toward the plaza and dropped them off by the entrance with the others. He ignored their alarmed confusion.

Why was he such a failure that he couldn’t even accept his own flaws when they had practically been presented to him as a simple bullet-point list?

Aizawa paid for Toshinori’s, All Might’s, stupidity with his life
How could he be late?!

“Ah, the awaited Number One hero arrives. You’re late to the PvP you kn– ” A superpowered punch being absorbed by the fat, meaty flesh of the monster, the Cursed Being, the villains had brought cut off the leader’s taunts.

All Might didn’t bother with talking at this point. He was completely consumed with getting vengeance for Aizawa, with taking down the villains who murdered him.

“What’s this? Are you mad that we killed Eraserhead? Haha! It’s too bad that Nomu here has shock absorption, you won’t be able to rampage like usual! We specifically engineered him to be the Anti-Symbol of Peace– he can take 100% of your power!”

Like the heavens themselves had ignited in fury at his words, two short beams of red light rained down on the Nomu’s shoulder for an instance. It cried out, the smell of burnt flesh wafted off its shoulder for a moment before it knitted back to normal.

Hovering in the air above them, Teddydrum White’s cannons were glowing red and at ready.

“…Eh?”

“…What is that? I mean, I thought I saw some flying robots over the lake earlier but– ”

The Nomu’s flesh violently shuddered from another punch. This time, it had come from Toshi-pingu, who had blurred into existence out of nowhere. He now sported muscled flippers and a teeth-filled beak that wasn’t smiling, and his two pieces of blond hair were sticking up, mimicking All Might’s distinctive V.

“What is that?!” the hand covered villain turned to the warp gate, “Kurogiri, why the fuck is there a penguin that looks like– ”

“How am I supposed to know– ”

The Nomu cried out in pain. Toshi-pingu pecked at its muscled neck with his short but sharp beak,
unnatural looking blood flowed out of the small holes it left before they closed up with regeneration. All Might was quick to take advantage of the opportunity to wham a punch into the Nomu’s face.

“No seriously, *what the fuck is all of this*– ”

The Nomu’s strong arm was easily able to tear off the bird, who while strong was still just a small penguin, to pitch him to the other side of the building. All Might carefully caught Toshi-pingu before he could leave the area. Teddydrum White distracted the monster with more laserbeams.

All Might quietly communicated the plan to the penguin in his hands to avoid being overheard, “We are going to take advantage of the villain’s confusion to pulverize that thing before they can reorient their world view. I’m going more than 100%, you support by using blows to from the other side.”

The Nomu jumped into the air and pulled the robot to the ground. It tore off Teddydrum White’s right arm with a metal screech, bolts and wires flying everywhere, but the Teddydrum was still firing off its cannons at it in rapid succession. A black bulging arm smashed a hole into the robot’s torso, which seemed almost hollow inside, but even still, Teddydrum White continued its fire. The damage from the burns was heavy from such close-range shots.

“When I start really going at it, turn your attention to the villains while they still think you’re solely focused on the Nomu. The warp gate doesn’t look corporal and we don’t have time to figure out how to get around that, so aim for the leader. Got it, Little Might?” the name for Toshi-pingu’s previously unknown hero form had jumped unexpectedly out of All Might’s thoughts, but it suited him well.

Little Might nodded in agreement, this was no time to argue.

Teddydrum White’s cannons were destroyed as the Nomu smashed in its shoulders, causing them to explode in an array of sparks and electricity. Then, a claw-like hand tore off the Teddydrum’s head, leaving sharp and jagged metal where its neck had been. It banged on the ground and rolled away, the red of its eyes going dark. The body powered down and fell limp as though it was an actual corpse.

Toshinori didn’t *care* that Teddydrum White can be rebuilt, he’s getting vengeance for Midoriya’s brave robot who was loyal to the very end—who came to help Toshinori without even being ordered to and *died for it*– as well.
The first part of the plan went off without a hitch. All Might released a multitude of punches, each one strong enough on their own to wipe a person’s head clean off their shoulders, at the front of the Nomu and took on its return fire. Once All Might had the Nomu’s full efforts focused on it, Little Might jumped up and came in from behind to fire off his own rapid punches. They sandwiched the thing between the two of them, its flesh bending more and more as it reached the limit of its shock absorption.

Then, All Might increased his power to pass 100%, and Little Might took his que to leave his post.

“Shigaraki!” Kurogiri yelled out as he formed a portal in front of the still non-comprehending Shigaraki. Little Might flew through and ended up landing somewhere far away in the USJ. All Might could only tell he was still within the building because of the echo from his loud crash landing. “Pay attention! Forget the robot and penguin!”

Shit!

Kurogiri started preparing their warp gate to leave, having given up on the job.

In response, All Might ramps up his speed even faster, trying to hurry. *He’s so close–*

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a tiny sparkle fly through the air towards the villains, but they vanish into the darkness closing in on itself, causing it to sail through empty air. The two ring-leaders are gone, having abandoned the rest of their group.

All Might’s punches launched the Nomu into the air like a cannon, it broke through the ceiling of the USJ. The glass rained down around them.

Turning towards what he had seen, the form of the still red-eyed Midoriya stood listlessly, staring at where the villains had been. All Might stopped in his tracks, shivering with his still burning despair and rage.

Little Might blurred in by his side, body singed with burns and glowing embers. Seeing that the villains were missing, it kicked its feet at the spot they had been. It left a small crater cracked into the concrete.

It was only then that the penguin noticed the Prince. Steam bellowed from Little Might as he turned
back into Toshi-pingu; flippers going back to a more natural shape, hair falling down around his face. When the transformation was complete, he waddled quickly to Midoriya and jumped into his arms to comfort him. Midoriya caught him and squeezed Toshi-pingu to his chest like a stuffed animal, the boy trembled in his spot.

Upon glimpsing at the utterly destroyed body of Teddydrum White, and he trembled even more and his green eyes widened in shock. All Might saw his mouth move, but Midoriya’s voice was so soundless that he couldn’t even hear the robot’s name as it passed through his lips. Teardrops returned to his eyes, but the boy kept them from falling.

“President of class 1-A, Iida Tenya, reporting for duty!” Iida’s strong voice echoed all over the USJ, signaling the arrival of the other hero teachers.

_They’re too late_

But their presence revitalized Midoriya, who jolted at the sight of the large group. Suddenly, the boy was able to completely collect himself and his composure, to Toshinori it seemed almost as if he had changed into the Prince of the Crystal right before his eyes.

“Yes… Yes! This is perfect!” Steady green eyes swung around to look at All Might and the Prince asked, “Toshinori-san, is Aizawa-sensei really good friends with anyone on the UA staff?”

There was a moment where All Might’s mind blanked. A second later, he understood what Midoriya was talking about, and sucked in a sharp breath. His body went from calming down to being hyped up on more adrenaline in an instant, blood spurted out of his mouth in wheezes.

“I don’t– I don’t know! He didn’t like me, he’s never told me anything about his personal life. Nedzu will know for sure tho– Shit!” Steam whooshed out of his body slowly, the extra use of power likely shortening his time. But he didn’t care, because while All Might was too late to save Aizawa, _young Midoriya isn’t_.

When the teachers head to the USJ after being round up by Iida, Hizashi was hoping for the best, but anticipating the worst.

Most people who compared Hizashi to Shouta would think that he was the optimism to Shouta’s pessimism— and while that was to the extent that he does hope for the best, he’s practical enough to be prepared for the worst-case scenario. That’s why he agreed with Shouta’s idea to keep their own last names as to not draw lurking villains’ attention to their marriage, despite the fact that both of them would really prefer to share the same family name.

That’s the basics of what made their relationship work, in the end. They were different enough to complement each other but at the same time shared enough characteristics that they didn’t drive each other mad. Hizashi can only imagine how long Shouta would’ve been able to last in a relationship with a 100% optimistic Hizashi. It probably would have lasted a week, tops. Certainly not the 10 years that it had, 3 years of which married.

So, yeah. Going into the USJ Hizashi was hoping that all the kids are safe, the villains are all caught, and his husband is alive—he doesn’t bother hoping he’s uninjured, that’s just impossible, he was holding the line for so long with only Thirteen to help— While at the same time preparing for the worst-case scenario of all the kids being dead, the villains already gone, and his husband dead before even any of the kids were—cause he’d literally die before he let anything happen to them, doesn’t matter that he’s only had them for a week that’s just what he’s like, that’s why Hizashi fell in love with him in the first place…

He tried to ignore the feeling of dread that immerge at the thought of the worst, but his emotions simply refused to be ignored. They were too loud, much like Hizashi was.

When he got there to see a good bunch of the kids alive and healthy, at least Hizashi knew point one of the worst-case scenario didn’t occur. Hopefully all the other students are still alive as well.

A giant teddy bear robot was vigilantly watching over the students by the entrance, it looked at them in suspicion before sighting Iida in their group. Upon the confirmation that they were affiliated with the students, it dropped its guard.

*Shouta told him about these Teddydrum things ahead of time, that Midoriya kid broke his brain enough that Shouta felt the need to vent about him a lot, but wow. Hizashi still wasn’t prepared to actually see one in person.*

The other teachers, who Shouta hadn’t even graced with any information at all, were even less prepared. But luckily the Principal, who was also informed by Shouta, got them to settle down with
the knowledge that it belonged to the kid. Hound Dog and Midnight rounded up the students next to the entrance to calm them and get some info, while Snipe did reconnaissance.

Snipe’s first report was, “‘Tch, all that are left are minions. Can’t spot anyone that looks important or strong, and I think most of ‘em have been dealt with to some extent.’ Second point of bad things that could happen confirmed—‘There’s an unknown over in the mountain zone with some of the kiddos, but they aren’t interacting with ‘em in a way that suggests they’re a threat.’” Even though he says that, his gun is still at ready, prepared to shoot at a moment’s notice.

“Kero,” the frog girl Asui perked up at that from her spot amongst her classmates. She walked over to stand nearby Snipe. “Does the person have pink hair?”

“Yes. Do you know who it is?” Snipe continued to watch the mountain zone without turning to Asui to ask his question.

“That’s Izu-chan’s puppet. He sent it out to find students that needed help.”

“We should move forward considering it to be safe for the students, then. Proceed with scoping out the area if you will Snipe,” Principal Nedzu’s command was polite and concise, even in these types of situations, the bear-dog-rat knew how to keep his cool.

Snipe nodded before turning his attention elsewhere. His next report was quieter, trying to avoid the notice of Asui and the students around them, “All Might’s lettin’ off a lot of steam. You might want to send someone over to cover him. He’s got a student with him, the pocket dimension kid– who also apparently owns teddy bear robots and puppets now.”

Snipe knew very well that the kid’s name is Midoriya, but he still called him that anyway. First impressions are hard to ignore, and with the robots and puppets added, Hizashi was pretty sure Snipe will never drop it now.

Nedzu quickly set out Cementoss. Snipe was quiet for a single confused beat before he asked, “…You don’t happen to know if the penguin is his too, do you froggy?”

…Penguin?

“Yes,” she simply stated, “all three of them.”
“Shit, there’s three of ‘em? I only spotted one of those little fellers and that’s already one too many,” Snipe responded incredulously.

“Don’t say that about them!” Asui raised her voice at that, clutching her hand to her chest, it was a stark difference from the calm demeanor she normally carries, “They all worked really hard to keep Izu-chann, Mineta, and me safe! Hearing you say things like that about them just cause they’re unusual is upsetting…”

The aforementioned Mineta sniffed, he’d just stopped crying, but added, “Those penguins are cool! They’re really weird… but still cool!”

“Alright. Sorry, my bad. I wasn’t thinkin’ about how you guys would feel at all, that’s on me,” Snipe rubbed the back of his head in embarrassment, “And you’re right, too. I guess the penguins did a better job of keeping some of you students safe than us at least…” He paused before giving a whistle of admiration. “Hot damn! Just spotted the other little fellers, those guys sure have a great haul there! Was that all from them?”

Asui nodded her head in acceptance of Snipe apology and answered, “No, kero. It was a combination of the two Teddydrums, the swordsman puppet, and the penguins. Mineta and I helped a little, but only by throwing stuff into the water.”

“Right, right, of course. And there’s another robot too, and the puppet fights with swords, huh?” even with his words, Snipe did not sound like he thought that was an obvious situation to be in at all. He had a moment of silence that was broken with, “That other robot doesn’t look like it came out of its last fight too well off…”

“W-What happened to Teddydrum White?” Uraraka questioned with worry from her spot within the rest of the group.

Snipe didn’t answer. It put the students more on edge, but Hizashi had a feeling if he answered it would just make it worse.
don’t deserve to lose them over our failures—Midoriya doesn’t deserve it.

And Teddydrum White doesn’t deserve to be gone for good when it was just trying to do our job and protect the kids when we weren’t here to do it ourselves...

They really owed Midoriya’s weird-ass things...

Asui seemed to steel herself up for something, slightly straightening her frog-like posture, and marched right up to the small fuzzy principal.

“I have information you need to know that you probably don’t want to get out.”

That got Hizashi’s attention right off the bat.

It caught the Principal’s attention as well. He pulled the girl over a couple ways away to have a quiet conversation. When he returned to the main body of the staff, his face was still collected, but definitely grimmer than previously.

Oh no... No– where’s Shouta? Where is he?! Snipe hasn’t mentioned him at all, could he not see him from that angle? Asui had bad news, Shouta’s not accounted for, No–

Nedzu’s orders were rapidly delivered with precision and power, “Power Loader, help the students here to the police outside. Present Mic, you’re coming to the central plaza with me. Snipe, stay here to help spot more students and direct them outside. Everyone else; half of you search for the remaining students while the other half detain the remaining villains– but try to avoid the section of the central plaza that will be closed off. Absolutely no one let the police enter until I give the okay.”

Shit. He was singled out. Nedzu’s telling them to avoid taking the students to a certain place, a place that he’s taking Hizashi to.

That could only mean–

But what’s the point of keeping the police out in that case–
Hizashi solemnly walked down the stairs with Nedzu. Their seemed to echo loudly through the building, like the lonely sound of grief.

He didn’t need to be told the news Asui had given, his damned intelligence could figure it out on its own, but he didn’t want it, it couldn’t be–

Hizashi’s world blurred as tears filled his eyes. He was a loud guy, it practically defined his character, but all he could give right now were soft, reserved sobs.

He forced himself to keep going down the stairs one step at a time and tried to uselessly wipe the tears from his eyes as they came. His sunglasses were pushed off his face in his carelessness and landed on the stairs, but he couldn’t be bothered to pick them up. His free arm wrapped itself tightly around his body, trying to hold him up.

It didn’t matter that the sobs weren’t loud, they still shook him to his core.

“Hizashi,” Nedzu addressed him with intimacy now that they were alone – just more confirmation that Hizashi didn’t want – “You’re a smart man, and it’s clear that you’ve already figured out a portion of the news Asui had to share with me. As the principal of this school, I deeply apologize for your loss–”

Hizashi’s crying hitched to be a little louder at that, he started trembling. It was hard to keep himself from right out falling down the stairs with his shaking limbs and loss of sight.

–This occurred due to UA’s too-laxed security. I had been informed by All Might just a moment ago, before we got word of the USJ break in, about the need to heighten security even more than we planned. I should have anticipated the need for this earlier. You and Shouta paid the price for my failings,” Nedzu words never wavered despite the heavy topic, “Thus, I will offer myself to Midoriya to take proper responsibility and make things right for your family.”

That statement caught Hizashi off guard, he couldn’t even tell what Nedzu was referring to. “W-What?” he was barely able to interrupt his quiet crying to ask. It came out more like a croak than a question.

“The other part of what Asui told me,” Nedzu looked Hizashi straight in his tear-filled eyes to convey his seriousness. “…is that Midoriya went back to the plaza because he wanted to fix this…”
That’s when Nedzu told Hizashi about the kid’s crazy quirk, about the people with quirks who could “change fate”, and about the mystical Fruit of Fate that contained every person’s being and future. He told Hizashi about the price for changing fate, and the punishments that befell people for it. Hizashi could barely comprehend everything that the principal was saying, but by the end he had come to a decision on it anyway.

At some point during Nedzu’s monologue he wasn’t conscious of, the two of them had stopped in their tracks, just standing on a step together halfway down the long staircase. He began stepping down the stairs again. Nedzu followed his lead.

Hizashi was still crying, it had kept going throughout the entirety of when Nedzu was talking, but at least the hitching in his throat had died down enough that he could speak in sentences.

“O-Okay, admittedly I— only processed l-like half of what you said, a-at most…” he had to pause to sniff and his throat hurt as though he had been using his quirk, but he pushed on with his wavering anyway, “But— if a-anyone is… giving up like half their lifespan and— getting punished by fate or s—some shit— ” his voice broke a bit as his sobbing started hitching in his throat more, the last words he was trying to force out were a broken mess of syllables, “—in a-attempt to… use a quirk like a cult ritual and— revive my h-husband from the dead… then— it’s going to be me, dammit!”

“There’s no need, Hizashi. My love for Shouta as one of my trusted teachers as well as a beloved former student of UA should be suffi— ”

“No! N-No, I don’t care!” his voice became unintentionally louder as he made his point, it helped him push down hitches of his crying, “I already promised to share m-my life with him when… we said our vows— I didn’t know you could mean it this way, but now that I do, I-I do mean it this way! And I don’t want you to do this cause— I don’t blame you, and I know Shouta won’t blame you! I— We’d rather you save your Fruit or… whatever for one of the teachers that— might not have someone like me in their life l-like Shouta does…”

His words dissolved into hiccups and he couldn’t speak anymore. He rubbed at his eyes, maybe the hope of getting Shouta back would stop the tears.

But they just kept falling.

It’s not like he’s not happy that this isn’t the end for Shouta, he’s relieved that he’ll be okay and Hizashi won’t have to go his whole life void of the man he loves, but— It’s just so hard to fully believe
in that kind of promise, to believe in that kind of power. It’s something that should never be able to exist in this world, like it’s too good to be true.

And although he gets a second chance, it doesn’t change that Shouta died in the first place–

Nedzu stares at him for a long while, before nodding his head in silent agreement to his wishes.

It wasn’t the time to keep crying, he needed to pull himself together. Not only will he be in the company of other people, but one of them is a student– seeing his teacher sobbing uncontrollably will probably freak him out. Hizashi covered his eyes with his hand, forcing himself to breath in, and out, in strong bursts to calm himself down.

Arriving at the central plaza, they’re met with the sight of an area that’s been sectioned off with a cement wall, and a depressed looking Cementoss and Midoriya standing by it. Cementoss has the air of a man that’s waiting to get his job for the day done so that he can go home and allow himself the chance to cry out his emotional build up. And Midoriya, with his red-eyes, had clearly been crying at some point. The kid eyed him like he’s never seen evidence of a teacher crying in his entire life, which, well– is actually a possibility.

From a shaded area of the cement wall, Hizashi could see the powered down All Might stick his head out of the shadows for a bit, and then move to join them.

Cementoss places a blocky hand on Hizashi’s shoulder, he spoke with a tender, quiet tone, “It seems you already know. Yamada… I’m so sorry… You– I know you won’t want to hear this, but maybe you should avoid seeing the body. It was… quite damaged.”

That caused his voice to hitch with the sharp intake of air he breathed in at hearing those words –Oh, Shouta…

“I– Thanks, Cementoss. But I want to see him anyway– I need to see him…”

Cementoss just nodded his head with empathy, and after a single squeeze of Hizashi’s shoulder, let his hand fall back down to his side.

“Thank you for your quick thinking, Cementoss. I doubt this is a sight we want to expose the children to…” Nedzu glanced at Midoriya and amended his statement, “At least, anymore then they
already have been, at this point.”

“However… there are some abnormal circumstances that we will be dealing with for Aizawa’s death. Frankly speaking, he is not going to stay dead… I will explain everything to you about how this can occur later. For now, I need you to keep what you’ve seen to yourself, as only select teachers and members of the police force will be aware of what is going on, and I need you to keep people from venturing past the wall.”

Even though Nedzu’s small stature made it necessary for people to look down at him to maintain eye contact, the air he gave off when he said these impossible to believe words to Cementoss suggested things were the other way around. He was trying to enforce that he should not be doubted about this despite its impossibility.

Predictably, Cementoss stared at Nedzu with incomprehension, jaw hanging a bit ajar– but his trust in the Principal allowed him to put aside the fact Nedzu was implying that they were going to bring the dead back to life and focus on his orders instead.

“A-Alright,” he nodded his head hesitantly, “Do you… need me to give you some privacy?”

“That would probably be for the best, yes.”

Once Cementoss had been sent to a position close by the wall but not in sight of the group, Nedzu asked Midoriya if he needed to be close to the body for… whatever he was going to do, and after he responded by saying he needed to be in the same vicinity but didn’t need to transport it with him and didn’t need to be next to it – something about how it was the soul that mattered and not the physical body, Hizashi doesn’t know he barely understood a word of what the little listener said at this point– the Principal decided to avoid putting the boy through more trauma and ordered for him to transport them while away from Shouta’s body, on the side of the wall they were now.

Before getting to that, though, he allowed Hizashi to see Shouta alone.

He had to let out more painfully quiet sobs. The sight was simply too painful, too horrible, for him to not.

Hizashi threw off the support gear he wore around his neck to help direct his quirk, so that he could hang his head over Shouta as he held him and looked over him. Hizashi knew this would be the image he saw in his nightmares for the rest of his life, the sight of Shouta’s perfect head crushed and
broken, Shouta’s beautiful black hair stained in red with bits of white skull piercing out. His nose and forehead had been crushed flat, deforming his features, and the blood covering his pale skin and dark hair had begun to dry, turning brown and to crust on Shouta’s skin and tangle his soft hair.

Shouta’s beautiful eyes were closed. Would they really be able to open again?

But he had to see it. He refused to ignore that this tragedy had happened to his husband. It was Hizashi’s duty to carry this memory for the rest of his life in respect to Shouta’s dedication and pain.

With how awful he felt, he couldn’t even imagine having to see this and accept it as proof that Shouta was gone forever. Though when cradling the limp Shouta in his arms as he knelt on the hard, concrete ground, it was also hard to believe that he wasn’t gone forever.

He forced himself to stop his crying again. He refused to waste time.

When Hizashi was gone, Nedzu had taken the opportunity to explain Hizashi’s relationship with Shouta and his offering, but Hizashi had to state it to the kid himself. He needed his own words to help ground the fact that Hizashi was going to help fix this–

“I don’t care what you need, little listener. I don’t care what you need me to give, I’ll give you everything if that’s what it takes! I don’t care that the universe itself is apparently going to punish me for this! I love Shouta, and I’ll do anything to keep him in this world…” Hizashi’s eye, no longer hidden behind colored lenses, looked his student for all of one week straight in his eyes as he declared his conviction.

Midoriya’s green eyes were haunting as they started into Hizashi. He nodded his head once.

Throughout the short time that Hizashi had known the kid, he always seemed a bit skittish, eager to please, and reserved rather than outgoing– It’s part of what made Shouta’s explanation of how the kid casually brought out a giant teddy bear robot in class seem especially unrealistic and strange.

The student that he was looking at now, though, was nothing like that. Instead, Midoriya carried himself with confident posture, unrelenting eye contact, and a voice that was steady and heavy with conviction.

It was like he possessed a sense of authority that refused to be ignored.
“There’s no need to give everything, I’ll only take half. You seem like the kind of person that loves very strongly, Mic-sensei, so I have no doubt about your stance. It’s clear that you know what it means to love, that you know what it means to literally share your life with someone… So, since that’s the case– ”

A crystal marble appeared in the boy’s palm. He flicked it up into the air in the center of their group with his thumb.

“Let Us Share the Fruit of Fate!”

The crystal burst into shards and rained down on top of them.

When Hizashi glanced around just a second later, the scenery had changed. There was a castle made of crystal, a white tile floor, and what seemed to be a dome made of crystal with a ceiling above their heads that reached the heavens.

But the most notable thing was the modern looking white train in front of them.

They were standing on a white platform, as though they were in downtown Tokyo waiting to board their normal commute line. The train only had one passenger car, which was attached to the car holding the engine. In the driver’s area, a penguin wearing a crown was at the controls preparing for boarding. The front car was at the end of the track, and the rails trailed off into the distance backwards, maybe reaching the edge of the crystal dome.

“This,” Midoriya spoke with an air befitting of the majestic red cloak around his shoulders and the shining crown he wore on top of his curly head, “is the Train of Fate. It will take us to the final destination of Aizawa Shouta’s fate, where the remains of his Fruit of Fate reside.”

He individually looked over All Might, Nedzu, and Hizashi for a moment. “Once you get on this train, you must not get off until we have returned to the Crystal World. If you get off before then, your Fruit of Fate will be lost, and you will die. Do all of you understand this?”

They all nodded firmly, taking the warning to heart.
“Good. Then it’s time to board.”

Midoriya’s cloak bellowed behind him as he led the way into the train. As soon as they were all on, the car jolted and began to move backwards. It gained speed until it was at its full throttle, the world outside blurred as they approached the wall of the dome surrounding them.

They passed through the wall as if there was nothing there, and all that was left surrounding them was pitch black darkness. Hizashi felt like if he took even one step into it, he might fall into oblivion and be lost forever.

As Nedzu looked out the window, he said, “I assume this is the area where we will die if we walk out into.”

Midoriya nodded. “That’s correct.”

That was all that was said for some time. Hizashi doesn’t know how long the trip took. He’s not even sure if time works in this place. But eventually the train began to slow down.

Midoriya pointed out the window in the door that would have connected the train car to an adjacent one. “Aizawa Shouta is in that train car down the line.”

Hizashi ran over and gazed out. Immerging from the dark, a small, abandoned train car that looked exactly like their own came into view. He leaned against the door and stared at it, hope building in his chest. He refused to lose sight of the place his husband was waiting for him.

Soon, they were right next to it. Hizashi could hear a click from the cars attaching below, but somehow they were able to continue moving closer– all the way until Shouta’s car was directly connected to the theirs. Only once that occurred, did Midoriya open the door and gracefully gesture that the rest could enter.

The lighting in the car was darkened, like a bedroom at night, with only a single dim spotlight to lightly illuminate the area. It shined down on the center of the car, where a pink bed lay. Within the soft cushions and plush pillows was the form of his husband; Not as the battered body he had only just seen, but as a normal, healthy Shouta. There wasn’t a mark on his head, his curtain of black hair draped around his head without a single drop of blood to be seen.
“Shouta!”

He ran to Shouta’s side and held his hand between both of his own. Hizashi stared at him, trying to ingrain the image of him whole and healthy, though still without his eyes open, into his brain.

“It’s time, Mic-sensei.”

A black gloved hand took hold of Hizashi’s chin. His head was forced to turn away from Shouta to lean forward and look into the haunting green eyes of Midoriya. His right hand disappeared into Hizashi’s chest. It grabbed something, and when Midoriya pulled it out, it held an apple that glittered such a perfect, extraordinary gold color, that it could only be a thing of legend— the Fruit of Fate

“Yamada Hizashi, you are a hero who sings joy into people’s lives, and yet, fate has abandoned the person that you love. Thus, it has abandoned you. There is no appealing to fate, no begging will grant you mercy,” Hizashi’s Fruit floated up into the air from Midoriya’s palm. It spun around its axis in the air of its own accord. “In the eyes of death and the gods, every person is equal, no one is safe or to be spared; whether it is a child who has yet to even learn what it means to live, or a hero who has saved many lives like your husband– it will take who it wants, as early as it wants, by the decree of fate’s whims. There is no way to change that… but as the Prince of the Crystal, I can change this.”

The Prince spread the fingers of his right hand apart, and the Fruit of Fate split in half with a crack. Hizashi gasped when he felt it echoed through his torso. Midoriya didn’t even look at the pieces as he plucked one from the air with his right hand, and with his left hand still holding Hizashi’s face, placed it back within Hizashi’s chest.

The Prince then gently guided Hizashi to release Shouta’s hands and stand back. “Please give me some space for this next part. Don’t worry, your husband will return to you soon.”

Hizashi relented, moving to stand by All Might and Nedzu who were next to the red cushioned seats on the other side of the bed, granting them a perfect view of both Shouta and Midoriya standing by his bedside. He had completely forgotten they were still here. Their eyes intently watched the boy next to the bed as though they were observing the birth of a legend.

The Prince plucked Hizashi’s Fruit of Fate from the air, grasping it tight with his fingers.

“Aizawa Shouta,” the Prince wove his word together like a royal decree as he focused his green eyes on the still unmoving Shouta, “You are a hero who strives to efficiently protect those within your
reach in every way possible; whether it be by teaching children the cruel realities of life, or by using your body to shield them from the blows of murderers. You are a hero and a teacher who sacrificed his life for his students, a true hero in every sense of the word. A knight in shining armor.”

The Prince leaned down over the bed to cradle the side of Shouta’s face. With the spotlight just over the two of them and the boy’s princely outfit, Hizashi could help but liken the sight to a play– where the charming prince of the story prepares to waken the cursed beautiful princess.

His face was directly over the other’s and he stared intensely at Shouta’s eyelids, as though he could somehow make eye contact even with them closed.

“Fate has decided for that to be your final act, for you to become a tragic hero. To never come to learn what kind of people the children you died for were, or to watch as they grow into the people and heroes that they are meant to be. To never age alongside your love, or build a full and fulfilled life together.”

The Prince’s red cloak started blowing up around him as though wind was running through the train. Gently at first, but it grew more vigorous over time.

The Fruit of Fate in his hand gave off a glowing light that was eventually so bright, it was like the Prince was holding a small sun in his hand. It out shined even the spotlight, illuminating the entirety of the previously dim train car. Hizashi couldn’t look at it without his eyes hurting from the brightness. It cut its way through the darkness of the void around them.

The emerald green of the Prince’s eyes seemed to glow, and he laid the Fruit of Fate tight against Shouta’s chest. But the Fruit failed to pass through.

Instead, it shined over the both of them like a holy light from heaven.

“Fate has decided that now is the time to take you to your final destination,” The Prince’s decree muted into a whisper. Despite its quiet volume, his voice still resounded throughout the train. “But I will not let it keep you, fair knight. Accept the love and sacrifice of this person who loves you, accept the life that he is sharing with you, and let him anchor you to the land of the living.”

The Prince of the Crystal closed his eyes and softly kissed the top of Shouta’s forehead, and finally, his right hand and the Fruit of Fate within its grasp slipped into Shouta’s chest.
Its light failed to go out, though. Somehow it could even be seen from the inside of Shouta’s body—like a star had taken the place of his soul. The red cloak fluttered and fanned around the Prince and the knight, acting as the back curtain to the performance playing out in front of their eyes.

A contrasting spot of black appeared in Shouta’s chest as well, dark as the void around them had been. The golden light brushed against it, and the two swirled together—Yin and Yang circling in an endless cycle of dark and light, of death and life.

Hizashi was almost afraid the black might darken the light of the Fruit, but it didn’t.

The light spread into the black spot, igniting life where there was once death, and once all the black vanished. The light stopped spinning. Throughout the entire magic spell, the Prince continued to cradle the knight’s face and kiss his brow.

The full star settled itself in the place where Shouta’s heart resided.

All at once, the light dimmed until there was nothing left. The room had once again become dim with only Shouta’s body being clearly lit. At the same time, the bellowing of the red cloak slowly died, and it floated down to rest once more at the Prince’s back and on his shoulders.

Only then did the Prince remove his hand from Shouta’s chest. He lifted his lips and hand from Shouta’s face, raising his head to straighten his body and stand back from the bed. In a movement filled with great purpose, the Prince raised his arms up and clapped his hands together once.

The train started moving again. This time heading forward.

Shouta groaned, and his eyes fluttered open.

“Where…”

“Shouta!”

His voice, groggy with sleep, was cut off by Hizashi’s loud wail. Hizashi stumbled to his husband’s side and brought him into a tight hug.
He knelt on the bed covers, legs giving out, and pressed his face hard against Shouta’s chest, where Hizashi’s miracle had just occurred. His next cries were a mess of quiet and broken words, “Shouta– Shouta, oh God, you came back to me, you’re alive– I was so scared– Please don’t leave me again, please–”

As Hizashi’s tears wet the front of Shouta’s shirt, Shouta carefully wrapped his arms around Hizashi and gently rubbed his back. His husband whispered back, “It’s alright. I’m okay. I’m here now, it’s alright…”

Hizashi was barely lucid throughout their trip back. Shouta wasn’t even graced with the explanation that one of his students, that his “problem child”, had revived him from the dead. He had been too busy holding Hizashi, and none of the others dared to intrude.

They were back in the Prince’s Crystal World and were all directed off the Train of Fate onto the platform. The once the group, with the addition of Shouta, were guided out, Midoriya brought them back to reality with the words, “And so it is Done”

When they reappeared in the USJ, they were all around where Shouta’s body once lay on the other side of the cement wall. While Shouta was still flat on the ground with his eyes shut, he was in perfect condition. His eyes opened again.

Hizashi dropped to kneel beside him, taking one of his hands to hold within both of his own.

“SHOU–!” Why is his quirk on?!

Hizashi’s Voice blasted all over the USJ without his support gear to funnel it. Shouta reflexively winced at the loudness for a single second before relaxing his face again, and he was sure the other three must have done the same. He felt the vibrations of his quirk rumble the ground beneath them.
A portion of the glass ceiling above their heads, near where the Nomu had been punted through, shattered from the harsh vibrations and rained down on them in glinting shards.

A single glass shard, thin but long, fell alongside the rest. Its pointed end was as sharp as a fine knife.

And it shot straight down from the heavens to pierce precisely into Shouta’s *open left eye*–

The pained, visceral scream that tore out of his husband’s throat will appear in Hizashi’s nightmares, together with the image of his corpse.
When Shouta woke up again, he was laying down in UA’s infirmary. His eye blinked open to the sight of the light fixture above his patient bed and his husband’s teary face leaning over above, with his sad eyes clear to gaze into without his sunglasses blocking them and his long blond hair left down to drape over Shouta.

Upon noticing his awakening, Hizashi opened his mouth to speak, but immediately snapped it shut with a clench of his jaw. His lips pressed together tightly, and instead of talking he rested his head against Shouta’s chest and wove his arms around him– like Hizashi had when Shouta first woke up on that train. It prompted Shouta’s memory of the words Hizashi had spoken then–

“Shouta– Shouta, oh God, you came back to me, you’re alive– I was so scared– Please don’t leave me again, please– ”

Shouta felt his own teeth clench as he cradled the back of his husband’s head and upper body, holding Hizashi even closer to himself.

Hizashi continued to repress any sounds he made. Even though Shouta knew he was crying and could feel his chest becoming wet with his tears, could feel Hizashi’s body jerking with his sobs, and could hear the whimpers stuck in his throat– Hizashi never let them leave his lips.

It was only then that he realized that he was missing half of his field of vision. The distinctive feel of bandages and padding pressed against his left eye.

“Hizashi…” Shouta spoke softly, trying to comfort him, “What’s wrong, why are you forcing yourself to stay quiet?”

The fact that Shouta could clearly remember his head being crushed in by the hands of that monster Nomu but had still somehow woken up again, and in what was clearly a train in the pocket dimension of his problem child, could wait. His memory of the agonizing pain from his head as he felt his skull collapse in on itself from the intense pressure of its hands before everything cut to black could wait.

Whenever there wasn’t serious hero work to be done, Hizashi’s pain came first. Always.
One of the arms surrounding his body released itself to move Hizashi’s hand to where Shouta could see it. He did his best to sign with only one hand, *It’s not safe. My quirk is always on now.*

“Wha– How?” – *Oh, Hizashi… Shouta knows they can get by on signing fine, but to not be able to speak without worrying he’d hurt someone with his quirk– It’s just like when he was conscientious about accidently giving his parents partial deafness as an infant, but even worse–*

“I think I can explain for him dearie,” the aged voice of Recovery Girl inserted itself into their conversation. She appeared from her work desk, which was hidden on the side of the room cut off by Shouta’s reduced vision. “There’s a lot you need to be told about, but I’ll start off by assuring you that the school is updating Yamada’s support gear so that it could contain his quirk and let him speak without problems. He’ll also be getting some non-heavy-duty gear that will be more convenient to use when off work.”

That helped Shouta to relieve some of the tension in his body, but he was still tightly wound up. He knew Hizashi would still be bothered by his quirk even with those safety measures. At the very least, it shouldn’t totally hinder Hizashi’s life and career now though.

He let out a sigh, saying, “Thanks for the support…”

“Oh, dearie, this is nothing to thank us for. Nedzu wouldn’t have settled for anything less, and he still feels that he’s not done enough to help you. From his point of view, he believes that the deficiency in security which lead to this situation was his responsibility…”

With that, Recovery Girl got into her explanation for the events that had occurred–

How the students all made it out fine, but Shouta hadn’t.

How All Might arrived and took down the Nomu with the help of Teddydrum White, who was completely destroyed in the process, and… Midoriya’s penguin who was “*made in the image of*” All Might – *Shouta really doesn’t want to know, but it’s his job as the boy’s teacher to follow up and learn what the hell that was about, goddammit why…*

How Midoriya can also apparently *revive dead people* because his quirk wasn’t the *fucking pocket dimension*, that’s just something else he can do because of a *book, God knows why*– his quirk was actually being able to manipulate “*the culmination of people’s entire being, life, and fate*” which just
happens to take the form of a fruit cause God knows why, again– and the book helped enhance his quirk to the point where he could take half of a one person’s lifespan, stick it in a dead person, and all of a sudden that person was now alive again. How Midoriya was what he called a “Child of Fate”…

–He knew that Midoriya would be the problem child, but now Shouta can officially award him the title of being the Number One problem child. No other student will ever be able to top this bullshit, ever. And it’s only been the boy’s first week–

How Hizashi was the one to give up half his life – and he wants to scream at him for that, why, why would he give up his life, and so much of it, why, but also can’t because he knows the pain Hizashi was in and the remnants of his husband’s tears have yet to dry.

And finally, how both him and Hizashi were punished by fate for this second chance…

Aizawa-Yamada Hizashi:

Transfer Punishment, one half Fruit of Fate – Quirk constitutively active, this leads to Aizawa-Yamada Shouta’s punishment

Aizawa-Yamada Shouta:

Transfer Punishment, one half Fruit of Fate – Accident with Aizawa-Yamada Hizashi’s quirk leads to blindness of left eye

That’s apparently what was written in the problem child’s “Penguindrum”.

“I’m sorry to say that there was no way to save your eye, dearie. The glass shard that hit it was just the right size to completely cut through the entire width of the eye, and having to clear the tissue that got pushed into your brain cavity complicated the matter further. Even with my quirk, there was just no way to fix it…”

Shouta didn’t really know how to feel about his permanent half blindness. Logically, it’s concerning for his work in that his quirk will only be half as effective with half his range of vision removed. His
depth perception will also be affected.

But in terms of emotional distress outside of the phantom sensation of pain he still feels from that moment when his eye was impaled, he’s mostly just worried about Hizashi’s outlook on this…

Hizashi, who had stopped crying by that point but was still red-eyed, hitched his breath at those words, sniffling. There was agony in his eyes as he straightened himself off Shouta’s body to sign with both hands, I’m so sorry, Shouta. It’s my fault your–

“No. It’s not,” Shouta immediately cut him off with unyielding words. He sat himself up and took both of his husband’s hands within his own. Out of the corner of his good eye he noticed Recovery Girl left to give them some privacy.

“I’m not one to blame anything on something like “fate”, usually, but if we are to believe that Midoriya’s powers are literally connected to fate, then fate is what’s clearly at fault. And even if there is no such thing as fate– ” which is what Shouta was personally inclined to believe, but it seemed like that kind of thinking wouldn’t last long around his “I-Bring-People-Back-To-Life” problem child “ – then it was still a freak accident. There’s no way you could’ve known that your quirk would be active.”

Shouta guided Hizashi’s hands up to his face to gently kiss the knuckles on both his hands, he saw that Hizashi was finally able to give a small smile at that.

His next words were as gentle as his kisses, he wasn’t usually good at comforting or sweet talk, but he tried his best for this, “Please don’t blame yourself for this… Not only is it illogical but knowing that you’re in pain about it is– it hurts. I don’t blame you for this, so try not to carry the blame on your shoulders, okay?”

Shouta leaned towards Hizashi to kiss one of his cheeks, right where they were still wet from the previous tears. “How about you just do what everyone else does, and complain about how fate is a bitch?”

Hizashi snorted in response, smile curling up just a bit more, and signed, I thought you hated when people did that?

“Oh, I do. But I’ll make an exception. This time it’s the truth– fate was obviously being a bitch.”
At that, Hizashi had to put his hand over his mouth to keep his snickers as quiet as possible. Shouta would like hearing his laugh more if Hizashi didn’t have to worry about wrecking the infirmary, but at this point, even just being able to force a laugh from Hizashi with everything that had occurred was a win in his book.

UA gave all the students a few days off as it worked to upgrade its security and manage the different changes they were planning to implement.

The first thing Izuku did once he got the chance to was confront Momoka. He refused to settle for the vagueness she had given him last time— a hero, his teacher, had died for him and his death might have been avoided if Momoka had given more information. The Prince of the Crystal refused to accept her silence.

Momoka had respected that enough to tell him of her storybook.

“It’s a book I wasn’t able to use when I had been the owner of the Penguindrum,” she explained using Izuku’s voice, in her hands was the dull, golden colored book that he had seen her reading before, “I tried to make a book that would write out important events that would happen in the future, but the only thing I got was this blank book. The physical copy is actually still stored on the shelves here in the library. The day before the villain’s attack, I saw that my version of the book that’s stored here in the mirror with me had glowed for a moment, and the book had written a fairytale style set up for the event— but the outcome for it hadn’t been written. The physical book is still blank though, I asked Izu-pingu to check it.”

It seemed that she really had no idea about the details as to what would happen, or even who Shigaraki was or what the Nomu was.

*Izuku hadn’t forgotten her silence about the Witch though. Momoka-san hardly ever lies, so lies by omission are her forte.*

During that same trip to his world, Izuku had visited Teddydrum White. His parts had returned to the Workshop automatically upon Izuku transporting himself for sharing Hizashi’s Fruit of Fate. The
clockwork mechanisms of the tools and machines within the Workshop had already begun putting the Teddydrum back together. But the repair process was lengthy due to how wrecked the robot had been.

Izuku had stood next to Teddydrum Black, who was sitting in mourning outside the window looking into the major repair bay. He pushed down his tears and consoled his healthy and whole Teddydrum with a hug that was miniscule compared to the size of the robot.

He also confessed his guilt, “I-I’m sorry… Teddydrum White got so hurt because he was trying to help us… he must hate that he died for it.”

Teddydrum Black slowly shook its head at that statement and held him closer with his large arms.

Izuku knew why it felt that way, Momoka had once said that the Teddydrums were made in the image of the stuffed animal companions their designs imitated; they were the protectors and comforters of their master, the Child they had been made for and gifted to— the owner of the Penguindrum. They happily lived and died for their owner, it was the purpose of their existence.

Izuku can’t help but wonder if it was wrong of Momoka to design beings for an existence such as that. They were like slaves in a way, but didn’t even think of it as that because it made them happy.

*But if they were built to gain happiness from their servitude for the convenience of their owner, were they really “happy”?*

Izuku didn’t know the answer to that. All he can do is be a good owner to them, to love them and hug them close for both their comfort and his own, like a good child that treats his teddy bears with care and sleeps with them in his arms at night.

He passed by the treasury and thanked the Champion of the Rose Bride for its hard work at the USJ– Izuku had heard that it saved Yaoyorozu, Jirou, and Kaminari from a lingering villain, his electric attacks absolutely useless against the unliving mannequin. He had also asked it to station itself at the Dueling Area in case an emergency like the USJ occurs again and he takes a villain to the arena to battle, but that it could leave to guard the treasury if there was a need for it. It acquiesced easily with a solid nod.

Izuku had once thought that the Champion was built similarly to the Teddydrums, but apparently it actually had the ability to *choose* whether it wanted to obey the Penguindrum’s owner. Momoka said
that the storybook character she had made it in the image of wasn’t the type of person who would follow someone who was unworthy of leading her, and thus the Champion of the Rose Bride was the same.

Izuku didn’t know how the Champion had come to decide he was worthy, but he felt proud that he had managed to earn its respect and loyalty.

Izuku’s last stop was the Penguin Exhibit, and it was there that he discovered something concerning. Inside the penguins’ second igloo, which was always closed shut and seemed inaccessible to them, there was a new penguin sleeping…

*If it could even be called a penguin— really it was more like an abomination of nature; a mixture of a black and white penguin-shaped body and flippers, a mammalian snout, ears that looked like they belonged on a bear, a long and thin white tail, white paws instead of webbed feet.*

“Summon: Momoka’s Hand Mirror!”

When the mirror appeared in the palm of his hand, Izuku banged on the glass to catch her attention. Once Izuku’s image with pink eyes appeared in the frame he yelled, “Momoka-san! Why is there a bear-dog-rat-penguin in the empty igloo?!”

He pressed the mirror directly into the viewing window to show her the aforementioned bear-dog-rat-penguin.

“Ah, I see… I didn’t think this would be likely to happen, but you are a Prince that is full of surprises. Isn’t your principal a bear-dog-rat thing? I suppose it’s off putting to see all those traits added to a penguin…”

“He shouldn’t have a penguin in the first place!” Izuku insisted sharply, he brought the mirror back from the window to look at Momoka’s cool expression, “He’s not a Child of Fate— the stem on his Fruit is as brown as they come, I saw it myself! Why does he have a penguin?!”

Momoka eyed Izuku with scrutiny, but her voice was monotone when she replied, “This igloo is where the penguins of Potential Children of Fate sleep.”

Shock ran through his system as he blinked at his image, “…Potential Children of Fate?”
Momoka nodded. “That’s right. I never told you about them, because they’re actually rarer to come across than normal Children of Fate. Your father had never met one himself.”

Her eyes glanced in the direction of the igloo.

“They are people who have quirks that cannot affect the Fruit of Fate but have the potential to, through some sort of specific circumstance, get a normal Child of Fate to use their quirk—Thus allowing them to change fate with their quirk through the use of the other Child’s quirk. Once that happens, they become an actual Child of Fate and face punishment for it. Their penguin also wakes up at that time.”

Izuku narrowed his eyes at Principal Nedzu’s penguin as he filed through his memory of hero quirks.

“The principal’s quirk, High Spec, gives him intelligence that surpasses human intelligence…” he muttered with a heavy tone, “So— if you consider everything that he thinks or plans as a product of his quirk, then you could claim that if he devised a strategy that manipulated a Child of Fate into using their quirk—then that might count as his quirk manipulating them…”

Izuku sighed at that, “Really, that’s only a technicality though!”

“As if fate cares about whether something is a “technicality”. It meets the requirements, so it makes him a Potential Child of Fate.”

Izuku just sighed once again, trying to ignore the encroaching nervousness he felt at the sight of the Principal’s sleeping penguin.

Once he left the Crystal World, Izuku went to his mother, who had been patiently waiting for him to finish what he needed to do and prepare himself for their talk. With her, he vented out some of the emotions that had welled up through all of the pandemonium.

He had told his mother about Momoka’s warning, about the villains, about how his homeroom teacher had died, about how he had used another teacher’s life to bring him back, and how they were punished for it. She had held him tight in her arms through his whole story without interrupting once, and when he was done she had told him how sorry she was that Izuku had to go through such horrors, how proud she was of him for keeping himself and his classmates safe, how she was sure his teachers were enjoying the miracle that he granted them right that very moment—
“You did good, Izuku,” Mom had whispered in broken words while she hugged him tight into her chest, “You did **so good. He’s still here** because of that. Please try to remember that– when you remember what you saw…”

–*Shouta-sensei face down on the ground, blood everywhere around him, Fruit of Fate gone, how could this have happened–*

Izuku held his mother even tighter as that image repeated itself in his mind. It mixed with his memory of that fateful day he was supposed to die; his memory of the pain in his chest at being unable to breath, his choked drowning as his sight faded to darkness.

Izuku may be alive, but death’s touch lurked in his mind. The guillotine of fate that had come down upon his neck was not forgotten. And the missing presence of Midoriya Hizashi would most certainly never be forgotten by this household as well.

On the last day before Izuku was to head back to classes, Toshinori visited him at his home.

“How are you doing, my boy?” Toshinori gazed at him with fond but sad eyes. His posture was crouched even more in on himself than usual as he sat on the sofa next to Izuku.

“I-I’m still feeling sort of out of it, I guess…” Izuku frowned down at his knees, brows furrowed in grief. “*Teddydrum White’s still in the middle of being fixed… And I can’t stop remembering–*” he cut himself off abruptly, swallowing the words along with the image.

“I see, I had thought it would be something like that,” Toshinori sighed as he placed his warm hand on Izuku’s shoulder, “That’s actually part of the reason why I came over… You see, the school wants you and your classmates Asui and Mineta to have at least one counseling session concerning what you saw.”

That was logical, but Izuku still blinked in surprise. “But… I thought they didn’t want us talking about how Shouta-sensei– *died*?” he managed to force the word out this time.

Only select people from the police force were told the full story of the USJ, including the detective Tsukauchi Naomasa who had already been in the know about Izuku’s quirk as Toshinori’s close friend. The rest of Izuku’s classmates, and even most of the teachers, were kept in the dark.
Toshinori looked caught off guard by the way Izuku addressed his homeroom teacher but didn’t comment on the matter, instead heading right into the information he wanted to impart on Izuku.

“Yes, but it would be negligent of us to just force you to never discuss your thoughts on the matter with professionals to help you work through the trauma it caused. Principal Nedzu has carefully vetted professional counselors for the students for this exact purpose, seeing that the heroic course students become exposed to these sorts of things once they get involved with fieldwork.”

Toshinori’s hand squeezed his shoulder firmly and he slightly bowed his head towards Izuku in a plea. “Will you consent to openly discussing your troubles with one of these counselors, young Midoriya? I feel like that will help you immensely…”

Izuku stayed silent. Conductor had turned itself on at Toshinori’s physical contact, and he let his eyes stray towards the man’s chest– his Fruit was still the same as he saw it throughout the trip on the Train of Fate.

“I will…” he answered, but followed up with, “But Toshinori-san… do you think that you could– find someone to talk to also? It doesn’t have to be a counselor, or me– but…”

Toshinori stared at him questioningly for a moment, before realization dulled his sunken eyes.

“My Fruit of Fate… it’s gotten worse, hasn’t it?” his voice sounded so weary.

Izuku deactivated Conductor and nodded sadly. “Not only is it down to one half now, but… the poisoning grew. Only the bottom fourth of the Fruit is uncovered.”

Toshinori breathed out deeply, then explained, “During the fight with the Nomu I had to push my quirk passed its limits to get around the being’s shock absorption. It reduced my time down to 3 hours, where I was at before the transfer…”

The man had to look away from Izuku as he continued, “And… there was really no getting around the poison increasing– frankly speaking, right now… I hate myself quite a lot.”

Pain shot through Izuku at hearing those words come from his favorite hero and the person he was
growing close to. In a jerky movement, he grabbed Toshinori’s arm to direct his attention back to him. “You– You shouldn’t think of yourself like that, Toshinori-san! That’s–”

“I know it’s not healthy, my boy…” Toshinori’s eyes were pained as he looked down at him. “But I just can’t help feeling like that now. You and I both know that Aizawa didn’t have to go through such a horrible fate, and he and Present Mic—who I didn’t even know was his husband—wouldn’t be facing consequences for changing it, if I had just listened to you–”

He swiftly gestured his hand towards Izuku. “You literally told me just the day before that one of the problems I had was that I didn’t leave enough things to others, that I didn’t delegate hero work and put it all on myself because I wanted to be the who did it. And that’s exactly what I did the day of the USJ!” his voiced was raised by the last sentence, his anger at himself breaking through.

Toshinori rubbed one hand down his face, frustration mounting, and gazed a blank but broken stare down at the floor.

“I was so focused on saving other people, even when other heroes could’ve handled it themselves, because I wanted to, that I couldn’t even be there to save the people–my students, my colleagues–who needed me…”

Izuku grimaced and replied, “That’s… technically true, but– there’s a lot of things that could have gone differently. Maybe I could have done something if I wasn’t so caught up with wiping out the villains that were after us. Hell, even just the school deciding to have you attend only the first hour of the USJ instead of showing up later would have changed everything. So many options, so many paths– But none of them happened. They were all just meaningless regrets and wishes for what “could have been”, in the end. Everything turned out like this instead. And that…”

His left hand tipped Toshinori’s chin over so the man was facing him and leaning down towards him, like a parody of that day he changed Toshinori’s Fruit of Fate. Toshinori’s sunken eyes still seemed just as lost as they were on that day. Izuku’s eyes were the same piercing green that they had been on that day.

“That’s precisely what fate is. That’s precisely what fate means… Don’t forget this as you go forward to the destination of your fate, wherever it may be, All Might…”

Chapter End Notes

There was a headcannon on tumblr that got fairly popular that since Present Mic was
born with his quirk and he would've had no way to really control it that his parents ended up deaf because of it, and because of that he know sign language. That sort of background fit really well with what I'm doing with him, so I decided to use it.
The first day of school after the USJ villain attack, two notable things got every student from class 1-A’s immediate attention; Shouta-sensei showed up with a medical eyepatch covering where his left eye used to be. And Mineta was missing.

Izuku was surprised by neither of these things.

“My eye was a casualty of the villain attack. There will be no questioning about it. Also, there was a new development with Present Mic’s quirk that now requires him to use his support gear to better regulate his quirk. There will be no questioning about that either,” was Shouta’s quick dismissal of the first of these things. It was met with tense silence, everyone looking over him in worry but not willing to disrespect their teacher’s wishes. Izuku glazed at Shouta sadly, but the man wouldn’t make eye contact with him.

The second required more explanation, “Mineta dropped out of the hero course of his own volition and is now in general education. However, all of you should note that his behavior was unacceptable, and I would have dropped him from the class regardless. He has agreed to the school’s requirement that he take anti-sexual harassment training and counseling, that he is required to fully pass, in exchange for continuing his UA education.”

The exasperation and anger his single eye conveyed said that although Mineta may still be at UA, the man would never, ever permit him the opportunity to join the hero course again.

Izuku almost wished he was there to see the look on Shouta-sensei’s face after he had been told about Mineta groping a student during a villain attack. Izuku made sure to report it with Tsu-chan’s approval, so the man must’ve been told about it at some point.

“Huh?!” Kaminari exclaimed in shock, “I mean– not about the other stuff but, why did he want to drop out?!”

Shouta carefully did not look at Izuku or Tsuyu.

“He, along with a couple other of your fellow classmates, saw a disturbing level of violence produced by the most dangerous of the villains, and upon self-reflection decided that he wouldn’t be able to handle dealing with that type of experience for his everyday job.”
Their teacher paused for a moment to slowly look every student in the eye before he continued, “Frankly speaking, that was a very smart and practical decision for him to make. While the job may seem glamorous, being a pro hero requires an extremely high amount of mental fortitude for those kinds of horrible sights and actions– It’s most definitely not a job everyone is capable of, even disregarding the potential of a person’s quirk. It doesn’t matter if your quirk is well-suited for heroics if you can’t stomach the possibility of death and maiming being inflicted on either yourself or other people.”

Shouta gently tapped his eye patch with his index finger.

“This occurrence was a mistake on the school’s part, but since it happened take this lesson to heart. A lot worse may happen to you during the course of your pro hero career than losing an eye, and you will see a lot worse happen to other people, whether they be civilians, other pros, or villains. If you don’t think you can handle that– drop out of the course now and find a different career path.”

Izuku glanced at Tsuyu, who glanced back at him as well. They were obviously thinking of the same thing, had the same images and words haunting their minds.

*Izuku knew that worse might happen to him, he’s already died once without even being a hero. But he has no plans on wasting the Fruit his father gave him– he’s going to survive and become a hero who changes that sort of fate for others.*

*He has already changed that fate for his teacher…*

“But in any case, there’s another piece of important news you guys need to be reminded of.” Shouta narrowed his eye at them. “The UA Sports Festival is approaching…”

After the initial confusion as to why the school was continuing with the Sports Festival despite the recent villain attack had passed, everyone was hyped about it.
Ochako-chan especially—the others all seemed shocked at her fervor, but Izuku had always known that there was a frightening girl hidden underneath her bubbly exterior. Really, everyone else should have paid more attention to the kind of logical reasoning that would be required to come up with swinging a foundational support pillar around as a sound battle tactic for a class mock fight.

Izuku was walking with Ochako, Iida, and Tsuyu to lunch and had just finished learning about Ochako’s desire to become a hero so she could financially support her parents, when Shouta unenthusiastically requested for him to eat lunch together to discuss something.

Thus, Izuku parted ways with his friends to head to a private conference room with Shouta. Hizashi was already in the room with some steaming plates of Lunch Rush’s food and green tea. His support gear had been altered to include a transparent orange-tinted plastic covering that enclosed most of his face, starting from his matching sunglasses and curving over his nose, then reaching back towards his iconic headphones and over his chin. It was connected to his regular support gear with various large tubes.

The man himself seemed to have improved his mood quite a bit since the last time Izuku saw him—which wasn’t that hard to beat, seeing as his husband had literally died, been revived, and then maimed the last time Izuku saw him—because he stood up to greet Izuku with a bright and genuine smile. He was holding cups in both of his hands.

“Hey, there’s my favorite listener!” the sound came from the speakers on his gear instead of directly from his mouth, it must have been filtering his quirk Voice to make it quieter, “I never got the chance to thank you for what you did for Shouta and me, so…” Hizashi’s smile lessened in intensity, but showcased soft fondness instead. “Thank you, Midoriya… I really don’t know what I would’ve done without—without your miracle…”

Hizashi passed off one of the cups of tea to Shouta, who was discreetly observing the emotional moment, to plant his fingerless-gloved hand on Izuku’s head to ruffle his curls. Shouta sipped at his tea without comment.

The physical contact triggered the selective activation of Conductor, and Izuku was shocked to see that the half Fruit of Fate inside his teacher’s chest was darkened at the core by the thick purple of poison.

That definitely wasn’t there before, Izuku made sure to check this time. Is it just because his punishment affected his quirk or… is it something more? He’ll have to see what he can do about this later.
While still feeling residual concern, Izuku also felt himself become lighter with happiness at both Hizashi’s words and actions. He accepted the affection with a bashful smile.

“T-There’s really no need to thank me, Hizashi-sensei. There was no way I would’ve let things end like that for Shouta-sensei—”

A spit-take from his homeroom teacher cut him off, the man choked on his green tea. Izuku swerved his head towards him in worry.

“A-Are you alright, Shouta-sensei?!”

The man audibly choked on air this time, he was looking at Izuku like he had no idea what to do with him.

Instead of showing concern for his husband, Hizashi blinked at Izuku in surprise for a moment. The surprise transformed into a slightly mischievous grin. While the lower half of his face was stuck behind plastic, it didn’t seem to hinder his exaggerated facial expressions at all.

“Oh— so we’re Hizashi-sensei and Shouta-sensei now, huh little listener? Are you always this forward with the people you use that quirk of yours on?” His hair was ruffled more after those words.

Izuku stared dumbly for a second. Then his entire freckled face promptly heated to a bright red.

“Ah! I-I’m so sorry! That was so rude of me, I just— After handling a person’s Fruit of Fate I just really feel personally connected with them, you know? I’m sorry, I’ll try not to—”

Shouta held out his hand to stop his aimless rambling, exasperation clear in his expression. “Stick to last names in public and you can use whatever you want when referring to us in private. Got it?”

“G-Got it! Shouta-sensei!”

Izuku tried to straighten up to instill confidence in his ability to avoid using their personal names in class, but Shouta’s single black eye looking over him in doubt made it clear that he wasn’t
succeeding.

Hizashi patted his head once and removed his hand to gesture at him. “Yeah! It’s no problem as long as you keep it quiet kid. You’re our favorite student now you know! Call me Hizashi-sensei to your heart’s content!”

Shouta side-eyed his husband at that.

“What?! Don’t give me that look Shouta, I don’t care if he’s your “problem child”– he raised you from the grave! It’s practically illegal for him not to be your favorite now!”

“Teachers aren’t supposed to have favorites,” was the monotone reply.

Hizashi rolled his eyes. “That’s why we’ll only be showing favoritism in private. I know you like to stick to your guns but come on! Under these extraordinary circumstances, you have to admit that now is the time to make an exception.”

Shouta, predictably, admitted nothing. Instead he dismissed the conversation by stating, “We’re moving on to the other reasons why Midoriya is here now…”

He plopped himself down in a chair and indicated that Izuku should do the same. Izuku and Hizashi both followed his lead and started to casually munch on their food.

“First of all, Midoriya, I need you to write me a comprehensive list of everything you can do. And I mean everything,” Shouta stared at Izuku intensely to emphasize that last word.

Izuku glanced away in thought, then asked with hesitation, “Does… that include stuff that I don’t know how to do?”

His teacher gave a long sigh and responded with, “…What exactly do you mean by stuff you don’t know how to do?”

“I mean– ” Izuku awkwardly tried to find the right words to explain his, but then figured that starting from the beginning was the best way to do it, “Everything about the Penguindrum was created by the
quirk of the first Penguindrum owner, Momoka, who is still inside the Crystal World to this day in her mirror. Momoka-san made several abilities that she refers to as “spells” and other things for the owner to use, but I don’t know how to use all of them yet because I need to figure out how they all work.”

Izuku stared at the table and leaned on his hand with his elbow supporting him as he vented, “The information about the spells are scattered throughout different books in the library, so I have to comb through tons of books to look for scraps of info. Also, the only information there is are the descriptions on what they’re supposed to do, there’s absolutely nothing on how I actually do it or what I need to say to activate the spell. Asking Momoka is worse than useless, so I just have to figure those things out on my own. It’s the same for using any of the items she made and stored in the treasury.”

Izuku sighed and exclaimed, “Not only that, but there’s a bunch of stuff that’s not useful! For example, there’s a spell that lets you play ballroom music in any area that isn’t the ballroom—which has its own orchestra and doesn’t need it– There’s also stuff that’s probably down right illegal to use– Honestly, what was Momoka-san thinking when she made a love potion that’s essentially a date rape drug–”

“I think I get the point.” Shouta’s dry words interrupted Izuku’s frustrated muttering, “Write a list on everything you can currently do or use. Then write a separate one on the things you are actively trying to learn.”

Rubbing the back of his bead in embarrassment, Izuku ducked his chin in slightly. “O-Oh, okay. Sorry about going on like that…”

Hizashi waved his hand at him. “Don’t worry about it. Sounds like you’re having a crazy time with that thing, huh?”

Izuku simply sighed and nodded his head at that.

“Secondly,” Shouta continued, “You need to prepare your speech for the Sports Festival.”

...What?

“It doesn’t have to be long. Actually, I would personally prefer if you were concise about it, as opposed to what you did just now. I can give you some past speeches as references if you need
“I… I have a speech?!” Then his hero nerd knowledge slapped him in the face and he yelled, “Oh God! I was first in the practical entrance exam! I have a speech!”

Hizashi bodily laughed at his panic. “A-Are you– Ha! Are you seriously afraid to give a speech?! What happened to that dashing prince who performed an enchanting soliloquy about fate and death before bringing his fair knight of a teacher back to life by kissing his forehead?!”

With a dramatic arm gesture the man emphasized from his slightly tinny-sounding speakers, “How can you be so eloquent and bold but still be nervous about this kind of stuff?!”

Shouta narrowed his eye at his husband. “I’m sorry– he brought me back to life by what?”

“Ah…” Hizashi’s chuckles stopped as he cleared his throat, his arm retracted to bring his fist up to the part of the face-covering over his mouth. “Don’t worry about it darling…”

He took one look at the awkward and blushing Izuku and decided to abandon that line of questioning. “Anyway– write whatever shit you want about fate for your speech, but try to keep it positive and motivating and don’t turn into Hamlet on stage, and you’ll be fine Midoriya.”

_He says that like doing all those things at once is easy for Izuku; A positive and motivating speech involving fate? By him? Without acting like a Shakespearean actor? Is that even possible?!_

“R-Right…” Izuku suddenly remembered something. “Speaking of fate… do you think you can help me set up an appointment to talk to the Principal, Shouta-sensei? I need to tell him something important that involves both him and my quirk.”

“That doesn’t sound ominous at all,” Shouta’s words were filled with sarcasm. The he sighed –he’s probably going to be doing that a lot when dealing with everything concerning Izuku– and affirmed, “I can set one up, yeah. I’ll try to schedule it sometime tomorrow.”
“Thanks, Shouta-sensei!” Izuku felt relieved to be able to get that out of the way soon.

“I’m just doing my job. Now, last but not least…”

Shouta gently grasped Izuku’s shoulder. While there was only one half of a Fruit in his chest, it was pure gold all around.

“Thanks for the save back there, hero-in-training…” he didn’t smile at Izuku, but his expression softened along with his words.

Izuku stared at his teacher with wide green eyes, before a huge smile lit up his face.

He still felt sadness when thinking of the fate his teacher had gone through, and the punishments the two of them face— but now, he also felt warm when thinking about how he had helped them.

“Wha– What’s going on!?” Ochako cried at the sight of the random crowd of students milling about in front of classroom 1-A’s doorway.

“There’s no way out with all of them in the way like that. What are they all here for?” Kirishima tilted his head to the side in thought as he looked towards Kacchan.

Previously Izuku would’ve been worried for the boy about his attempts to strike up a friendship with “Out-Of-My-Way-Extras!” Bakugou, but throughout the day Kacchan had been fairly tolerant towards the sharp-toothed boy. They had been stuck together during the USJ, so maybe Kacchan had come to some sort of agreement with him during that time.

Kacchan only glanced at Kirishima for a second before refocusing his sight on the crowd and walking towards the door. “They’re here to check out the competition, shitty hair. We’re the kids
who survived a villain attack, so they want to get a look before the Sports Festival,” he growled, “Doesn’t matter though. Out of my way, extras!”

Guess somethings never change, at least he doesn’t call his classmates extras anymore…

Iida snapped a knife hand gesture towards Kacchan. “Please refrain from referring to strangers as extras!”

“It’s true, we came to get a look, but you’re being a little full of yourself aren’t you?,” a deep voice rang out from the crowd, “Are all the kids in the hero course like you?”

A tall boy with striking purple hair moved to the front of the group. The eyebags under his eyes looked even worse than Shouta-sensei’s. He blatantly ignored Iida and Izuku’s shaking heads at their denial of his question, and continued with, “If that’s all you guys have to offer, I’m a little disappointed. There’s quite a lot of kids that didn’t make it into the heroics course that are in gen ed and other courses. Depending on the outcome of the festival, we might have the chance to transfer into heroics– ”

He boldly gazed around at all of Izuku’s classmates, especially focusing his attention on the riled-up form of Kacchan. “This class already has a spot open, doesn’t it? Word travels fast for that kind of thing. And the reverse is also possible for you guys… Scoping out the competition? For a general education student like me– this is the perfect opportunity to knock you off your pedestals.”

With narrowed piercing eyes, the challenger finished with, “Consider this a declaration of war.”

...What?

“Hey, I’m from class 1-B next door!” a loud voice yelled. The student that popped out of the crowd had unique looking eyes, gray hair, and sharpened teeth similar to Kirishima’s. “I heard you guys fought some villains, so I wanted to find out more– but all I’m seeing is this arrogant bastard here!”

What…

“You better not make fools of the heroics course at the Festival!”
What is this bullshit

Shouta-sensei didn’t die for this bullshit–

“I’m sorry, did I just hear you guys right?” Izuku made his way to stand beside Kacchan, who took one glance at his face and promptly sidestepped to give him the floor. Izuku wasn’t sure what he saw, his facial expression felt blank right now, but whatever it was it made him back off.

“You want to “knock us off our pedestals”? You want to find out more about us, about the villain attack, but decided that one student out of nineteen was enough to tell you about the kind of people we are?” his words had no inflections to showcase the anger that built inside of him. Izuku eyed not only the two outspoken students, but all of the group impeding his classmates’ way around the door.

“Well… if you really wanted to learn more about the villain attack, then none of you guys have seen our homeroom teacher, Eraserhead, yet– have you?”

The tired looking general education student stiffened at the mention of Shouta’s hero name and took the bait, “What happened to Eraserhead? I heard he came out okay…”

So he’s paying attention to Shouta-sensei for some reason. The hero name seemed notable to him, so maybe he’s a fan. If he is, he has to be quite dedicated seeing that Shouta-sensei’s an underground hero. It’s hard finding info on them.

Maybe Izuku shouldn’t say this then, but if the guy really wants to join heroics…

“He’s okay, yeah, but he’s also missing his left eye.” Izuku pointed at his own eye to increase the weight of his words. “They couldn’t fix it. He’s half blind now.”

The student’s tired-eyes widened in shock as he involuntarily stumbled back a step. The class 1-B student looked at him with wide eyes and a slacked jaw.

Not a single word was spoken by the crowd behind them.

Definitely a fan then, Izuku thought dismissively. He then turned on Conductor and got a look at the
two; the class 1-B kid was doing fine, but the general education kid had what could almost be considered a halo of fire around the top of his Fruit of Fate. *He figured there would be something like that, another person to add to his list to watch over…*

Turning off his father’s quirk, Izuku still didn’t change his expression– but his eyes bore into them all intensely.

“Our “pedestals” was a traumatic event that ended with our teacher being permanently maimed.”

–and dead– “Don’t make fools of the heroics course? You’re the ones who are acting like fools–”

He slowly swept his arm out with a dramatic flair to gesture to the entirety of the group. “–treating a villain attack like it was a play where we were the main stars acting as flashy heroes!”

Izuku made eye contact with the general education student for this next part. Even though the other was much taller than him, he wouldn’t let himself be looked down upon. The still wide-eyes didn’t look away from Izuku’s attention, but could only gaze back in shock.

“There was a moment, when it looked like our teacher was dead”

–when he was dead– “Do you want to know what the leader of the villains said to me, and my friend, and the guy who transferred to general education, when we saw him?”

Izuku’s words were quiet, but easily heard over the silence. “He said *Is this your guys’ first time seeing a dead body? Those of you that I leave alive should get used to the sight, if you really aim to be so called heroes.*”

Those words tolled through the boy in front of him, as well as the rest of the crowd, just like it had through Izuku and the others on that day Shouta-sensei was supposed to die.

“Maybe all of you should think about that, if you also aim to become heroes.”

Tension thickened the air. Izuku wasn’t even sure if the boy in front of him was breathing anymore, he looked like he was in shock. No one from the crowd or the 1-A students dared to break the silence.

Until someone did.

“Alright first years, let’s break it up! I think that’s enough excitement for one day, yeah?”

A smiling blond haired, beady blue eyed boy cut his way through the crowd to stand in front of the
doorway. His broad frame easily pushed its way in. He must be an older student, probably a third-year if Izuku had to guess.

He turned his back on Izuku to wave away the crowd. “Everyone that’s not from 1-A stop loitering around now. Go on– shoo, shoo!”

The majority of the group practically ran at his dismissal, scattering like fleeing rats. The boy from 1-B ducked his head in shame and took his leave without another word, and the gen ed student finally blinked the shock out of his system to divert his eyes from Izuku and slink away in quiet contemplation.

The smiling older boy turned around to face Izuku, towering over him unintentionally, saying, “So, you must be Midoriya Izuku! Sir said you had a way with words, but wow! That was pretty brutal– you should find a way to make money off of that! Haha!”

Izuku’s anger was extinguished by a wave of confusion. “Uh… Thanks? You know Nighteye, then?”

“Oh yeah, I’ve been interning with Sir since last year. I’m Togata Mirio! He told me about you so I wanted to get the chance to talk, but it doesn’t seem like now would be a good time so– ” He rummaged through his backpack to find a spare piece of paper and a pen, and quickly wrote a string of numbers out. He thrust the paper towards Izuku. “ –Call me at your convenience, okay?”

After some hesitation, Izuku delicately plucked the paper from his outstretched hand. “O-Okay?”

“Great!” Togata gave him an All Might-esque thumbs up and large grin combo, then swerved around to swiftly walk away. As he left he called out, “I look forward to hearing from you, Midoriya-kun!”

Class 1-A continued its silence until Ashido seemed unable to contain herself any longer, “Was that third-year trying to score a date with Midoriya?!”

Izuku gave off a choking sound at that. He frantically waved his hands in denial. “N-No! We have a mutual acquaintance, that’s all!”

“That acquaintance is Sir Nighteye, correct? All Might’s former sidekick…” Iida cupped his chin in
thought. “Come to think of it, you also said All Might personally visited you to tell you about your counseling too. What sort of relationship do you have with All Might-sensei, Midoriya-kun?”

He froze like a deer caught in headlights. “O-Oh, uh…” Izuku glanced around looking for an excuse to form in the air, before he mental slapped himself out of his nervous stupidity to say the obvious lie-based-on-truth answer, “Last year All Might saved me from a villain, and we just kept in touch.” Or he tried to save him at least…

“Really?!” Sero inserted himself into the conversation, “Everything about you seems so wild, Midoriya! Like– you act completely normal most of the time, then suddenly you bring out your teddy bear robots or penguins –which I totally want to see for myself one day! Or you verbally eviscerate an entire crowd of other students! We can never guess what’s gonna come out of you next…”

He gave a wide and unique-looking grin. “All that just now was really heavy, but– it sort of makes me excited to hear what you do for your speech, you know? I think you’ll really blow it out of the water!”

“Kero. I think so too, Izu-chan.” Tsuyu gently held onto Izuku’s arm in a calming gesture. Her Fruit was gold as it had been before the USJ. “You’ll blow it out of the water just like your Teddybombs.”

“Midoriya has Teddybombs too?!” Jirou asked incredulously.

His classmates’ relaxed chatter flowed over Izuku as they all prepared to leave now that no one was blocking their way. Izuku let himself relax with it. Maybe the Sports Festival and his speech won’t be so bad after all?

Then he headed back to the Crystal World, to see that a penguin with large, dark eyebags was sleeping next to Principal Nedzu’s, and remembered that fate can never let things stay simple.
The Fight Against Damnation and the Fight for Glory are One in the Same

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Toshinori heard through the grapevine about the... confrontation that occurred between the first-years around class 1-A and was not surprised one bit to hear that said confrontation featured young Midoriya. Toshinori of all people knew that the Prince’s words were just as good of a weapon as his robots or spells, he simply chose to use them to help people work through their problems instead of punishing them for their failings.

Though in this case, perhaps he was doing both– Aizawa did say that he was right to disillusion the other students about the fame the villain attack had given 1-A, and that it would save them time by weeding out those who couldn’t handle hero work while helping to mentally prepare those who could handle it. Did the boy do that on purpose or is he just naturally prone to this sort of work?

Toshinori also got to be a fly on the wall for Midoriya and the Principal’s conversation the day after, where he learned about Nedzu being a Potential Child of Fate, and that one of the general education students was one as well. Midoriya insisted that they had to put some sort of safety net in place to prevent both that student and any other possible Potential Children of Fate that may be among the first-years from accidentally triggering their own downfall. Nedzu assured him that he would comb through the first-year students and their quirks, and see if he could send them specific instructions on what they should avoid doing. He also said that he himself would avoid planning actions that may cause his own transformation into a full Child of Fate.

After Midoriya left, Toshinori got to have his own conversation.

“Nedzu… were you actively planning on me taking a student from UA to be my successor and pass down my quirk, because if that’s the case then… I don’t know.” Toshinori held one hand to the side of his face in frustration. “I have no idea whether or not that would be enough to qualify as “getting me to use my quirk” …It’s all very vague.”

The Principal hummed in agreement and responded, “I would imagine that there is a certain amount of leeway. Technically speaking, my plan every year for the practical entrance exam and all the coursework is to have the students use their quirks to their fullest potential, but Midoriya Izuku’s participation in these things was not enough to damn me. Though, it probably would have been different if I planned for his revival of Aizawa…”

Nedzu swiveled in his chair to gaze out his wall of windows, looking over the school grounds. He steepled his paws underneath his chin.
"I’m thankful Midoriya granted me permission to see him use that aspect of his quirk... but also quite intrigued by what I saw. It’s almost as if his powers and the Fruit of Fate are metaphors come to life; A prince who awakens people from the sleep of death with a kiss, an apple that is forbidden to touch at the cost of punishment by the gods—like the original sin of the Christian faith. Quirks have always been seen as purely biological abilities, but with Children of Fate... it’s like they transcend that bodily limit and reach the metaphysical realm of the universe."

The bear-dog-rat glanced his head back towards Toshinori. "What do you think of the word "fate"? Does the concept of fate exist in reality? To put it simply, are people's futures set in stone when they are born, never to be challenged? Do you believe in such a rule? Even beyond that, do you believe in souls? In God? Humans have always glossed over these questions by dismissing them with either blind faith in concepts that the truth could not be ascertained for, or blunt refusal of the existence of things that could not be proved."

"But now..." Nedzu’s tone was filled with wonder, like a scientist who had discovered a previously unknown entity in the world, "Now, there is something concrete to those questions! One might say that it’s still speculation to conclude that fate exists, that Midoriya’s quirk and the Fruit of Fate are actually acting on some biological or physical level to cause these events—Even with that dissent, this is still strong proof that the concepts of fate, souls, and God all actually exist. So where do you stand on these questions, Yagi?"

"I... have no idea," Toshinori sighed, "When I was young, I never believed in fate even after meeting Shimura-sensei. To me, our meeting wasn’t fate, it was an opportunity. Then, when I went after All of One and after I heard the future Nighteye foresaw for me... I guess I believed in it to some extent. Not that everything that happens is a product of it, but that the end of my life, that my battling All for One, were things decided by destiny."

He averted his eyes from the Principle to look down at his chest, where he knew his poisoned Fruit lie though he was unable to see it. "Now... It seems like the impossible is happening every day, and it’s taking all my energy to just keep myself from drowning in it all, let alone try to further examine the truth behind souls and fate. I’d rather just take everything as it comes." He looked back up to Nedzu to suggest, "Young Midoriya would surely be a good person to discuss this with though."

"Oh, most definitely!" Nedzu set his gaze back out the window. "But while I don’t know the entirety of his answers to those questions, I do know this; That boy believes in fate, in souls, and maybe even in God. How can he not, when he can simply reach inside his own chest with his palm to feel their existence for himself?"

Nedzu’s right paw grasped at his chest and he looked down at it, just as Toshinori had. His next words were quiet, but still loud enough that he knew that he was meant to hear them, "...I wonder
what he would have seen in me, if I didn’t have a quirk that increased my intelligence– He’s never
mentioned the Fruit of Fate being in animals, right?”

Toshinori blinked at that. “T-That’s right, I hadn’t thought of that… He didn’t seem surprised that
you had one though, so perhaps they do?”

“Perhaps… or perhaps he’s not surprised that I was able to get one with the quirk that I have. The
original sin of humanity described by Christianity was taking an apple from the Tree of Knowledge,
you know. That awareness of “what is good” and “what is evil” might have damned Adam and Eve
more than their disobedience of God. Of course, different monotheistic religions interpret the Tree of
Knowledge differently, so I suppose that’s no basis for proof…”

Nedzu looked back up at Toshinori, finishing the talk with, “Don’t worry about whether taking a
successor from UA will lead to my damnation or not, Toshinori. That’s something that could be
considered later. The first thing you need to decide is whether you plan to pass it on at all.”

**Because he still hasn’t even decided on that, has he?**

This led to Toshinori staring at his phone in apprehension. He’d been putting off this meeting for
way too long now –he’s starting to sense a theme with how he handles issues in his personal life–
but now the thought of talking about One for All is even more off putting, after having witnessed
fate’s control over life firsthand.

Eventually, he was able to bring himself to press the button for Gran Torino’s contact.

“We need to talk more about… those Fruit I previously discussed with you, as well as the future of
my quirk, can we meet sometime before the Sports Festival?”

The two weeks leading up to the Sports Festival were filled to the brim for Izuku with stuff to get
done.
After talking it over with Momoka, the queen of dramatic speeches who had taught everything Izuku and Izuku’s father knew about monologuing and soliloquies, he was actually capable of making a shortish speech that wasn’t too heavy on fate—*but it still had fate in it cause that’s just how Izuku works*—and was somewhat positive and motivating. He gave up on not turning into Hamlet though.

The day after the *confrontation*, the rowdy boy from 1-B came back over to their class at the end of school to introduce himself as Tetsutetsu Tetsutetsu and give an equally rowdy, but sincere, apology to the class. Kirishima immediately forgave him on behalf of the rest of them, and the two bonded over “manliness”. A concept that, despite being male himself, Izuku has never really gotten behind.

Shortly after that, a presumably informed Cementoss thanked him for helping Shouta. Then Midnight, surprisingly, did the same. She filled him in on the fact that she’d been classmates with both Hizashi and Shouta, and was thus friends with them throughout their adult lives as well, which was why they had been allowed to tell her what happened. It was nice to know the two had co-workers looking out for them.

He followed up on his promise to Tsuyu to explain how he brought their teacher back to life, and she somehow managed to take all the impossible information about the Fruit of Fate and Children of Fate without freaking out or losing her composure at all. Izuku was thoroughly impressed, but when he told her as such, she just said that she’s learned to accept that nothing is impossible when it comes to Izuku.

“To be honest… when you first told me you would fix the situation with Sensei, I couldn’t believe it at all. Kero,” Tsuyu explained with the frankness she was known for, “But—when you looked at me so intensely and pleaded with me so genuinely to accept it… it really conveyed that your intentions were true and serious. So I trusted you and your words despite not having a single idea as to how you would make them the truth.”

Tsuyu gave him a small smile and said, “Thank you for keeping your promise to me, Izu-chan, and thank you for keeping your promise to help Aizawa-sensei. I’m glad that I put my trust in you…”

Izuku cried a bit after that, but Tsu-chan accepted his tears with good grace.

He also intended on explaining things to Mineta—*while also explaining that the boy really had to fix himself as a person*—but Mineta declined, saying that he would rather not know the details behind how Izuku seemed to go against fundamental laws of the universe. He did promise that he would take his anti-sexual harassment training seriously— so that Izuku would never again feel the need to feed him to the penguins.
Guess seeing Little Might spear people through the gut really left a lasting impression on him…

He attended a counseling session with a soft spoken and kind woman, who had already been filled in on the details as to what happened at the USJ and even the role his father’s quirk played in it. She explained that the school wanted him to be able to fully confess any problems he had about it. To that, he conceded that he sometimes still had nightmares about his own death as well, and they planned to have a follow up session where he could talk more about that subject.

After rehashing all the thoughts he had about Shouta-sensei’s death, Izuku wasn’t sure if he was feeling better per say, but his mind did feel clearer.

Izuku made good on his promise to call Togata, and they texted throughout the two weeks. They were only able to meet up once due to their busy schedules with the impending Sports Festival, but Izuku made sure to put that time to good use and subtly investigated Nighteye’s state of mind. Based on Togata’s testimony, it seemed that his attitude had improved since transferring a third of his Fruit to Toshinori, but he was still reluctant to use his quirk. *His Fruit must still be frozen around the core then…*

Togata’s Fruit of Fate was a pure gold – *though Izuku has come to learn that doesn’t always mean there’s nothing hidden inside* – and he claimed that his belief that a hero should save both people’s hearts as well as their lives was inherited from Sir Nighteye. Izuku hadn’t looked into Nighteye’s Fruit to see that for himself, but it would make sense that any trusted sidekick of All Might’s would have that kind of perspective towards hero work.

He also stated that his hero name, Lemillion, comes from his desire to save a million people as a hero– since it’s impossible to save everyone. Izuku appreciated that sort of practical optimism, but couldn’t help but wonder what Togata’s actual reaction to failing to save a person would be.

The boy seemed very much like Toshinori – which was probably why Nighteye took him on in the first place– and from Izuku’s experience with the man… being like Toshinori was both a good thing and a really bad thing depending on which of his traits were being examined. It made him wonder if Togata was fated to have a Fruit that was poisoned by his own good intentions to match Toshinori’s…

And also…

*He was like Toshinori, and his quirk sounded so incredible– was Nighteye intending for him to*
succeed All Might? If he was, would the hero still consider passing down his quirk? Being a Child of Fate is not something to take lightly, they might end up damning the boy...

Izuku checked the Penguindrum after that meeting with Togata, his own punishment was still Pending.

Izuku checked in on his classmates; Everyone was still golden, except for the two problem Fruit of Fate…

Kacchan’s was still burning, but maybe died down a little due to his increased socialization with Kirishima –bless that boy’s pure soul and patience, Izuku was so glad he didn’t have to be the one actively helping Kacchan through his complex…

Todoroki’s was still as frozen solid as the icy tundra, and Izuku had to remind himself that it was rude to look into a person’s being and psychoanalyze their issues out of them when they were barely casual acquaintances. He’ll have to start interacting with the boy so that they could progress their relationship to the point where it would be okay.

He doesn’t think that’s exactly what Toshinori-san had in mind when he told Izuku to back off, but if there’s one thing he’s learned from Momoka-san besides monologuing– it’s how to find loop holes in people’s expectations to mercilessly exploit them.

Principal Nedzu updated Izuku on the Potential Children of Fate situation, saying that along with that gen ed student, he picked out another first-year in class 1-B whose quirk was extremely likely to make him a Potential Child of Fate. He sent explicit instructions to both of them on what they should avoid doing when it came to Izuku on the vague basis of a safety issue with Izuku’s quirk.

Teddydrum White’s repairs finished just the day before the Sports Festival, the Workshop having just barely finished on time. Everyone from the Crystal World, even Momoka in her Hand Mirror, gave a roaring welcome back to the robot. Izuku and Teddydrum Black especially made sure to freely give their affection, and Teddydrum White seemed absolutely ecstatic to hug Izuku gently within its giant metal arms and accept Teddydrum Black’s mock kisses to its cheeks.

He had been worried that Teddydrum White’s memory would be wiped after being rebuilt, but he still remembered the times it had played with Izuku as a child with Dad watching over in fondness. Izuku was beyond relieved by that– the Teddydrums have been his companions for far longer than his tenure as the Prince of the Crystal, losing that time with them would’ve been devastating…
Izuku managed to progress a little with his already known spells, but after the USJ he shifted his priorities. Bringing everyone out for the villains had been a little overkill for the shipwreck zone minions, but Teddydrum White on his own was only able to buy time for All Might and Little Might when it came to the big hitters. He needed to better coordinate them, like a king coordinating his chess pieces for maximum strategic affect. Making protocols and formations for when everyone based on whether they were outside or inside the Crystal World was his main concern during the time leading up to the festival.

Finally the day of anticipation arrived, and Izuku thought he had all his priorities lined up and accounted for– but a delayed issue reintroduced itself.

“Midoriya, objectively speaking… I have more raw power than you, but the range of abilities from your quirk is so vast, I can’t even tell how much is left that I don’t know about. It’s almost like you’re a completely unknown variable; there’s no way to tell how a fight with you would go,” Todoroki stated with his normal stoic manner in 1-A’s prep room.

Izuku blinked at Todoroki’s sudden conversation starter. He knew most of the other students were doing the same, this was the first time they’ve spoken to each other. “U-Uh… That’s a fair assessment, yes.”

“All Might’s got his eye on you, right? You said it’s just because he saved you from a villain, but I think there might be more to it than that…” Izuku involuntarily jolted, and Todoroki certainly noticed, but didn’t mention it. “I’m not going to pry into it, I just wanted to say…”

His mis-matched eyes bore into Izuku, it made Izuku wonder if this was what it was like to be on the receiving end of his own stare.

“I will beat you,” those words were heavy with conviction.

*When put together with Todoroki’s soft hair and delicate facial features– he almost seemed like a prince, even with the scar marring half his face.*

“A declaration of war from one of the strongest in the class!” Kaminari called with excitement.

“Hey, man, don’t pick a fight now! We’re about to go on…” Kirishima came up to Todoroki, but the prince-like boy rebuffed him.
“I don’t care, I’m not here to make friends…” Todoroki narrowed his eyes at Kirishima and shied away from the attempt to grab his shoulder.

*Todoroki has an interest in him. He sensed an opportunity here but if Todoroki is reluctant to get close to others, some evasive maneuvering will be needed to help his Fruit—*

Izuku mentally shifted his priorities and set his bait, “Later you can pry into it, and into my quirk, if you’re curious. As for your declaration to beat me, well…” Izuku curled his lips into a half-grin. “My speech should answer what I think about that, so make sure to listen.”

Then, the Prince turned his back and walked towards the door, just a moment before a runner came to direct them to leave for the arena. And when Izuku felt Todokori’s lasting stare stay firmly on his back, he knew that the boy had been lured in.

*He loved it when things worked out like that. He’ll have to do some last-minute changes to his speech to further catch Todoroki’s attention, but he’ll pull through.*

The UA Sports Festival Stadium was enormous and Shouta could only watch from above as his problem child walked out onto the grassy field looking like he was one step away from dying of nerves.

He was seated in the commenter’s booth with Hizashi. This was a decision by the school that was not made without heavy consideration – after all the League of Villains were under the impression that he was dead – but the Principal ultimately decided that they needed to give a strong front by showing everyone that class 1-A’s homeroom teacher was fine and dandy for the most part. Also, the League might try to spread rumors that they had killed him – *which they had* – so showing him off now would put those to rest.

His husband speaking through his gear would cause too much feedback from the microphone, so instead the booth had a system for him to directly hook up his gear to the stadium’s speakers. He pulled the plug for it on his end to be able to speak privately to Shouta through the speakers on his gear, “You think Izuku’s gonna be alright on stage?”
Shouta side-eyed him with his one good eye. He was glad they had the foresight to place Hizashi on his right, the side with his working eye.

“What?! Don’t give me that, the kid’s calling me Hizashi so I can call him Izuku– that’s how it works!” Hizashi folded his arms to demonstrate his stubbornness.

Shouta sighed and discarded the idea of trying to sway his husband on the matter. “You’re the one who said that the soliloquy he gave while reviving me was theater-worthy, and the confrontation from before suggests that it wasn’t something he only does when he’s bringing people back to life, so…” Shouta shrugged his shoulders. “It’s up to how strong his immunity to stage fright is. And even if he bombs it, it won’t be the end of the world. He’ll be fine.”

Hizashi just hummed at that. He continued to look over Midoriya’s tiny form on the field with his brows creased in worry.

_Hizashi was really starting to become a mother hen, maybe Shouta should ask him if he wants to adopt a kid? When they talked about it before he said he was okay with them being too focused on their hero work for one, but maybe now…_

“To start us off, this year’s student representative Midoriya Izuku from class 1-A will be giving a few words of encouragement to his fellow first-years!” Nemuri pointed at Midoriya with her whip, and the boy shakily made his way to the stage.

Hizashi pulled at his arm in excitement. “It’s starting, Shouta, it’s starting! Do your best Izuku!” he cheered, ignoring the fact there was no way for the boy to hear him.

Shouta told Hizashi that Midoriya would be fine, but truthfully he also felt a bit worried when looking at the boy’s shaky legs.

Once he reached the center of the stage though, everything changed. Midoriya took a deep breath in, and when he breathed out, it seemed to release the tension from his body. He placed a hand over his chest, like he was grounding himself with his Fruit and soul, and stood strong in front of the microphone.

“Today, everyone here is aiming for the top,” Midoriya’s words were steady and composed as they passed through the speakers, “But despite all of us being on the same playing field, we are not all
beginning from the same starting line. As a person whose quirk developed late in life, I can tell you from firsthand experience that there are people in our society that are told every day that, because of what quirk they have or their lack of a quirk, they have no future, and that they will never amount to anything…”

Did someone really tell him that? Shouta couldn’t help the anger that coursed through him. Objectively he knew favoritism based on people’s quirks was prominent, UA’s own practical entrance exam was a testament to that, but to outright discard a child’s potential to have any future at all like that…

“The people who told me that were wrong, though, the fact that I stand here now is proof of that.” He spread out his arms to emphasize his presence. “And I’m certain that they will be wrong about many others as well.”

“People don’t get to choose the quirk they are born with, or even if they have one at all. That’s something that is decided by fate. Some of you were born with quirks that people have told you are “good”, and that they will make you a good hero. Some of you were born with quirks that people have told you are “bad”, and that you wouldn’t be able to become a hero with them. But I think that neither of those things are true-- I think that what leads to a person becoming a hero is how they use what they were given, quirk and everything else, and their conviction to go beyond the limits of what fate has granted them. Even if a person is born with a “good” quirk, in the end that doesn’t matter if they fail to follow through on their potential.”

Although Midoriya’s wording phrased these things as his opinions, the weight behind his voice made them sound like undeniable facts. He sounded nothing like the nervous mess the kid was usually.

“There is only one Number One hero, and there is only one first-place spot on the podium.” His arm gave a graceful gesture outwards as though the actual podium had already been placed on the field in front of them. “With all the competition at play, it may seem like an impossible thing to reach that first-place spot. And maybe the odds are already stacked against you, having been given a quirk that’s simply not as “powerful” as others on this field, but there’s something someone said to me once that I think fits here…”

Midoriya had a wide grin on his face as he clenched his right fist in front of him. His voice rang through the stadium, “May those who defy their fate be granted glory-- Everyone here will have to fight for their glory today! Whether it’s for the glory of being recognized by our society, or for the glory of standing on that first-place podium. Show all the people of Japan your conviction and earn your glory, that’s what Plus Ultra means! So do your best, everyone!”

Right on que, the crowd of spectators and students gave a roaring round of applause. Next to him, Hizashi echoed them with his own applause and whistles. Midoriya gave a grand bow as though he
was an actor who had finished his performance and gracefully walked off the stage. Many of the 1-A students patted him on the back as he made his way back to his spot.

Shouta hummed at the scene, “So that’s what the Prince of the Crystal is like, huh?”

Hizashi enthusiastically nodded beside him. “You got it!”

If there is one thing that Shouta knew for sure in that moment, it was that those people who told Midoriya that he “had no future” and “would never amount to anything” have probably never been more wrong in their entire lives.

Chapter End Notes

Quotes from this chapter:
“What do you think of the word "fate"? Does the concept of fate exist in reality? To put it simply, are people's futures set in stone when they are born, never to be challenged? Do you believe in such a rule?” is a quote from mawaru penguindrum
Izuku hoped that the preface he included in his speech about how his quirk mysteriously developed late would increase Todoroki’s interest in it enough to outright ask him about it, giving him an excuse to tell him about the Fruit of Fate—*that would count as the boy approaching him about the subject technically, right?*—But that was something to consider at a later time.

After his successful speech, Izuku felt ready to put his money where his mouth was and fight to earn his own glory. At first, an obstacle course seemed like the perfect starter to that.

As soon as Hizashi signaled the race had begun, Izuku popped back into the Crystal World to quickly hop on Teddydrum White’s back and pop back into the race. As they flew away, he could hear some of his classmates cry out in excitement at the sight of the robot, obviously glad to see that it was alright—It was Izuku’s intention to show off Teddydrum White to put his classmates at ease, so he was thankful that it seemed to work.

He could also hear the sounds of extreme confusion from the non-1-A students, but Izuku ignored that. It was only to be expected.

Even Hizashi seemed glad to see it. “Wow! Look at Midoriya go on top of Teddydrum White! That robot took a real beating during the villain attack, it’s good to see that it’s back in action! For those not in the know—Midoriya Izuku has a pocket dimension quirk that’s got a bunch of cool stuff in it! He got clearance to use all those things from there, right?”

“That’s correct. Everything that is naturally there is at his disposal,” was Shouta’s monotone response.

“AWESOME! It’s going to be a real crazy ride today then, folks, let me tell ya!”

Izuku directed the Teddydrum to fly high in the air, not so high that he would have problems breathing but just enough that they would be safe from any competitors or obstacles. Izuku just got Teddydrum White back, he planned to avoid putting it in excessive danger anytime soon. He ignored both the chilly bite of the air rushing passed him and the sting of wind in his eyes.

However, upon easily passing over the 0-pointers Izuku was starting to lose his excitement.
“Shitty Izuku!” Izuku could only barely hear Kacchan’s scream over the wind as he passed the boy from high above and **wow he’s still using Izuku huh? That’s nice…**

Todoroki was much quieter when Izuku passed him, but he could barely see from the distance that the boy’s eyes narrowed at the sight of him and Teddydrum White flying over him.

They put up a great effort to retake their lead over him, but the Teddydrum’s rockets let Izuku keep a sustained flight speed, while both of their methods of movement required bursts of propulsion. They were at a clear disadvantage here.

As Izuku easily passed over the canyon gorge, he started to feel a bit put off.

“That’s true but please don’t say it out loud, Hizashi-sensei… Damn, he’s going to undermine his own speech…”

By the time Izuku reached the minefield, he was shivering like crazy. Flying through the air like this at the speed he was going maximized the cold temperature– Izuku thought that if he spent too long doing this he might actually freeze himself to his robot. He directed Teddydrum White to lower itself while passing over the minefield so Izuku wouldn’t get frostbite and so they would be able to go through the tunnel once they got to the end.

*Note to self: Get warm coat for hero costume, very warm. Actually, his visor would be really good to have right now too, and his headphones– the wind in his eyes and ears was very impeding. He should also remake his headphones to double as full-grade ear protectors. His visor and headphone set up was sort of similar to Hawks’ wasn’t it? That must be why his costume has them–*

“Shitty Izuku!” Kacchan’s reprise was audible once more. Izuku got a glimpse behind him to see the boy furiously blasting his way over the minefield with Todoroki pushing himself with ice right behind him.

Adrenaline started pumping through Izuku at the sight of his competition catching up. The opening for the stadium was closing in fast.
“Don’t slow down until you pass the finish line, Teddydrum White! Once you get there just start flying sharply up so we don’t hit the wall before you can stop!” Izuku yelled over the roar of the wind and his robot’s rockets. The Teddydrum nodded in confirmation.

Izuku pushed himself further into the metal back of Teddydrum White, arms secure around its neck, as they entered the stadium’s wide hallway. *Just a bit more—*

All of a sudden, the darkness of the hallway opened up to the bright open arena.

Then, Teddydrum White somehow managed to execute an almost 90 degree turn upwards that was so sharp Izuku’s arms were forcibly torn from the neck of his robot half-way into its journey towards the air. There was a distinct sense of Déjà vu as Izuku simultaneously plummeted to the ground due to gravity and flew forward due to momentum.

“The first-place winner is– OH SHIT!”

–*And also* get a harness–

Teddydrum White completed a full 180 and blasted full speed towards Izuku. It won the race against gravity to grab onto Izuku’s body, twist around their positioning, and suffer a total crash landing that rumbled through Izuku’s body and left a deep streak through the ground of the arena’s dirt flooring.

Once they stopped moving, the body of the Teddydrum was mostly buried under a mixture of loose soil, gravel, and grass, but its metal nub-like hands stuck out into the air with Izuku at their ends. He was lifted out of the way without a scratch on him.

Izuku took a moment to process everything that had happened within the span of maybe ten seconds, neither him nor Teddydrum White moved a centimeter from their positions. Loud, confused murmurs traveled throughout the spectators.

After a single beat, panic instantly filled Izuku as he tried to unsuccessfully squirm around in the robot’s grip to look at it. “T-Teddydrum White! Are you alright?!”

“I- Midoriya is OKAY! YO, Teddydrum White, give us a sign! You still with us, robotic listener?!” Hizashi echoed his concern through the speakers of the stadium.
Vibrations traveled up the robot’s arm into Izuku’s body, then the dirt tumbled apart to reveal Teddydrum White. Izuku’s robot sat up still holding Izuku out with his hands like a champion baseball player holding out a saved ball. Debris was stuck deep into the crevasses of its body, and from the protruding wires and metal Izuku can see, the back of its head and torso probably looked like a disaster, but the Teddydrum still seemed to be in good spirits.

The crowd burst into applause at the victorious stance of the robot.

“And it’s okay folks! What a wonderful save by Teddydrum White! Midoriya Izuku from 1-A places first in the obstacle course! Todoroki Shouto and Bakugou Katsuki, also from 1-A, place second and third!”

“Midoriya, no more riding robots until you get a harness from the support department,” Shouta cut in with dry exasperation.

Izuku sighed, “Sorry Teddydrum White, we just got you fixed too…”

The robot released its lower body from the confines of the ground to stand up and gently place Izuku down. It nonchalantly waved off his apology, it probably thought it was the one at fault. When it shook its body like a dog, dirt flew off the Teddydrum to splatter over Izuku, and the robot immediately ceased once it saw the consequences of its actions to fret over Izuku. Izuku waved it off but Teddydrum White still hung its head in shame.

“Shitty Izuku!” Kacchan echoed for the third time that day. Izuku turned around to see that he and Todoroki had paused in the middle of moving into positions to catch him. The red-eyed blond looked furious as he demanded, “Why the hell didn’t you just pop yourself out of reality when you started falling?!”

Izuku blinked dumbly at that. “I… couldn’t really comprehend what was going on fast enough to–”

“Then think faster dumbass! I thought you were supposed to be fucking good at that!” Kacchan clenched his fists in a way that disturbingly mimicked strangulation.

Rubbing the back of his head in embarrassment, Izuku conceded, “Sorry for worrying you like that Ka–”
“I wasn’t worried dammit!” The angry boy stormed away with that as his last word.

Todoroki just blinked his pretty eyes a bit before awkwardly turning away himself, as though he didn’t really know what to do in this situation.

*So he’s a socially awkward prince, huh? That's actually charming in its own way– wait, no. Stop thinking of Todoroki as a prince, Izuku, you’re not Momoka-san get it together…*

“Shiozaki Ibara from 1-B finishes in fourth, and it looks like Yaoyorozu Momo took a page out of Midoriya’s book to finish in fifth!”

Izuku swerved his head back towards the finish line at that. Yaoyorozu approached him, hovering with cool rocket-propulsion boots that featured stabilizing elongated handles for her to steady her upper body with.

She touched down a couple feet from him with her body shivering slightly to say, “I hope you don’t mind I took some inspiration from your Teddydrums, Midoriya-san. Though I wasn’t quite prepared for how cold I would get from flying like that…”

Izuku snorted, “I wasn’t prepared for it either, *or* prepared for *falling off*. I don’t mind at all about you taking ideas from me though, Yaoyorozu-san. My pocket dimension is practically a sandbox of creative ideas– someone else might as well benefit from that too.”

Yaoyorozu gave a kind smile in response. “I see, I’ll be sure to take advantage of that then. Thank you for your generosity.”

Before the next round, Izuku transported himself back to the Crystal World to deliver Teddydrum White to the minor repair bay. If Izuku learned one thing from the first-round of the Sports Festival, it
was that his own hubris was his greatest enemy, apparently. This lesson was further solidified after Midnight explained the cavalry battle and that as the first-place winner, Izuku would be cursed with a ten million point bounty—making him the number one target for the second-round.

The pressure surrounded him with crushing tension as everyone turned their eyes to him, gazing at their prey. Even under these circumstances, though, Izuku instantly had a perfect strategy in mind. *Though he’ll be undermining his speech again, but frankly it’d be stupid to overlook this…*

“Deku-kun, do you want to team up?"

“Oh, thank goodness— you’re a life saver Ochako-chan!” Izuku breathed out in relief that he had at least one willing teammate.

Ochako just laughed sweetly. “It’s no problem Deku-kun, I’m sure you’ll think up some way to win—like a magician pulling stuff from his pocket dimension hat! As long as we can hold onto your headband, we have an absolute pass to first place, you know!”

Iida, on the other hand, shook his head to decline saying, “Sorry, Midoriya-kun, but—ever since the entrance exam, I’ve been losing to you. I can’t follow you now, since I also wish to challenge you! So for this battle, I cannot join your team,” then made his way towards Todoroki.

Disappointment rose in Izuku’s chest, and was amplified when Tsuyu glanced away in guilt. “Kero… Sorry, Izu-chan. I’m sure you can make it even with your disadvantage. But that’s sort of why I want to try my own thing, I have an idea I think would work well for me and Shouji…”

Her large black eyes refocused on Izuku to convey her sincerity. “For what happened at the USJ, I could only support you as you took care of everything for us”—even our teacher, she didn’t say—“so for something like this, I want to try growing on my own. That way next time I might be more able to help you.”

With that reasoning, Izuku couldn’t bring himself to feel disappointed anymore. Tsuyu was just trying to do her best to become a hero in her own right as well. Izuku gave her a slightly sad smile and gently replied, “That’s alright, Tsu-chan, I understand.”

As she hopped away, a human missile launched towards Izuku.
“Ten Million! I’m Hatsume Mei, from the support department.” The girl with pink curls and metal goggles forced her way into their conversation to take his hand for a handshake. “Let me join your team to bring attention to my babies! And you also own such a wonderful baby, did you make it yourself?”

“U-Um, thanks for joining?” despite what he said, Izuku didn’t feel too thankful, just somewhat confused by the new comer. Then he processed the rest of her rambling and decided he liked the girl; the Teddydrums were sort of like his children —or maybe he was their child?— in a way, and he could appreciate someone who felt similarly about their own creations. “I didn’t make Teddydrum White, no. There’s a Workshop in my pocket dimension that made two Teddydrums when it, uh– first came about. It also repairs them for me.”

“Really?! How mysterious! Sometime after the Sports Festival let me take a look at your Workshop, Ten Million!”

“Ah– my name is Midoriya Izuku…”

“You got it, Ten Million!” Hatsume exclaimed with a grin, not a single trace of irony to be found in her voice.

*Guess it’s better than mister penguin at least…*

At the thought of those flightless birds, Izuku caught sight of a very different kind of bird out of the corner of his eye. He thought to himself, *Well– for the plan he wants to go with, teammates who have good defense will be the best bet. Also, they’re both bird themed, kind of, so might as well see if he’ll join…*

“Tokoyami-kun!” Izuku called out. When the bird-headed boy turned towards him, he waved at him to come over.

Tokoyami meandered to their group with an expression of contemplation on his face —which was impressive considering it was made up of feathers and a beak, but if the penguins could manage it he supposed Tokoyami would be able to manage as well.

“So the Creator of Madness has set his sights on me… what antics will you materialize for this round?” Tokoyami asked with a completely serious tone, to match his completely serious face.
On second thought, maybe mister penguin wasn’t so bad after all…

Izuku accepted Tokoyami’s edgy atmosphere with good grace, not even bothering to get him to let go of that “Creator of Madness” thing. He simply accepted his fate to constantly be misnamed by people. “I do have a plan, and if we can use it, our first-place victory will be almost totally secured, but…” He looked around at the group sheepishly. “Admittedly, none of us will get to show off a lot with it.”

Ochako tilted her head, brows furrowing questioningly. “What kind of plan would give us first-place but not let us show off?”

Hatsume cupped her chin in thought. “Hmm, that is a major downside. How can I bring attention to my babies that way?”

“If you do have a strategy for total victory, Midoriya–” Oh what a relief, so he’s not going to always call Izuku Creator of Madness “–then we shouldn’t worry about showing off in this round. Not only will we already be notable in the eyes of the masses for our placing, but we’ll have secured our spots in the third-round tournament. That is the arena in which we will truly be able to demonstrate our prowess,” Tokoyami gave his opinion with a stoic tone, crossing his arms in a purposefully cool manner.

Hatsume pointed enthusiastically at the dramatic bird boy, grin returning to her face. “Oh, that’s a good point! If I get in the tournament, I’ll get a chance to monopolize the scouting support companies’ attention! If I only have the second-round to show off, my babies might be overshadowed by the other competitors.”

“That’s right! Victory is the thing that matters most now!” Ochako pumped her fist into the air, a mean expression showing that she was ready to ruthlessly secure her win. “But what is this plan of yours, Deku-kun?”

After explaining his plan, Izuku’s teammates were still on board.

“Hmm… well you were certainly right about us not having a chance to show off but it’s also a certain victory. Will they even allow that sort of thing? It almost seems like cheating… An unexpected strategy worthy of the sort of eccentricities that you craft, but not as strange as usual.”

“What a brutal plan like that leaves absolutely no hope for the other competitors. I love the way you
“Let’s do it, Deku-kun! That first-place spot is ours!”

“Great! I’ll go ask Midnight about it now– oh, but does anyone have a watch or something on them?”

“I’ve prepared a baby for every need, Ten Million, even something as average as telling the time!”

“Good, cause we’ll need it…”

After Midnight laughed at their plan, she gave an okay with the condition that they wear something that the school can monitor them with. Team Midoriya set up their horse and put on Hatsume’s support equipment. He tightened their ten million plus headband around his forehead, as Hatsume, Ochako, and Tokoyami held him up securely.

“Here we go! The countdown to this brutal battle royal!” Hizashi began the dramatic countdown, “Three…! Two…! One…!”

Izuku could see that the majority of the teams were preparing to rush at them, their glares firmly resting on their prize, but that wouldn’t matter soon–

“START!”

All at once, numerous teams flocked towards them–

“Survival Strategy!”

–But they were already gone by the time any of them got close.
“Fucking Shit! Shitty Izuku!” Bakugou raged from his seat atop his team, explosions at full force as he redirected their course from where Midoriya’s team used to stand to charge towards Shouto instead.

Shouto narrowed his eyes at him, but couldn’t resist calling out, “You know that you gave him that idea, right?”

“Shut the hell up, half ‘n’ half bastard!”

“Midoriya has transported his team to his pocket dimension! Could it be that he plans on staying there the whole time? Is that even allowed?!?” Present Mic’s question echoed throughout the arena. Shouto did his best to ignore it while he blocked off Bakugou’s aerial pursuit with ice and his team back away.

“It’s a good thing we considered this possibility,” he murmured to his team, “Let’s just go after everyone else then…”

“He already talked it over with me,” Midnight answered with a wink using her own microphone, “It’s clearly something that’s part of his normal quirk functioning, there’s no point in denying him its use just for the comfort of his competitors! As long as they show up for the end and don’t dismantle their formation while out of sight, it’s legal! Life’s just unfair like that sometimes, you know~”

“What a heartless strategy! One might even call it, a heartless Survival Strategy– Aha!” Present Mic obnoxiously laughed at his own joke. Shouto wasn’t even sure if the crowd was able to hear Midoriya’s incantation, and therefore had no idea what Mic was joking about.

“Please never make that joke again…” Aizawa intoned, not a single laugh to be heard from him.

“Oh– What’s this?! Team Bakugou’s down to zero points, they lost their headband!”

Bakugou got distracted by a team made of class 1-B students taking his headband, so Shouto’s team took advantage of the reprieve to steal some headbands from other teams. Concealed beneath
Bakugou’s angry screaming, he could barely make out, “But seriously, what an unmanly strategy!”

“Shut up shitty hair!” was Bakugou’s loud response, “If Izuku didn’t try using such an obvious plan, I would’ve killed him myself!”

What was going on with those two’s relationship though? Are they friendly or not? Bakugou’s attitude changed quite a bit after their Battle Trial, did something happen?

Everything about Midoriya just seemed like a mixed bag of craziness and mystery…

“Later you can pry into it, and into my quirk, if you’re curious”

Why did he say that? Why does he want Shouto to pry?

Shouto’s not here to make friends, but at this point the unknowns surrounding Midoriya Izuku were bothering him. The only answers Shouto could think up for the boy were crazy in their own right. He’ll just have to see for himself whether either of them were true…

“Is first place really out of reach for us now?” Iida asked with disappointment clear in his words.

“No,” was Yaoyorozu’s quick reply, “Midnight-sensei said that they had to be back in time for the end so…”

“We’ve got one shot,” Shouto finished, “The second that they reappear right before the countdown finishes, that’s our only chance.”

“Do we even know where they’ll pop up, though?!” Kaminari questioned with doubt in his voice.

Present Mic’s commentary continued, “With the ten million headband gone, it’s a free for all now! Teams are losing and regaining headbands like crazy!”

“Please pay more attention to others during class, Kaminari-kun!” Iida exclaimed, “Think back to the Quirk Apprehension Tests and the Battle Trials, Midoriya-kun always reappears where he was
originally standing unless he uses a crystal!”

“That’s right. We’ll just have to make sure we’re in position in time and collect as many headbands as we can before then as a back-up,” Yaoyorozu explained.

Shouto nodded in agreement and added, “I’m sure Bakugou has thought of the same thing, so we need to be prepared to fight over it too.”

Team Shouto continued dodging attempts at their headband while taking others’, utilizing Shouto’s immense ice power, Kaminari’s immobilizing electricity, Yaoyorozu’s defensive creations and insulating blanket, and Iida’s mobility. Soon, the end of the 15-minute battle was upon them.

“Twenty seconds left! Will team Midoriya make it back in time to earn their glory!”

“Don’t think I didn’t notice you purposely referenced his speech.”

“What?! It was a good speech, come on! Fifteen seconds left!”

As team Shouto got into position, team Bakugou charged towards where Midoriya would reappear, having regained their headband.

“Ten seconds!”

“You better be ready for me, Izuku!”

Bakugou threw himself off his horse, flying through the air, but Shouto was already in the process of forming a circular wall of ice around the spot. When Bakugou exploded his way through, Shouto countered with a spear of ice to push him back.

“Five…!”

“Dammit, half ‘n’ half!”
“Four…!”

Midoriya finally materialized into existence along with his team. Teddydrum Black flanked them in the back acting as defensive wall of metal while Tokoyami’s Dark Shadow held the front guard. The jet pack on Midoriya’s back and rocket boots on Uraraka’s feet began lifting them out of the ice enclosure, with the two robots helping to stabilize their lift off.

“Three…!”

“Recipro Burst!” Iida dragged them forward as fast as a bullet. They maneuvered to try and avoid Dark Shadow to give Shouto a clear reach for the headband before the Teddydrum had time to react.

“Two…!”

As Shouto shot his right hand out, Bakugou fell in from high above screaming like a raging banshee to also shoot his arm towards the headband. Shouto could tell he was too far to beat the time limit though.

“One…!”

Shouto’s movement was forcibly aborted by a sword. Its gleaming silver blade had already been raised to guard their competitor’s head.

He reflexive made a shield of ice to protect his forearm that audibly scraped against the sword as Midoriya used it to push away his grab. Shouto’s team finished passing by Midoriya’s with nothing to show for their efforts.

“TIME’S UP!”

Bakugou tumbled through the air and fell flat on his face.

“Shit!” Bakugou yelled from the ground.
Despite how loud the boy was, Midoriya paid him no attention. Instead, his green eyes pierced Shouto in place like how his silver sword had pierced through Shouto’s desperate attempt for first-place, and all he could do was gaze at the boy with his mind blanked of everything else. He could only vaguely hear the roaring of the spectators surrounding them.

Midoriya lowered his sword with a graceful movement, and as he sat firmly above his teammates with his head held high, his sword carefully held out to the side to avoid his horse and glittering in the sun, his eyes boring into Shouto as though they could see his soul– Shouto thought that this was what a prince must look like.

Occasionally people have told him that he looked like a prince with the features that he had, as though being born the son of the Number Two hero made him hero royalty, but Shouto never thought of himself like that.

Was this really what people saw when they looked at him though? Shouto doesn’t understand how that could be possible, he doesn’t think he’s ever had the kind of regal air that Midoriya exuded now.

“Some of you were born with quirks that people have told you are “good”, and that they will make you a good hero… Even if a person is born with a “good” quirk, in the end that doesn’t matter if they fail to follow through on their potential”

Shouto felt his left hand clench itself into a fist.

“He comes with two color-complementary teddy bear robots! You can’t even pay for this kind of advertising!”

“Isn’t it a little weird he has something like that though?”
“Who cares! That’s an instant set of merchandise right there, I can already see it; stuffed bears, collectables, cute keychains— they’re absolutely perfect for flooding the market with!”

“And did you see that sword at the end! Do you think whoever markets for him will be able to convince him to get a prince or knight themed costume or something? That’d make his image really marketable.”

“I guess, but it wouldn’t really fit well when put together with his robots… ”

Toshinori has been listening in on the first-year business course students for awhile now, and while for the beginning of their conversations they had evenly focused on other note worth competitors like Bakugou and Todoroki, at this point Midoriya was monopolizing their attention. Apparently, the promise of a stand-out franchise of products was too appealing for them to move on from.

“They said he’s got more stuff in his pocket dimension too, right? I wonder what other things he has that he’ll be able to design merchandise off of?”

Oh God– marketers are going to want to make merchandise for the boy’s penguins, aren’t they? At least Midoriya planned on avoiding using Toshi-pingu, they wouldn’t even wait for the boy to graduate before someone started selling penguin All Might stuffed animals…

“After checking the monitoring device placed on team Midoriya before the cavalry battle, we can now say that team Midoriya never dismantled their formation!” Midnight declared from the stage, snapping her whip in the air.

“Then it’s official! Team Midoriya gets first-place in the second-round! Team Todoroki comes in second, and team Bakugou is third! The last team to make the cut in fourth place is– huh? Team Shinsou? When did that happen?!” Present Mic’s voice echoed through the stadium as loud and energetic as always, but Toshinori couldn’t keep his mood from dropping whenever he heard it.

It reminded him of the punishment the man faced due to his mistakes, in a similar way to how gazing upon Aizawa’s missing eye did.

The thought of punishments by fate reminded Toshinori about his other dilemma concerning fate, as well as the advice that had been given to him by Gran Torino.
Their conversation wasn’t a particularly long one after Toshinori finished explaining the details behind Children of Fate, as well as their punishments, that he had glossed over when he told his mentor about how Midoriya had improved his health. Gran Torino agreed that the possibility of a horrible fate awaiting any successor he chose shouldn’t be dismissed, but he also thought that Toshinori was stuck on the problem because he wouldn’t look at it from other perspectives.

“You don’t need to worry about what Nana would have wanted you to do, Toshinori. One for All is your power now, you already know that. How about you approach things from a different angle? You’re basically going into this trying to decide what’s best for your hypothetical successor, but how can you decide such a thing without knowing the kind of person they are? Different things will be best for different people.

“Nighteye’s kid is the only one you’re considering currently, right? How about you guys send him over to me for this year’s internships, and I can make an unbiased opinion on whether he’d be prepared to handle that sort of fate? And really, it’d be his decision whether or not to take your quirk after hearing about the risks—Instead of asking whether passing down One for All is the right thing to do, ask whether your successor would be alright with it.”

He wondered what his former teacher thought of Midoriya right now, he said he’d be watching the first-years’ Sports Festival to see him in action, along with watching the third-years’ to see Togata once it’s their turn...

Just as Present Mic was announcing the lunch break, Toshinori’s cellphone rang. As though he had spoken of the devil, Gran Torino’s contact showed itself to be the caller.

After a moment of apprehension, he answered the call and put the phone up to his ear, “Hel– ”

“Toshinori! What the hell were those giant teddy bear robots?! You never mentioned the fate kid having anything like that!”

…

“Oh. I suppose I forgot to mention them, along with the penguins…”

“How do you forget something like that?! And he’s got penguins too?!”
Toshinori sighed and started moving into the hallways of the stadium. Post-Penguindrum Astonishment always took a while to work through.
“What is it that you want to talk about?” Izuku asked, while at the same time hoping that Todoroki was here to ask about his quirk. *Come on, give Izuku a good excuse to look into his Fruit and talk his problems over with him…*

Todoroki stared back at him intensely from across the secluded hallway. Izuku couldn’t help but gulp, nerves standing on end under the unfiltered attention.

“I’ve been wondering a couple of things about you for a while now… Firstly, All Might always seems to talk with you in private, pays extra attention to you, and he even talked to you over the weekend about something. Not only that, but you said that you’ve known him since last year…”

Izuku suddenly had no idea where this was going. “U-Uh, yes?” *Was Toshinori-san’s favoritism really so noticeable, he should talk with the man about that–*

“And I’m pretty sure I overheard you muttering what sounded like his personal name once–”

*Okay that one was on Izuku…*

“So are you All Might’s stepchild or something?”

...*What?*

His mind blanked in confusion for a single moment. Then he was finally able to bring himself to speak, “N-No! Wha– How did you even come up with that?! Actually, you told me how just now– but don’t you think you’re jumping to conclusions?! Are you a conspiracy theorist or something?!”

“I wouldn’t really consider that to be at the level of a conspiracy theory,” Todoroki’s expression and voice failed to waver even after asking such a ridiculous question, “but I guess the other question that I want to ask you might count as one…”

*Oh great…* Izuku’s brows furrowed as he sighed, “Well, lay it on me then. What else do you want to know?”
“During the USJ, I heard from the students that were at the entrance that you went back down to the central plaza where the villains were because you wanted to “fix” something,” Todoroki’s monotonic voice was even as he explained his thoughts, “After hearing Asui’s report, who was aware of what you wanted to fix, the Principal went down there himself while restricting access to most of the other teachers, all of the police, and ordered them to avoid bringing villains or students through that area. There had been no mentions of where Aizawa-sensei had been during this time. Therefore, it seems like what you were trying to “fix” was Aizawa-sensei.”

Tension racked through Izuku’s body at Todoroki’s examination of the events at the USJ and his eyes involuntarily widened. There’s no way–

“The most obvious answer would be that you were trying to fix his eye, but based on Asui’s attitude it doesn’t seem like you failed to fix what you promised her you would. So if you keep the assumption that Aizawa-sensei was what you wanted to fix, then something worse than even missing an eye must’ve happened to him. And it wasn’t something Recovery Girl could fix– if that was the case you would’ve been focused on getting him to the infirmary instead. Also, it wasn’t something the school could tell people about. Then you got really defensive about what happened at the USJ with those other students too, so whatever it was must’ve been really awful – ”

There’s no way, how could anyone come up with something like that even being possible on their own–

“This kind of possibility should be considered impossible really, but it seems like your quirk is really weird, Midoriya. It didn’t even develop during the biologically normal timeframe–”

There’s no! Way! No way–

“So could it be that Aizawa-sensei actually died and you “fixed” him by bringing him back to life?”

…

What the fuck?!

Izuku’s mouth was agape as he stared at Todoroki in shock. He failed to comprehend how someone could come up with the completely ridiculous theory that Izuku was secretly All Might’s stepchild, and then come up with…
Actually, they’re both ridiculous theories. Not only that, but the one that was most ridiculous was somehow the one that was correct...

He had been trying to get Todoroki to pry about his quirk, he just never imagined he would be able to figure that part out on his own...

Izuku forced his mouth closed to swallow anxiously before whispering, “…Did you talk to anyone else about this?”

Todoroki’s eyes widened in surprise. “No, but– wait, does that mean that I was actually right about that? Seriously?”

Even the conspiracy theorist prince is shocked that he was right, Izuku doesn’t believe this...

Izuku decided to just ignore how this came about and accept the opportunity to introduce Todoroki to the Fruit of Fate. He turned his head left and right, checking for people, and kept his volume at a whisper, “That’s right. The quirk I have, Conductor, isn’t actually a pocket dimension quirk, but– I don’t want to get into details here. Would you be okay with being transported to my dimension? We can talk about it there…”

Todoroki still seemed surprised about Izuku’s confirmation but narrowed his eyes a bit at the offer. “That’s another thing– you clearly wanted to tell me about your quirk for some reason.”

Izuku opened his mouth even though he didn’t have an excuse prepared but Todoroki cut him off, “The reason why I wanted to know about your quirk –despite the general concern I had about the possibility that Aizawa-sensei had died– is because I wanted to see if your quirk was also one people would consider “good”, like mine.”

“I mean…” Todoroki glanced away a moment before refocusing his sight on Izuku. “Not that a pocket dimension wouldn’t have also been a “good” quirk, but reviving people is on a completely different level…”

“Yeah, I know what you mean…” —That’s why Izuku had wanted his father’s quirk as a child in the first place— “But, why do you care about whether I had a “good” quirk or not?”
“In a way, it’s connected to the reason why I wanted to know if you were related to All Might. I guess even if you’re not his stepchild, your connection with him is probably still significant, right?”

At Izuku’s nod he continued with his eyes drifting to the side of the tunnel, “Since you’re connected to him, I want to beat you even more. And since you have such an extraordinary quirk, that feeling is even stronger…”

Todoroki’s mis-matched but cold eyes returned to his face to look Izuku straight in the eye. “Have you heard of quirk marriages?”

Thus, Todoroki wove his story about how his father, the Number Two hero Endeavor, was consumed by his desire for the Number One spot and surpassing All Might so much that he attempted to breed himself a creation with the perfect quirk for power. He explained about the man’s abusive training, and how his mother had mentally crumbled from her husband’s behavior and violence to end up lashing at Todoroki by pouring boiling water on his face, because his left side looked too much like Endeavor. He explained about his conviction to become a hero without using the side of himself that had his father’s quirk.

Izuku doesn’t need to look into Todoroki’s Fruit of Fate to figure out what was wrong with him anymore. Somehow, without Izuku even intending for it to happen, Todoroki decided to directly approach him with his problems.

“He purposely tried to engineer a child to have a “good” quirk, that was even more extraordinary than his own, so that he could use it to become Number One.” Todoroki finally glanced away, looking towards his feet. “So, by beating you –who has an even more extraordinary quirk– with only my right side, I’ll have denied his quirk, and I’ll have solidified to myself that I will no longer be a servant that he can use as he pleases.”

Izuku’s throat felt tense, and his eyes felt wet though they lacked tears. For all the beautiful prose he usually spouted, he was somewhat at a loss as to how to speak about circumstances this horrid. He felt so much dread weighing him down after hearing that story, he couldn’t imagine how much dread Todoroki felt from living it.

“Todoroki-kun…”

Todoroki glanced back up at him and begun to turn towards the tunnel’s exit. “You don’t need to comment on any of what I’ve said. You don’t even need to tell me how your quirk works, or how you’re connected to All Might– I just wanted to confirm the ideas I had about you, and confirm my convictions for this tournament.”
He was only able to take a single step away before Izuku physically cut him off with his body, stepping in his way.

_This might’ve been all that Todoroki wanted to get out of this conversation, but for Izuku there was much more that needed to be said. He wasn’t about to let this chance to help his classmate pass by him just because he can’t find the right words to say— He’ll just find another way to say them._

“You were right when you said that I wanted to tell you about my quirk, Todoroki-kun. There’s something important that I need to tell you about that involves it, and now I know that it also involves your conviction to become a hero without using your left side, so— ”

Izuku held out his right hand to Todoroki. “Will you come with me to my world so I can tell you more? I understand our time is limited, but it’s really important.”

Mis-matched eyes gazed at his hand in confusion, looked back up to Izuku’s eyes, then looked back to the hand.

“What do you mean by… _important_?”

“It’s something that is guaranteed to have a major effect on your life.”

Todoroki studied his hand for a moment longer, then hesitantly accepted the hand.

Izuku tried to project a reassuring smile to his classmate, but he still felt the ball of dread that had formed from Todoroki’s story, so he wasn’t sure how successful he was. Todoroki’s grip on his hand was light, almost barely there— Izuku tightened his own grip around it.

“Survival Strategy!”
Standing hidden by the opening of the tunnel where Izuku and Todoroki once stood, Katsuki let his back fall into the wall behind him to slide down to the floor. His wide eyes stared blankly at the wall across from him. The only sound that echoed through the hallway was his own breathing.

“He purposely tried to engineer a child to have a “good” quirk, that was even more extraordinary than his own, so that he could use it to become Number One”

“Shit…”

“So could it be that Aizawa-sensei actually died and you “fixed” him by bringing him back to life?”

“Shit…”

Katsuki’s hands covered his face. He didn’t know what to think, there was too much to think about. He had already known that Izuku’s quirk was extraordinary—But to think it had this kind of power…

But even more than that, even more than the knowledge that his homeroom teacher had actually lost more than his eye during that fucking villain attack, Katsuki thought of one thing above all else—

Izuku… if he looked at the “Number Two hero’s” fate, he would see it burning just like Katsuki’s… wouldn’t he?

“Even if a person is born with a “good” quirk, in the end that doesn’t matter if they fail to follow through on their potential”
One second, Shouto was in the hallway of UA’s stadium. The next, he was in the most gorgeous ballroom he had ever seen in his life. And unlike most kids, he had actually seen other ballrooms before. Endeavor may not like the social fraternization aspect of hero life, but as the Number Two hero, those types of events were just impossible to avoid.

The ballroom wasn’t even lit, either. There was just a dim stream of light coming through a set of large windows on one wall. The room was huge, easily capable of fitting a party for hundreds of people, with a large stage featuring closed velvety red curtains that began high up the wall by the ceiling and draped over the majority of the stage. Despite the intimidating size, the soft creamy beige of the walls helped the room to feel cozier and more intimate, but the artistic murals of red roses on green vines that sprawled all across them kept them from looking plain. The intricated pattern contrasted heavily with the solid coloring of the deep gold flooring that managed to sparkle even in the dimness of the room –Shouto couldn’t help but wonder if it might be made of real gold– The ceiling featured an equally sparkling large, golden chandelier that wasn’t on and following the walls around the room were rows of countless unlit white candles.

His mouth was agape as he examined the room in awe. However, as he turned to his mysterious classmate, the awe quickly transformed into confusion.

“What… are you wearing?”

Midoriya sighed at him as he adjusted the crown he now wore atop his head. “This is just an outfit that signifies that I am the Prince of the Crystal– the owner of this world, which is called the Crystal World. I switch into it automatically when I transport myself here.”

“Prince of the Crystal? That…” –suited him quite well, actually…

Midoriya sighed again saying, “You don’t have to worry about that right now, Todoroki-kun. I can explain all that stuff later if you want. Let me just show you what my quirk is for now…”

With that introduction, Midoriya reached his hand into his chest to bring out a gleaming golden apple that perfectly matched the golden floor of the ballroom. He left it to float in the air.

“This is my Fruit of Fate– ”

And off his classmate went, weaving together a legend of fate, the people who could change it, and how his father’s quirk, Conductor, could change it. And of how disturbing the sanctity of one’s mind
and soul was reflected in their being and fate.

When he described that last part, Shouto suddenly knew what this was all about.

“Then— there’s something wrong with mine, right? That’s what you needed to tell me about…” Shouto bored his eyes into his own chest, as though if he tried hard enough he could see it for himself. But of course all he could see was the rise and fall of his chest as he breathed.

“Yes… I will show it to you,” Midoriya said this casually, despite the fact he was talking about showing Shouto the culmination of his being and fate, something that could be equated with his own heart and soul.

Midoriya moved close, and his left black-gloved hand cradled Shouto’s face while his right one slid into Shouto’s chest just as easily as it had Midoriya’s. It grabbed something inside of him and when it was pulled out, Shouto breathed in sharply.

The entire apple was covered in a thick layer of clear, cold ice.

“Your Fruit of Fate is frozen, that means that you’re stuck on something— like a person frozen in time, like a person who can’t move forward…” Midoriya cupped Shouto’s Fruit with both hands, holding it close to his chest like it was a precious gift from the gods. His eyes were closed as the fingers of his right hand ghosted around the surface of the ice.

Green eyes flashed open to bore into Shouto. “I could already figure out why you were frozen based on what you told me, but I was able to confirm it just now by looking into your Fruit. And— I think I know how I can start helping you, Shouto-kun.”

Shouto-kun?

And “looking into” his Fruit— isn’t something like that the equivalent of looking into a person’s soul?

How much does Midoriya know about him now? What did he see? Does Shouto even need his help?
“Can you follow me for a second?” Midoriya asked him. He waited until Shouto consented with a nod before letting Shouto’s Fruit float in the air like Midoriya’s was still doing, and walking towards one of the candles by the window. Shouto walked behind him to see that their Fruit was following them smoothly from their places in the air. Their footsteps echoed loudly through the spacious room.

Once they were close to the candle, it was much bigger than it had seemed from far away, probably around the length of his forearm. Midoriya gently took the candle out of its holder to place it between them.

“I’m sorry, Shouto-kun, but do you think you can light this for me? Once you do all the other candles will be lit too.”

Shouto couldn’t help but stare at the boy and his audacity. “You want me… to use my left side? Right after I finished telling you why I wouldn’t use my left side?” his tone was dumbfounded. He couldn’t even bring himself to feel mad– he was just confused.

Midoriya pointed at him as he explained, “You said you wouldn’t use it to become a hero. I’ve already seen you use it outside of fighting purposes– mainly when you melt your ice.” He held up the candle closer to Shouto. “This isn’t doing anything that Endeavor would want you to be doing with your quirk. It’ll be just like using it as a lighter.”

Well, he’s got a point. Endeavor would probably think Shouto was wasting his quirk by just using it like a simple store-bought lighter…

However, Shouto was still reluctant to use it. “Can’t you light it yourself, though? You must have something to light it with since they’re here. Why do you want me to do it?”

“Uh…” Midoriya sheepishly smiled and rubbed the back of his head. “Actually, there’s nothing like that here. It’s weird but– all the abilities and items I have in this world are closely tied to symbolic purposes as well. Like– I have a spell that lets me rain swords down on my opponents like how justice rains down to punish evil, and I have a spell that lets me cover them in crystal like sealing an evil to stop it from causing harm, and there’s another one that lets me heal wounds using plants like life giving rise to more life. Hell, even my quirk on its own is heavily based on the symbolism of the original sin of humanity. Does that make sense?”

No. Not at all, was what Shouto thought. But instead he said, “…What does that have to do with this?”
Midoriya stopped smiling, gaining a serious look on his face. “In the Crystal World... fire is the symbol of purification, and not purification as in simply removing ailments or anything, but the type of purification that works by reducing everything to ash to cleanse it’s presence from the world so that the world may be reborn from the ashes.”

Even though Shouto couldn’t follow his logic about the symbolism concerning his abilities, he was still able to understand the weight of his words. “That... does not sound like something that can be used lightly...”

“That’s right.” Midoriya’s green eyes stared into Shouto’s mis-matched ones. “Momoka-san, the creator of the Crystal World, didn’t know that when she was first starting out. She made this ballroom to feature candles, but later found that she couldn’t light them. I don’t think they’ve been used at all, so– ” He gestured to the candle. “...can you please try, Shouto-kun?”

“...I guess it wouldn’t hurt,” he replied. With great apprehension, Shouto carefully produced a single flicker of flame on the tip of his index finger and brought it to the perfectly preserved candle wick. After a few seconds, it caught the flame, and suddenly the entire room lit up as the fire was copied onto the other candles simultaneously.

Shouto turned around to look at the rest of the room— it was even more beautiful with the light that wasn’t too dim, but still not very bright. The floors and chandelier sparkled even more than they had just a moment ago. Their Fruit of Fate also sparkled in the light, though with Shouto’s it was more of a glimmer due to the ice.

*That... was easier to do than Shouto thought it would be.*

Midoriya placed the candle back on its holder and clapped his hands together in delight. The clap also seemed to cease the light from the windows, as though it had suddenly gone from a blue midday to a black midnight. The candles grew even brighter in at the contrast. “Thanks so much Shouto-kun! I’ve never been able to see this room with the candles lit, it looks so beautiful!”

As Midoriya gazed at the room, Shouto looked back to him to see that the warm light of the candle was causing Midoriya’s crown and the gold buttons and trim on his shirt to sparkle just like the room was. He had to force himself to avert his eyes from the beauty of it.

*Prince of the Crystal indeed...*
Midoriya clapped his hands twice, and right on que the red curtains on the stage opened up to reveal a grand orchestra made of mannequin performers along with a mannequin conductor. As soon as the curtains had tied themselves to the sides of the stage, they began to play a slow waltz.

The high notes of the violins mixed together with the lower notes of the cellos and basses, the violas bridged them together with their midrange, and the accompanying wind instruments swirled their notes around the melody. The sounds resounded proudly through the space around them, their beauty matching the beautiful sight of the ballroom.

“Shouto-kun,” Midoriya’s kind voice caught his attention. He glanced at the Prince to see him smiling gently with his right hand held out towards Shouto, like he had when he invited him to this place, “Will you dance with me?”

He blinked dumbly at the outstretched hand. “…What?”

Midoriya’s smile never wavered. “The thing I want to convey to you is something I think would be best done through action. And you’re the kind of person who pays more attention to action than words, aren’t you?”

“That’s true, but… what can you show me with dancing? I don’t even know how to dance!” Shouto lost his even tone by the end as he became more flustered. He could feel his face start to heat up a bit.

“That’s okay. I know how so all you need to do is follow my lead.” The Prince’s hand inched even further towards Shouto. “And I will be able to show you something, you’ll see.”

Shouto stared at the black-gloved hand for a long moment. Then ultimately decided that he had already brought himself deep into the rabbit hole that was the Crystal World and the Prince of the Crystal– he might as well commit to it.

Slowly, he placed his hand in Midoriya’s, who clutched it carefully as though Shouto was a small animal that might startle away. The comparison was too accurate for Shouto to feel offended by, though.

Midoriya continued to hold his hand at arm’s length as guided Shouto to the center of the room, right under the still unlit chandelier. Their Fruits still followed behind them.
Once in the center, he gently brought Shouto in closer. Midoriya moved Shouto’s left hand to rest it on his cloaked shoulder, then held up Shouto’s right hand with his left hand. Finally, Midoriya placed his right hand at Shouto’s waist. He looked down at Midoriya from his taller height to see the prince-like boy smile up at him, and felt his face heat up even more.

“We’re just going to step around in small circles, alright? Just follow my movements.” Midoriya’s voice was soft, but he still managed to be loud enough that Shouto could clearly hear him over the symphony playing.

As the Prince coxed him along, Shouto stumbled through the steps while allowing the Prince to push and pull his body to que Shouto’s movements. But despite the fumbling, Midoriya didn’t seem put off by Shouto even after he tread on his feet a couple of times. His dance partner moved closer to him to lean his mouth towards Shouto’s ear.

“Relax, Shouto-kun. Don’t think about being perfect. Just focus on what you’re feeling, on the feeling of us moving together like this,” was his whispered message. Shouto shivered slightly as Midoriya’s breath brushed against his ear.

He took the advice and forced his body to dissipate its tension. As he became less stiff, he became more malleable to Midoriya’s movements, and soon Shouto found it easier to relax his mind when he noticed that giving Midoriya more control over their dance helped to even out their steps. Their dance was now in synch with the slow 1-2-3 beats of the waltz.

Now that Shouto wasn’t totally consumed with not messing up, he finally had enough awareness to see that their Fruit of Fate seemed to dance around with them. They circled around slower than even the beat of the song– like moons circling a single planetary body. Their movement caused them to sparkle like stars in the light of the candles.

“Good job Shouto-kun!” Midoriya’s words brought his focus back to the shorter boy who was leading him. His smile had gotten larger and his eyes were shining and crinkled from joy. The feeling of Midoriya’s touch on his waist and in his hand intensified, along with the feeling of Shouto’s hand on his partner’s shoulder. “You’re picking this up so fast, I’m impressed!!”

As Shouto’s eyes involuntarily glanced over the Prince’s form, he immediately felt out of place. In this grand ballroom with this grand music, Midoriya’s princely outfit—with its long gloves and long boots, its regal shirt and puffed out coat tails, its red cloak that flowed around them as they spun, and its shining crown—fitted in perfectly. The smooth motions he performed to lead Shouto through their dance only served to further emphasize that he was meant to be here. That he was meant to be the prince of this ballroom.
When Shouto first saw Midoriya’s outfit, he had thought it was strange— but now he realized that it fitted perfectly in this place, that it fitted Midoriya perfectly. Shouto in his plain and average PE uniform was the one who stuck out like a sore thumb.

He forced himself to speak through his tightening throat. “Why are we doing this?”

Instead of answering, the Prince brought their bodies closer together until their chest were practical flush against one another as they danced in circles. Heat simmered in Shouto’s chest and face.

Midoriya looked up at him with his shining green eyes to ask, “What do you feel right now, physically? That will help you to figure it out.”

Shouto had to avert his thoughts from lingering on how Midoriya looked when he gazed up at Shouto to focus on his other senses. “I feel…”

–Midoriya’s hands, Midoriya’s chest, the fire all around them even though it should be too far away to feel–

“I feel warm,” he finally admitted, “from the… two of us together like this, and from the candles everywhere.”

The Prince nodded his head in encouragement. “And what do you see right now?”

–Midoriya’s face, Midoriya’s eyes, Midoriya’s shining crown, the two shining apples swirling in the air, the shining floors and chandelier, the glow set upon everything in the room–

“I see you, and the ballroom, and the light that shines on it all,” he gave this statement in a neutral tone, but he felt too consumed by the sight to truly feel neutral about it.

“That’s right.” Midoriya rested his cheek on Shouto’s collarbone like he was trying to make him even warmer. If he was, then he was succeeding. “And all that warmth and all that light– Does it make you feel good, Shouto-kun?”

“…Yes. It does.” They were simple things, but Shouto was enjoying their presence nonetheless.
“I’m glad it does. Because this warmth and this light— they’re being made by your fire, Shouto. The fire that you lit on these candles is bringing warmth to us, and beautiful light to this room and everything in it. Your fire makes me feel good, too,” Midoriya’s voice was soft, but still struck into Shouto’s core.

He felt like he accidently lit his insides on fire upon hearing that statement, losing the capacity to form words with both his voice and his mind.

“Shouto… Endeavor’s fire wouldn’t be able to make you feel good like this, right?”

The fire inside promptly died. “Of course not.” –That man’s fire only brings pain.

“Do you know why your fire can feel good, but Endeavor’s fire can’t?” Midoriya lifted his head to look back into Shouto’s eyes.

“It’s because Endeavor doesn’t want to make fire that feels good, so he can’t. But you can, Shouto, because this fire is yours and not your father’s. Your “good” quirk, your power, and your fire—they’re all yours. And you can do whatever you wish with them.”

Shouto stopped breathing. All he could do was gaze into the green eyes before him.

“This idea may be hard for you to internalize. But just from feeling it for yourself, just from unconsciously realizing that your fire can feel good— Look!”

They stopped their spinning as Midoriya slid his hand to support Shouto’s back and suddenly dropped him into a dip. Shouto’s world turned on its axis and his breathing started again with his involuntary, quiet gasp.

Fire once again burned in Shouto’s insides.

His gaze was now looking up to the Prince from where he leaned over his lowered form, it was only now that he realized Midoriya was blushing as well. He nodded his head towards something behind Shouto saying, “Your Fruit of Fate has already started unfreezing.”
Shouto had to blink himself out of his stupor to tilt his head back and see what Midoriya was talking about. Above his head, the Fruit of Fate behind him had stopped its spinning now that they were stationary.

The ice around Shouto’s Fruit was starting to melt, drops of water came off it slowly, one by one, to disappear as they fell through the air.

“It’s going to take a while.” Midoriya gently lifted Shouto back up with a firm movement. They had stopped dancing and the music in the air stopped along with them. There was only silence and the sound of Midoriya’s voice. “But eventually, I’m sure it will be completely unfrozen.”

_**Shouto didn’t know what to think of all this, he didn’t even know what he felt about all this.**_

A hand on Shouto’s shoulder brought his attention back to Midoriya. “When you face me, Shouto-kun—and I know we _will_ battle, to me it feels like it’s fated—consider using that fire of yours.”

As Shouto’s eyes widened, Midoriya explained, “This doesn’t have to break your conviction– you don’t have to use your fire before that point, or even in any battle you have following it, both in this tournament and real battle as a full-fledged hero. I just want you to try it once, just for our fight. Instead of how your father’s fire feels and the memories he cursed you with, I want you to think of how you felt when we were dancing, of how good this warmth and this light felt. Our fight can just be an extension of our dance.”

Midoriya looked up at him so earnestly with his still flushed face and his grip on Shouto’s shoulder was so warm, he couldn’t even give an automatic denial. Instead, he croaked out, “…Why?”

“…There’s actually a second part of that saying I used in my speech.” Midoriya continued to look into Shouto’s eyes, and Shouto never looked away from his. “The full version is, _May those who accept their fate be granted happiness. May those who defy their fate be granted glory._”

Midoriya brought his left hand up to Shouto’s face once again, tipping his face towards Midoriya’s, and plucked the dripping Fruit out of the air with his right hand to slide back into his chest. Shouto shivered at the sensation.

“Recently, I realized that before I got my father’s quirk, I hadn’t accepted my fate of being quirkless. That led to me being very unhappy with myself. You haven’t accepted your fate of being born as the
child of the horrid man who hurt you and your mother, and that you inherited part of your quirk from
him. But you don’t have to accept that man’s ambitions to use you in order to accept your quirk—he
has no say in what you do with your life and quirk. And you don’t have to accept that man as your
father—his blood may run through your veins, but a true familial connection is more than just blood.
He lacks everything else needed to be a real father to you.”

Midoriya’s hand retreated from his chest, but the warm hand on his face kept itself in place. “Perhaps
you will be able to defy that fate by becoming a hero with only your ice to support you. I’m sure that
would be quite a glorious achievement—being a top hero while only using half of your power. But…
would that really make you happy, Shouto?”

“He’s never thought about his goals in terms of whether they would make him happy. He only cared
about whether they made his father unhappy…”

Shouto swallowed a bit in apprehension. “I… I don’t know.”

“It’s okay that you don’t know now. Just think on that and everything else I’ve said—okay?”

As if he would even be capable of ignoring anything Midoriya’s told him today.

He nodded absentmindedly as his thoughts reviewed their conversation.

Shouto still needed more time to process what was said—and what he felt—about his quirk, but there
was one question that his mind had enough clarity to ask.

“Why do you call your quirk your father’s quirk as well?”

Midoriya blinked at his change of topic. “Oh, in my case it actually is my father’s quirk. I didn’t
inherent it genetically, he—” Midoriya stumbled over his words, looking away from Shouto for the
first time in what felt like forever. His eyes were filled with grief.

“I died a year ago, Shouto. All Might wasn’t there fast enough to save me from that villain I
mentioned because I was meant to die as my Dad’s punishment for being born with a quirk that
could change fate.”
Shouto felt his breath leave him and his eyes widen. His stomach dropped in dread.

*He couldn’t imagine the horror of that kind of experience, that Midoriya could have so easily been gone from this world without Shouto even knowing it—*

Midoriya’s words were a broken whisper, “…My dad gave me all of his Fruit of Fate so I could live, at the cost of his own existence. That transferred his quirk to me.” He was still staring at the ground instead of at Shouto.

“I… I’m sorry, for both what you went through and for your loss,” Shouto tried to keep his voice as neutral as always, but it still came out somewhat hoarse. After a moment of consideration, he brought his right hand up to cover the hand that was cradling the side of his face. That quickly got Midoriya’s attention and caused him to return his eyes back to Shouto.

“Even with those circumstances though… you’re still the one that owns Conductor now, not your dad. Doesn’t that make it *yours* now, too?”

Midoriya’s eyes widened and his mouth dropped open slightly. He took an elongated moment to think on Shouto’s words, then suddenly dropped his hand off Shouto to pivot around and look behind himself.

Shouto followed his gaze to see that even though Midoriya’s Fruit hadn’t had any ice around it, water slowly dripped off the golden apple from the center of its bottom.

He stared at it without comprehension. “What…”

Midoriya gave a sharp laugh and turned to show off a blooming smile to Shouto. It renewed the blush that he was sure was still on his face. “The core of my Fruit is frozen and poisoned… I wanted to help you, but it looks like you’ve helped me quite a bit too, Shouto-kun.”

Midoriya leaned his face upwards to place a small kiss on Shouto’s left cheek—right at the border of where his scar met his unmarred skin. “Thank you for that.”

Shouto’s cheek practically *burned* from the warmth left by Midoriya’s kiss. His body was completely frozen in place and his mind stopped working as his head, his entire body, overheated.
He could’ve literally set himself on fire right now, and he wouldn’t have noticed it at all.

The look on his face must’ve been really stupid, because Midoriya immediately burst into embarrassed stutters at the sight of it. “I-I…! I’m so sorry! W-Was that too much? That was too much wasn’t it? Oh God, why did I do that?! I shouldn’t have done that—”

“No. Don’t say that,” was Shouto’s automatic denial of Midoriya’s last sentence, “I liked it, so it’s fine…”

God why did he say that? He can’t just admit that kind of thing to Midoriya, he only just talked to the boy for the first time this morning! How the hell did he end up feeling like this when he’s emotionally repressed himself for years now, Shouto’s absolutely losing it–

Shouto swerved to avoid seeing Midoriya’s face, looking out the still darkened windows. “We– let’s just talk about this later.”

“R-Right! Good idea!” Midoriya swiftly accepted the chance to ignore the situation.

Luckily, the two were interrupted by the echoing sound of small feet waddling across the hard floor. They both turned their heads towards the large entrance of the ballroom to see a freckled penguin with a crown on its head holding a flipper behind its back. It looked suspiciously like Midoriya.

After blinking at it a bit, Shouto muttered, “I’m guessing that this is one of the rumored penguins Asui mentioned…”

“I-Izu-ingu! Great timing, what did you come here for?”

Izu-ingu finished waddling up to Midoriya to bashfully kick his orange feet around before holding up a single rose to his human. It featured a breath-taking mixture of red and white on its petals.

“I didn’t even know we had roses this color!” Midoriya carefully took the rose, being mindful of its uncut thorns, and admired its beauty. Then he made a sound of realization. “Did you look for one like this to give it as a present to Shouto-kun?”
The penguin... got him a present?

Izu-pingu shyly nodded. And Midoriya gave a small, fond smile to the penguin.

“Thank you so much, Izu-pingu, I’m sure it must’ve been hard work to find the right one. That was very nice of you, I’m sure he’ll love it!”

Well... now that rose could be covered in a deadly poison and Shouto would still have to love it. How can anyone deny Midoriya when he tells a cute penguin something like that–

Midoriya presented the rose to Shouto with a smile, and Shouto obligingly accepted it. His fingers held it delicately around its thorned stem, and its sweet fragrance wafted into his breath. The white and red on the petals matched the shades of his hair perfectly.

Seeing the care that went into choosing this rose for him made a sprinkle of happiness spring up in his chest.

He gave a shallow bow the penguin. “Thank you for the present, Izu-pingu."

Izu-pingu pressed his flippers to his feathered cheeks in happy embarrassment and Midoriya’s eyes and smile grew even brighter. Shouto flushed at the fact that his plain thank you was able to bring the two of them such joy.

When Izuku brought Shouto back to the stadium hallway, he was all smiles. And though Shouto wasn’t also smiling, Izuku got the impression that the boy was happy. Now that he had looked into his Fruit of Fate, it was easier to interpret Shouto’s stoic expressions.
Izuku noticed that he kept glancing between his rose and Izuku, and felt his insides flutter in response to the attention.

_A lot of things can change once a person really gets to know someone else– though Izuku took a major short cut for that…_

They had used up a good chunk of the lunch hour and needed to eat before the third-round began, so both of them had been hoping to quickly rush to the lunchroom together.

But fate was not so kind –The clock had to strike twelve at some point.

“Shouto! What are you doing loitering around here, you should be preparing!” a deep and angry voice yelled at them from further down the main hallway they were traveling through.

Shouto jolted into a tense and straighter posture, dropping the rose in his shock. He didn’t seem to notice it as he clenched his jaw and swerved his head to direct a glare to the large man behind them. Just from that, Izuku would’ve been able to tell exactly who it was even without having recognized him. The image of the Number Two hero was a very well-known one.

Shouto’s eyes held fury in them, but Izuku could also see that they held fear.

Izuku’s own fury erupted in response. _He shouldn’t need to deal with this man, especially while he’s still thinking through things on his own–_

His body slid itself between Shouto and Endeavor. He caught Shouto’s attention and nodded his head towards the exit of the tunnel they had been walking towards. For a second, Shouto’s eyes slightly widened in surprise before he narrowed them in refusal.

Izuku tried to placate him by saying, “It’s okay, I wanted to tell him something.”

Shouto gave him a questioning look at that but decided to leave it for later, respecting Izuku’s wishes.

While the boy had initially denied the request to leave, the way he almost ran to the exit suggested
that he was glad to take advantage of the opportunity. Izuku also hadn’t missed the fact that Shouto hadn’t been able to say a single word while in his father’s presence despite that not usually being a problem for him– He was absolutely not in the right emotional state to handle his abuser.

“Shou– !” Endeavor moved to chase after Shouto, but Izuku moved into his path.

The Number Two hero scowled down at him with his clenched teeth bared. “You… You’re the student representative. You may be doing well so far in these games, and you may have placed first in the entrance exam, but based on your speech you obviously don’t have the right outlook on heroics. All that nonsense about the nature of quirks and imaginary fate– It’s clear that your previous years of being quirkless messed up your head.” He growled out the word quirkless in the same manner that all people who looked down upon the condition had, though with more anger than most.

Endeavor gave him a mean smirk and haughtily stated, “My son will put you in your place, I’m sure of it. But at the very least you should be enough of a challenge to be a good stepping stone.”

Izuku leaned down to pick up the white and red rose that Shouto had dropped. He gently held it in his hands.

Conductor was activated to reveal a sight that didn’t surprise Izuku in the least; Endeavor’s Fruit of Fate was up in red-orange flames. Katsuki’s flames had nothing on this– Endeavor’s Fruit was a raging inferno that flickered violently all over, and the only reason Izuku could even see there was an apple in that ball of fire was because the black color of the lower half distinguished itself from the red. It was corrupted with rot.

Izuku’s neutral tone was completely at odds with the anger and disgust that flowed through him, “Yeah, listen– I don’t really care in the slightest about anything you just said. Truthfully, I was hardly paying attention to you and I’ve already forgotten it all.”

Endeavor’s smirk morphed into enraged offense– Good.

“You may not believe in fate, Number Two hero, but I do– because I can see it for myself.” Izuku willed his eyes to pierce through the man like swords as he judged his soul, Endeavor stiffened a bit in response. “And all I wanted to tell you is this…”

Izuku held up one finger, as though he was explaining things to a child. “One; Shouto isn’t you. So even if he beats All Might and becomes Number One, that still means that you never beat him, and
you never became Number One. Dumbass.”

He ignored the incredulous stare that was accompanied by Endeavor audibly choking on his rage to hold up a second finger and continue with, “And Two; I can see just by looking at you that your fate is going to go downhill fast. I promise you that one day, you’re going to look around yourself to find that everything important–everything you value and hold dear in your life– has been burned and reduced to irrecoverable ashes. And the only two things I hope for are that you don’t drag your family down with you, and that I get to see the look on your face when it happens.”

With that said, he turned his back towards Endeavor and calmly walked away. He didn’t hear any footsteps following behind him.

Izuku was sure that the last part of what he said was literally the cruelest thing he’s ever stated in his life. It was definitely something that he would normally feel guilty over, but in this case– it was totally worth it just to get the chance to see the Number Two hero’s spine shiver at the words as he retreated a step backwards.

Endeavor may not believe in fate, but he could still hear that Izuku fully believed that that would be his fate, and that Izuku fully believed that he would enjoy the moment when it came about.

At that time, Izuku hadn’t realize how out of place that thought was.

How usually, even when it came to horrible, despicable people, he still wouldn’t feel joy at the thought of their suffering– simply because Izuku was not the type of person who took joy in anyone suffering at all. To him, villains deserved to be punished, but using excessive cruelty just turned heroes into villains themselves.

He only realized this when he had gone back to the Crystal World during the final five minutes of the lunch hour to safely store away Shouto’s rose. From within her mirror, Momoka had narrowed her eyes in a serious look and told him to check his punishment status.

It had changed from Pending to In Progress.
Izuku forced his changed punishment status out of his mind. What else was he supposed to do? The final round of the Sports Festival was starting, there was no time to be able to think about it—No time to think about how his impending doom was catching up with him, or about how based on context clues it seemed like his doom involved the corruption of his morals of all things.

There was no time for Izuku to have an existential crisis—so he pretended like the suffocating dread inside him didn’t exist to focus on his top two priorities for the moment—

Helping Shouto, and winning. In that order.

All the remaining contestants gathered at the stadium’s field. Izuku caught the eyes of his friends who had made it—Iida and Ochako, unfortunately Tsuyu had been eliminated—to give them supporting smiles, they both smiled back at him to return the gesture. He also caught the eyes of Shouto, who simply nodded in thanks—maybe for both Izuku’s support or Izuku’s intervention with Endeavor—and bashfully looked away.

Izuku hoped that after his time alone, he had a clearer idea of whether he wanted to accept Izuku’s suggestion or not.

Midnight had explained the basics of the third-round’s one on one tournament rules and was preparing to draw lots to determine the brackets when Ojiro raised his hand to drop out. Amidst the confusion of the other participants, Izuku’s tailed classmate explained that he couldn’t remember anything from the second-round and felt he hadn’t truly earned his place there like the others did.

“It may be a stupid decision,” Ojiro admitted with a heavy tone, “But it’s like Midoriya said—everyone here has to fight to earn their glory. I don’t deserve to continue on when I failed to do so. It’s a matter of pride.”

“I want to drop out too!” a short boy with big eyes from class 1-B called out, “I can’t remember anything either, and it defeats the purpose of the festival to let someone who didn’t earn their spot advance!”

Midnight looked down at the two from the stage. “What youthful naivety…” she began with a
foreboding tone, then she cracked her whip in the air and professed with excitement, “I like it! Shoda and Ojiro have officially withdrawn!”

Aoyama, who was also part of team Shinsou, just clapped a hand on the down Ojiro’s shoulder and winked. “I’ll win for you~☆!”

Izuku snorted at that. Aoyama certainly wasn’t showcasing the type of chivalry one would expect from someone trying to emulate a knight, but despite being “princely” himself– Izuku agreed with his decision to stay in the running.

*Fate doesn’t often grant people favors, so they might as well take advantage of what they can.*

Apparently that type of practical thinking wasn’t the norm for heroics students, because team Kendo immediately passed on their opportunity to have a place in the tournament onto team Tetsutetsu with the claim that the other team had done more to earn a second chance. Tetsutetsu cried manly tears and Shiozaki bowed in gracious thanks as they accepted their spots in the tournament.

Once the match ups were drawn, Izuku saw that Tetsutetsu and Kirishima had been paired up for their first match and had the vague thought that all of that had simply been part of fate’s plan in the end. However, he was quickly distracted by his own bracket set up.

*Kacchan’s at the opposite end, so he’ll only get to fight him if he makes it to the finals —how fitting. His match up with Shouto-kun is much earlier, their each other’s second match. And for Izuku’s first match…*

Izuku subtly glanced around to find the Potential Child of Fate who had challenged his class two weeks ago, who had obviously done something to his teammates that caused their memory loss, only to jolt as he caught Shinsou standing right behind him.

The tall boy looked down at him, his eyebags just as prominent as they were last time. “You’re Midoriya Izuku, right? Can you explain to me why your quirk apparently has “safety concerns” that involve mine?”

*Does that count as an invitation to tell the gen ed student about how he’s on the precipice of damnation? Izuku thinks it does…*
But as Izuku opened his mouth to try and convince Shinsou to let him spirit the boy away to the Crystal World, a thick tail slapped itself over his jaw.

“Don’t answer him Midoriya!” Ojiro ordered firmly, he sent a suspicious glare at Shinsou.

Shinsou just scoffed with an air of annoyance and strolled away. As Midnight announced the beginning of the other activities that the non-competing students would take part in before the tournament, Ojiro said, “Let’s talk in a prep room, Midoriya. I’ll tell you about what I know of that guy.”

After his classmate explained how Shinsou most likely had a mind control quirk that could be activated upon a person verbally responding to him, Izuku knew he had to more work to do with the Potential Child of Fate than he had anticipated.

_That’s the kind of quirk people would define as a “villain quirk” for sure. He’d bet good money that Shinsou’s core has some sort of condition. He had been more concerned with telling the boy about his Potential Child of Fate status than his Fruit of Fate condition—while burning is a dangerous condition his was still at a fairly manageable level, it was barely even there really—but if the inside of the Fruit is compromised that’s an entirely different story._

_But he can’t really do anything about this now. Their match is first to go on, and a stranger coming in to try and give advice about a personal issue would be seen as overly nosy at best. Izuku’s just going to have to build a relationship with him first._

“I’ve got to say, Midoriya, while his quirk isn’t completely almighty, I’m glad that you were the one to go up against him rather than any of our other classmates.”

Izuku looked at Ojiro in surprise at that. “Huh? Why is that?”

“Well,” Ojiro rubbed the back of head with his tail as he answered with a sheepish tone, “I’m sure that plenty of the others wouldn’t have trouble with him exactly—especially if they’re good at keeping their mouths shut—but out of everyone you’re… like a gold standard I guess you could say? It’s like you’re from a completely different world than me.”

Ojiro gave a small smile.
“I mean, we haven’t really talked before this and you’ve already made a notable impact on my life. I certainly would’ve never imagined seeing something like teddy bear robots, and I haven’t even seen those penguins and the swordsman mannequin I heard about. With the things you can do, and the quirk you’ve got, you just give off the feeling that anything is possible; that there exists many more things in this world that I couldn’t even imagine. I have a rather normal quirk, so in comparison I’m not as good of a representation of what a hero should be, but you? You stick out like crazy and do crazy things, and that’s how people usually imagine heroes!”

He stuck his fist out towards Izuku. “So… this might be out of line, but I want you to win this for me, and show that guy and everyone else watching what a hero-in-training looks like!”

Izuku grinned in response and returned the offered fist bump, but also added, “I understand what you’re getting at Ojiro-kun, but I think you’re not giving yourself enough credit. After all, isn’t every hero just a normal person once they’re off duty and out of their flashy costumes? I may seem out of this world, but I’m just a normal person in the end too.”

Ojiro blinked at that, then gave a laugh. “You’ve got a point there!”

The two of them parted in good spirits, but as Izuku’s first match approached and he was wished good luck by a proud Toshinori, he couldn’t help but think that this fight with Shinsou must also have been a part of fate’s plan.

*Shinsou Hitoshi is a child who understands what it means to be forgotten and unwanted, who understands that there were many forgotten and unwanted children in this world.*

*That there were many children who had never been told the words “I love you”. Or, if they had, couldn’t even remember it due to how long ago they had been gifted those words.*

In his case, he had been abandoned when his single mother had learned what his quirk was. He knew it was just an excuse — she hadn’t even wanted him in the first place and his quirk was just the final nail in the coffin — but it still hurt like nothing else. He carried that harsh, eternal pain in his heart to this day.
Nothing hurt more than being thrown away like worthless garbage

Nothing hurt more than being unchosen, than being unloved

He had been told that there used to be a worse fate for children like them. That during the beginning of the age of quirks, for a few years there had been a place where children abandoned by society – many of them the newly quirked children born to parents that wished for a “normal” child– would get thrown away to be made “invisible”, and be remade into a type of child that would be wanted by society.

There were only whispers and rumors of this place left– hearsay that originated from those who had escaped that fate. But the threat of such a place even existing was enough to keep the tale alive amongst those that would’ve been at risk.

But the knowledge that things could’ve been worse, that some people do have it worse, didn’t help Hitoshi in the least.

It doesn’t help him now in his lonely home life with a foster family that only takes care of him as an obligation and was uneasy about his quirk. It hadn’t help him throughout his school life where he had to navigate around his untrusting peers and accept the non-malicious comments and jokes about how “he would be a great villain with that quirk”.

And it hadn’t helped him that fateful day when his mother had dropped him off somewhere only to never come back. It hadn’t helped him when he had waited his mother for hours at some agency, only to be told by a stranger that they were going to help him find a new place to live.

He can’t ever remember being told that someone loved him, but he can easily remember the times when, as a young child, he had wished to whatever God or gods that exist in this universe that he would one day wake up and find that he had a different quirk, a “good” quirk that would let him one day find a person that loved him.

Of course, the day where that actually happened never came.

That kind of miracle simply doesn’t exist. Or at least, that’s what he had thought.
“Midoriya Izuku’s story made it sound like that kind of miracle *can* occur. Hitoshi knows he’s not bullshitting about being a late bloomer— a person right out born with a “good” quirk would never dedicate time in their important *nation-wide* speech to talk about the people who were forgotten and unwanted, to talk about how they had been told that they had no future and would never amount to anything.

For Hitoshi it was slightly different—with his quirk Brainwashing, instead he was told that his only future was for him to fall into evil, that the only thing he’d be able to amount to would be becoming a villain.

*Even so, he still wanted to be a hero.*

Even if his foster parents didn’t believe he could be a hero. Even if everyone told him he could only be a villain, and certainly not a hero. He still decided that *that* was the only path he wanted to take, that if fate exists and his was to only amount to evil, he would find some way to *change* his fate so that he could amount to *good*.

And if he was fated to be unchosen because of his quirk, he would find some way to change that too.

*“Despite all of us being on the same playing field, we are not all beginning from the same starting line”*

*“Some of you were born with quirks that people have told you are “bad”, and that you wouldn’t be able to become a hero with them. But I think that neither of those things are true— I think that what leads to a person becoming a hero is how they use what they were given, quirk and everything else, and their conviction to go beyond the limits of what fate has granted them”*

Yes, Hitoshi understood the sentiments of Midoriya’s speech *very* well. It was still hard to believe that a person who had amounted to so much truly believed in an ideal that Hitoshi tried to strive for every day— that having a “bad” quirk doesn’t make you a “bad” person. That it was possible to be *more* than everyone and society told him he could be.

The way the boy had spoken on that stage, it also reminded him of the way he had spoken during the infamous confrontation at the doorway to class 1-A.

*“None of you guys have seen our homeroom teacher, Eraserhead, yet— have you?... He’s also missing his left eye. They couldn’t fix it. He’s half blind now.”*
“Our “pedestals” was a traumatic event that ended with our teacher being permanently maimed. Don’t make fools of the heroics course? You’re the ones who are acting like fools—treating a villain attack like it was a play where we were the main stars acting as flashy heroes!”

“Do you want to know what the leader of the villains said to me, and my friend, and the guy who transferred to general education, when we saw him? He said, Is this your guys’ first time seeing a dead body? Those of you that I leave alive should get used to the sight, if you really aim to be so called heroes.”

“Maybe all of you should think about that, if you also aim to become heroes.”

His words had hit Hitoshi hard. To hear the gravity of the situation 1-A had been through—and why hadn’t Hitoshi been able to figure that out on his own, it was a fucking villain attack, what did he expect?—and to hear that his favorite hero, Eraserhead, who got by without a flashy quirk and was able to transfer to heroics from general education during his time at UA, was now half blind because of a villain attack Hitoshi stupidly made light of—

Hitoshi was immensely grateful that the man hadn’t been there during the time, he might’ve just died on spot from mortification if he had…

But in any case, Midoriya had his mind straight on the reality behind being a hero, and about the reality behind being a child who was looked down upon by society. If Hitoshi wasn’t so damn jealous of his miracle, he might’ve gotten along with the kid.

He had caught Hitoshi’s attention with his words, then he had maintained it with that note he received—signed by the Principal of UA himself—that Hitoshi shouldn’t use Brainwashing to “order him to use his quirk” due to “safety concerns with Midoriya’s quirk”. Mysterious and suspicious were the most fitting descriptors for that situation.

Then it turned out that the guy was also the top scorer of the practical exam? And he proceeded to almost effortless win first-place every round in the Sports Festival so far? With robots that looked like teddy bears?

He couldn’t have stood out to Hitoshi more than he already had even if he tried…

*He really wished that he hadn’t been paired with the guy right off the bat. Honestly… the no-*
combat-skills-gen-ed-student set to fight mister eternally-in-first-place, who also happens to use giant flying robots? If fate is a thing that actually exists, then it’s being a fucking bitch. He even missed out on the chance to take him by surprise, that noble tailed heroics student was sure to rat out his quirk in the name of “friendship” or something.

But whatever. He’s had to deal with shit like this his whole life. This is his first real chance to become a hero, to become someone who is wanted, who is chosen— he’s not going to accept defeat without even trying.

As he stared down Midoriya from across the cement ring, Hitoshi tried to keep himself nonchalant about the match up. But he could still feel bitter hopelessness well up inside him.

“For the first match— ” Present Mic announced enthusiastically, “We have the delightful student who’s on one hell of a winning streak, Midoriya Izuku! Versus! The gen ed student that hasn’t done anything to stand out much but still managed to somehow creep his way into the final round, Shinsou Hitoshi!”

“Delightful student”, “Hasn’t done anything to stand out”? Hitoshi honestly can’t tell if the man’s bias for the heroics student is because he’s biased against Shinsou due to his gen ed status or because he’s biased for Midoriya in particular…

“The rules are simple; win by either knocking your opponent out of the ring, immobilizing them, or getting them to say, “I give up”! Fight dirty if you must— “ethics” have no meaning here!”

Well that’s good, since there’s literally no other way for Hitoshi to win other than playing dirty–

“I give up, huh? Get it, Midoriya Izuku, this battle is a test of wills.”

Midoriya jolted as Hitoshi started to speak, clenching his teeth and furrowing his brows. He knew exactly the kind was dilemma he was in.

Hitoshi had made sure to pay close attention to the heroics kids, and especially Midoriya, so it was easy to notice his only real advantage for this fight– the fact that his opponent needed to use a verbal que to transport himself.

Midoriya probably thought that if he just spoke quickly enough, he would be able to beat out Hitoshi
laying his trap. But there’s nothing he can do about it now that Hitoshi’s spoken before the match even started.

Hitoshi continued to play the bad guy with, “If you’ve got any kind of vision for your future, there’s no sense in worrying about how you’ll get there–”

“READY–!”

“Like that monkey babbling about his stupid pride–”

“START–!”

“What kind of dumbass throws away a chance like this?”

Midoriya just blinked once, before raising a single eyebrow to non-verbally communicate, Is that all you’ve got? Then rushed at him.

Dammit, he thought the heroics student would agree with that noble shit. Now Hitoshi’s got to talk like even more of a dick if he wants to get anywhere…

As Midoriya encroached on his personal space, Hitoshi did his best to split his focus between evading his opponent and coming up with shit to agitate the boy with. He could tell right away that his opponent had at least a little experience in non-quirk combat to oppose Hitoshi’s complete lack of it– The most assured way for him to win this was by brainwashing him.

“You gave a real good speech, you know? I’m sure you know by now that I’ve got a “bad” quirk, so I could get behind what you were saying. Though I don’t really know what to think about the whole fate shtick–” He had to cut himself off to jerk himself away from an attempted punch to the abdomen.

“But it’s hypocritical for you to be going for that angle now, after getting a quirk like yours– ” Midoriya’s eyebrow twitched and his leg sweep successfully knocked one of Hitoshi’s feet off the ground, causing him to hit the hard cement. He ignored the pain to roll away, and after gaining some distance picked himself off the floor.
Hitoshi found Midoriya’s sore spot– He let the bitterness he had been holding inside himself rise up to form words, “Cause in the end, you were saved from being worthless, weren’t you? Most us don’t have that kind of luck. This world is divided into the chosen and the unchosen, to be unchosen is to die. But you don’t have to worry about that because you’re one of the chosen now– ” Midoriya’s movements quickened to the point where Hitoshi couldn’t dodge fast enough and he was forced backwards. He wants Hitoshi to stop talking.

“You’ve been so blessed!” Hitoshi barked out with a strained, breathless voice, “To have been granted a miracle like that –to have been saved from being unchosen– without even having to work or sacrifice for it!”

The whites of Midoriya’s eyes widen dramatically, and all other markers of expression were wiped from his face. It would’ve been the exact same passively-aggressive neutral that it had been two weeks ago if it wasn’t for the eyes that seemed to be trying to murder Hitoshi through their sight alone.

Midoriya took a deep breath and ran at him like a possessed man, tackling Hitoshi to the floor. Hitoshi grunted as pain shot through his back.

“Don’t talk about things you know nothing about– ” Hitoshi’s quirk clicked into place, and Midoriya went from a murderous glare to blank nothingness. He was stock still pinning Hitoshi to the ground.

“What’s this, Midoriya’s stopped attacking all of a sudden?!” Present Mic proclaimed, “We were barely even aware this guy existed, but he’s now one to keep an eye on!”

“Like I’ve said, the format of the practical entrance exam is irrational,” Eraserhead cut in, Hitoshi felt his excitement rise upon hearing his hero’s voice, “Shinsou Hitoshi’s quirk is incredible powerful, but due to the format of the exam, it wasn’t able to help him pass into the heroics course.”

That’s right– he’s doing this to get around his disadvantages and enter the heroics course, to become a hero.

Hitoshi pushed away the guilt of provoking Midoriya with something that was obviously extremely upsetting for him and kept his voice even as he commanded, “Get up and walk out of the ring.”

Midoriya picked himself up, then started walking away.
“WOAH! Midoriya’s leaving the ring?! Get it together little listener!”

He’s totally biased…

“Wait, isn’t that– ?!”

Something flashed out of the corner of Hitoshi’s eye, and he turned his head to see some kind of marble was thrown towards him. By a penguin.

The Fuck?

It squawked loudly two times, and suddenly the marble broke into dozens of shards, some of which hit Hitoshi.

He blinked, then saw that his location had completely changed from the airy, loud stadium to a quiet place surrounded by glimmering, opaque stone and black and white stands.

Shit!

Hitoshi could feel the grating of dirt against his skin as he pushed his torso off the floor to see the blankly staring Midoriya who had stopped walking to now just stand in place– and whose outfit had changed for some reason. What the hell is he wearing?

He felt something pointed and sharp steady itself on the back of his neck. Frozen in place, Hitoshi didn’t dare try to turn his head to see what it was or who was there– a vision of the silver sword Midoriya had pulled out for the end of the cavalry battle flashed through his mind.

Hitoshi audibly gulped before stuttering out, “I-I’m not going to try anything, promise, so– could you not kill me?” He waits for a response to activate his quirk, but there’s nothing but silence behind him.

The sound of steps moving through gravel got his attention. He unconsciously rotated his eyes to see the penguin with a crown had procured a hand mirror and was waddling towards him from the side. As it closed the distance between them, he could see that Midoriya’s reflection was in the mirror without the boy even there to face it.
Clearly, Hitoshi was absolutely wrong when he thought that Midoriya couldn’t stand out more than he already did…

Midoriya’s reflection started talking and his voice intoned from the mirror, “Well look at that– seems like we’ve got an Alice who fell down into our Wonderland. Or maybe it would be more accurate to call you an Alice who’s on the precipice of falling into Wonderland? Were you waiting for a response from our Champion? It’s only a mannequin, so it can’t speak.”

…The mirror talks? And what is it even talking about, with all that Alice in Wonderland stuff? Considering the talking mirror Wonderland was certainly a fitting term for this place though.

“T-That’s good to know,” he couldn’t keep his nerves out of his tone, but he marched on regardless, “Are… talking mirrors a common thing in this guy’s dimension?”

“Oh, no. It’s just me!” Midoriya’s reflection giggled.

Hitoshi tried to activate his quirk, but it failed –That was a long shot anyway.

The image in the mirror curled its lips at Hitoshi. “Ah! You just tried to use your quirk on me didn’t you, Shinsou Hitoshi? Little Izuku said it was some kind of mind control ability.”

Fuck– “…I didn’t mean any offense. Just doing my best to win a friendly competition.”

He was extremely aware of the sharp sensation still on his neck.

“It’s fine, a bit silly really. I’m not a human anymore, just a reflection– something that is neither alive nor dead.”

The reflection tilted its head as it examined Hitoshi, he only just noticed that its eyes were a glassy pink instead of Midoriya’s green.

It nodded its head at the presence behind him, leading to the sharp point being removed from his
He was only allowed to feel relieved for a second before the reflection frowned at him and said with a heavy tone, “You are a forgotten and unwanted child, aren’t you? Someone who has been abandoned by society…”

Shock rang through Hitoshi at hearing those words, plainly stated for the first time ever. They solidified the misery in his chest.

“I can tell because my Mirror reflects the truth, and I used to be like that too. Before I became chosen, before someone chose me.” The reflection focused its sight on Midoriya, then gave a small but fond smile to the unaware boy. “My Prince here has faced much hardship, and is fated to face more, but he’s never known what it means to be abandoned by the entire world like that. I’m quite glad he doesn’t know that sadness…”

Hitoshi ignored the crushing feeling centered at his heart to look back to Midoriya. Suddenly the outfit made more sense– with his crown, cloak, and regal shirt, he does look similar to what a prince would look like.

“However,” Midoriya’s voice from the mirror recaptured his focus, “he does know the significance of being unchosen by society and fate, as well as the significance of being chosen. And he is a kind child. So Alice, I am certain that there will be a day when you are chosen – where you are loved – because if you accept his hand of friendship, he will choose you. And perhaps there will even come to be other people who choose you as well.”

A sharp inhale tore through Hitoshi’s breath at those words.

Does that kind of miracle truly exist?

“There’s much that you need to be told still, so make sure you seek out little Izuku at some point to return here. But for now…” Midoriya’s reflection mischievously grinned at him and continued in a playful tone, “Champion of the Rose Bride, can you help your Prince out of his mental imprisonment?”

The presence behind him stepped around to reveal a prince-like mannequin with long pinky hair and a silver sword in hand. It strutted to Midoriya’s side, then pushed him over to the ground. He tumbled onto the dirt.
“–Gah!” Midoriya pushed himself off the floor to look at Hitoshi, only to quickly avert his eyes to the mirror – *Damn. He totally heard all of that, how embarrassing* – “Thanks for the help, Momoka-san, but maybe next time encourage a gentler reawakening?”

“Maybe next time don’t get brainwashed?” was Momoka’s immediate retort.

Midoriya winced. “Okay, fair point.” He glanced back to Hitoshi and upon realizing that Hitoshi had no intention to continue their fight – *he had already been held at sword-point once, he was sure it’d be easy for them to accomplish that again, and it’s not like he would even be able to get himself out of this crazy town without Midoriya letting him leave* – Midoriya awkwardly muttered, “Uh– I’m just going to…”

He held out a gloved hand. “Will of the Crystal Princess.”

Glimmering, opaque crystal burst out of the ground to encase all of his body except for his head. Hitoshi grimaced at how restraining it was. “Cozy…”

Midoriya rubbed the back of his head while giving an apologetic look. “Sorry about that–” Hitoshi’s quirk clicked into place and Midoriya cut himself off to stare into space.

Hitoshi snorted and released his quirk’s hold. Midoriya snapped out of it to blink stupidly at him. “Don’t you think you’re a bit too trusting?”

“Wow… right after I just told you not to get brainwashed too…” Momoka chimed in.

Midoriya sputtered defensively, “I-It’s not like I can just ignore everything Shinsou says!”

*Yes he could. There had been a couple of his classmates before UA who just never talked to him if they could help it for fear of his quirk.*

Hitoshi didn’t say that though. He couldn’t help but feel glad that Midoriya wouldn’t consider acting like that towards him.
“So, what the hell is up with the penguin?”

Midoriya chuckled sheepishly, “Ah– This is Izu-pingu! He was sort of made in my image by this place, I guess you could say? So he can do some of what I can, including transporting himself in and out of the Crystal World. In the tunnel before coming out onto the field, I came here and told Izu-pingu to transport himself out after a couple of minutes had passed –after the match would’ve started– to hide there. And if it looked like I had been brainwashed, to come out to provide support. The teachers consider him to be part of my quirk for the most part, so I figured that would be allowed…”

Hitoshi stared at him for a moment before hanging his head, “I can’t believe a goody two-shoes heroics course student beat me at playing dirty…”

“But of course, he learned from the best!” Momoka placed a hand on her chest to clarify who, exactly, had taught Midoriya how to play dirty.

Hitoshi and Midoriya rolled their eyes in synch with each other.

“Survival Strategy Complete!”

In an instant, they were surrounding by the roaring cheers of the spectators and the sight of UA’s Sports Festival Stadium.

“Can you move, Shinsou?” Midnight called out.

Hitoshi gave her a look and stated a flat, “No.”

“Midoriya Izuku has immobilized Shinsou! Midoriya wins the match to move onto the second-round of the tournament!” Midnight announced.

The cheering got louder at that. And within the congratulations for Midoriya, Hitoshi could hear–

“You were awesome out there, Shinsou!”
“You’re the shining star of the general education course!”

“That quirk would be great against villains, I wish I had it…”

“What the hell is UA thinking, putting him in general education?”

From his place inside the crystal, Hitoshi could only look up at his classmates from 1-C and the impressed pro heroes in disbelief.

“May those who defy their fate be granted glory”

“It seems like that day Momoka-san told you about is fast approaching, Shinsou-kun, as well as the day you become a hero!”

Hitoshi looked back at Midoriya, who smiled brightly at him and unconsciously stretched his hand out to Hitoshi. “Maybe this is out of place to say now, but… do you want to be friends, Shinsou-kun?”

“I am certain that there will be a day where you are chosen – where you are loved – because if you accept his hand of friendship, he will choose you”

Hitoshi stared at him. As he began to fully process all the praise and the boy in front of him, he felt lighter than he had his entire life.

“…Sure.”

Midoriya beamed at him.

“Great! Now I’ve got to, uh– take you back so I can get rid of the crystal…”

Hitoshi snorted at his maybe friend, but a smile crept onto his face anyway.
Chapter End Notes

References from this chapter:
"This world is divided into the chosen and the unchosen, to be unchosen is to die" is a quote from Mawaru Penguindrum, and also, "forgotten and unwanted" children/children "abandoned by society" is a reoccurring theme in the show.
After exchanging his contact info with Shinsou and promising to meet up with him later—and he would definitely keep that promise, Izuku was determined to stick himself into Shinsou’s life for good now—Izuku went to the stands to watch the rest of the first-round matches.

Shouto didn’t use his fire against Sero. Frankly, it wasn’t even necessary seeing that he froze him with an iceberg that filled a good half of the stadium. It just barely avoided the spectators, including Izuku and the students of class 1-A. The crowd yelled, “Don’t mind!” to Izuku’s completely outclassed classmate and Shouto stood with an air of loneliness even with the frozen Sero right beside him as he melted his ice with a heated palm. Izuku got an incredible sense of sadness from him, and the sadness echoed through his own chest.

He couldn’t bare it. He placed his hand on the wall of ice that protruded right in front of his face, ignoring its biting cold.

“Survival Strategy”

Due to the iceberg’s positioning, Izuku was high in the air when he appeared in the Crystal World right next to the Penguin Exhibit, but he just displaced his surroundings in time with gravity, stopping his fall. Then, he blurred to Shouto’s side using the same technique.

Shouto stared at him dumbfounded for a second, then turned to stare at the size of his enormous ice creation, then turned back to stare at Izuku again.

“W-What the h-hell, Midoriya! H-How were you able t-to move something t-this huge! And what are you w-wearing?!” Sero stuttered out from his frozen prison.

Izuku sighed at the frequently asked question, he was really getting sick of it, “It’s just an outfit that signifies I’m the owner of this dimension.”

Izuku gave a sad smile to Shouto. “I just thought that this would be easier, Shouto-kun— ”
“S-Shouto-kun?!”

“You only have to melt out Sero-kun, and you can just leave the rest of it here,” Izuku continued without paying Sero any mind, “This is the Penguin Exhibit, so the ice will stay frozen and the penguins could play on it.”

“P-Penguin E-Exhibit?!”

Shouto looked around at all the snow and ice surrounding them. “…It does seem like it would fit. If you’re sure it’s okay, then that’s fine.”

Shouto glanced away from Izuku and placed his left hand back on Sero to continue melting the ice encasing him. Sero’s eyes whipped back and forth between them.

“…Thanks for your help.”

A grin bloomed on Izuku’s face that matched his delighted tone, “It’s no problem at all, Shouto-kun! The way you make your ice is almost beautiful, really, it’d be a shame to have to melt one this spectacular!”

Shouto didn’t move his eyes from his hand on Sero, but Izuku still caught the faint red that rose on his cheeks. Sero choked on freezing-cold air.

“O-Okay, I could’ve s-sworn that you two o-only first talked this morning. W-What on Earth h-happened to your guys’ r-relationship within the span of a c-couple of hours?!”

Izuku’s answer involved the secrets of the Fruit of Fate, so he stayed silent. Surprisingly though, Shouto answered.

“Midoriya is a natural-born Prince Charming— that’s what happened,” Shouto stated with a sardonic tone laced into his normal monotone voice.

Izuku turned red and sputtered, “What?! What I did wasn’t too…”
He stopped to mentally review their romantic candle-lit ballroom dance and kiss to the cheek.

“Oh… actually, you have a point…”

Shouto glanced his eyes towards Izuku to give him a look, before averting them again.

“Oh-Oh, come on! Don’t leave it at that! W-What did Midoriya do, seriously?!?”

Izuku and Shouto ignored Sero’s pleading. As Shouto finished up his work, Izuku wandered over to the igloo containing the penguins for Potential Children of Fate and from the window, he could see that a new third penguin had appeared.

It was most likely the penguin for the class 1-B student the Principal had told him about –Izuku must have caught sight of him sometime during the festival– but just by looking him there was no way to tell who it belonged to. The only discernible feature the penguin had was that he somehow managed to maintain a smug expression even in his sleep.

When Izuku returned with both Shouto and Sero, Hizashi was in the middle of a positive-sounding tirade.

“YEAH! What an incredible feat by Midoriya Izuku! Could it be that there’s no limit on the size of things he can use his quirk on?! What a glorious display of power– ”

Shouta tried to cut in, “Can you please stop? This didn’t even happen during a fight– ”

“Does it look like I CARE?!”

Izuku was slightly embarrassed by Hizashi-sensei’s rampant praise, but he was much too happy at hearing his words to complain about it.

The next battle was also over in an instant. Kaminari lost against Shiozaki’s insulating vines. The one after was purposely stretched out by Hatsume so she could advertise all of her “babies”, some of
which she had even given to Iida to show off. After finishing her ads, she stepped out of the ring to give Iida the frustrating win.

Ashido and Aoyama were a more evenly matched pair, but her stronger physical prowess upper-cutted Aoyama for the win. Yaoyorozu wasn’t given enough time to make complicated creations and couldn’t utilize the simple ones she was able to get out well enough to defend against Dark Shadow’s strength, so Tokoyami won their match.

During Kirishima and Tetsutetsu’s heated battle, Izuku spent his time with Iida reassuring Ochako in the prep room. Izuku offered some tips on Kacchan’s battle style but Ochako turned them down, stating that she wanted to win without relying on Izuku as she had last round. He did make sure to emphasis that Kacchan would give it his all in their fight, though, so Ochako needed to go all in as well.

And go all in she did, their fight was a grueling one– to many it seemed like Kacchan was overpowering her at every turn. Some in the crowd even started booing at him for “toying” with her.

“Ah, to be honest, I sort of agree– Ack! Elbow!”

“The pros who are booing, you might as well leave right now and find a different career. Bakugou understands that since his opponent has made it this far, he needs to keep his guard up and not underestimate her. He can’t afford to go easy on her.”

Izuku grinned towards the commenter’s booth and muttered to himself, “That’s right! Ochako-chan isn’t in the heroics course to become some damsel in distress– she’s here to become a knight!”

Because the booing pros had completely missed the meteor field Ochako had been preparing. The multitude of debris caused by Kacchan’s explosions floated high in the air, and she released them all to fall down from the heavens onto the Earth in a powerful move.

But it wasn’t enough. Kacchan’s overwhelming power was able to blast through her strategy and she lost the match.

When Izuku went to the prep room to comfort her before his match with Shouto only to find her showing all smiles, he furrowed his brows and said, “It’s okay to be sad, Ochako-chan. It’s okay to cry too, whether you cry on your own or with others. That’s part of what it means to be human, you know?”
Ochako let her smile fall. She looked to the side to respond, “…Thanks, Deku-kun. Do might leaving me here to call my dad for a bit? I’m sure you need to prepare for your match too.”

“Allright, if that’s what you want…” Hopefully letting out her sadness with her dad will help…

But as he walked down the hallway, he was intercepted by a surprising visitor.

“Shouto-kun?! Is something wrong, why did you need to see me before our fight? Did Endeavor bother you?!”

Izuku tried to fret over the boy, but Shouto anchored him by grasping both his shoulders to physically calm him. Conductor selectively activated to show his frozen but slowly melting Fruit of Fate.

“I’m fine, Midoriya, I just wanted to know…” He kept his hands on Izuku but glanced his eyes away. “…I think if it’s only this once, I can try out my fire side. But are you sure about me using fire in our match? You’re going to use everything you can, your Teddydrums, and penguin, and mannequin– but they’re all precious to you, or at least that’s the feeling I got from you…”

Shouto cast his gaze on his own left hand and asked with a hesitant voice, “…What if the fire hurts them too badly, or maybe even you? I don’t want you to end up hating me because of something like that.”

…There was only one answer Izuku could give to this.

In a move that Izuku was aware was very forward, he carefully lifted Shouto’s left hand and rested his cheek against its palm, like a parody of when he handled Shouto’s Fruit.

Shouto blushed at his affections, and Izuku made steady eye contact with him while explaining, “I’ll be okay, Shouto-kun, I’m strong. You were right to think that all of the inhabitants of my world are precious to me, but you don’t have to hold back against them. My Teddydrums can be repaired, my Champion of the Rose Bride will reappear back inside the Crystal World completely intact if its body is destroyed, and my penguin is connected to my life– Izu-pingu can be hurt, but as long as I am alive, he won’t die.”
He placed his own left hand on top of Shouto’s. “Don’t worry about trying to hold back. Just let all of yourself feel free, for this one time. There are some things I won’t be able to use for our match for security reasons since we have watchers, along with my broken Teddydrum, but I won’t be holding back at all. I fully plan on winning this fight– I want to earn my glory too!”

Shouto gave him a long look before nodding.

“We… probably have to get ready now…”

“Oh, right.” Izuku blushed and removed Shouto’s hand form his face. “Sorry about that– ”

“You don’t have to apologize,” Shouto cut him off, then turned away to head towards his own entrance, “Don’t regret this later, Midoriya.”

“I could never regret supporting you to the best of my ability!” Izuku countered with honesty flowing in every word.

For some reason, that made Shouto blush again. The two parted with Izuku reassured that Shouto will be able to move forward with their fated match.

“They’ve both done great in this festival so far, but there’s only room for one of these greats to move on! It’s Todoroki! Versus! Midoriya!” Present Mic’s declaration was met with the roaring cheers of the crowd.

“Get up! You won’t be able to defeat third-rate villains, let alone All Might, if you get knocked down by a hit like that.”

“I can’t do it anymore. The children, they’re… like him more and more every day. And Shouto, his
“left side… sometimes I look at him and think it’s unsightly.”

Across the ring from Shouto, Midoriya gave him a beaming smile.

“This warmth and this light— they’re being made by your fire, Shouto. The fire that you lit on these candles is bringing warmth to us, and beautiful light to this room and everything in it. Your fire makes me feel good, too”

“I just want you to try it once, just for our fight. Instead of how your father’s fire feels and the memories he cursed you with, I want you to think of how you felt when we were dancing, of how good this warmth and this light felt. Our fight can just be an extension of our dance”

“But you want to be a hero, right? That’s fine… you’re not bound by his blood”

Shouto clenched his left hand into a fist and closed his eyes for just a moment.

Try to ignore everything else; ignore Mother’s words, ignore that man who’s probably watching from the audience—

This fight won’t be about his conviction, it won’t be about what kind of hero he wants to become, all of that can come later—

Shouto unclenched his fist and opened his eyes to face the Prince.

“Just let all of yourself feel free, for this one time”

This fight—this one time— will just be about Shouto searching within himself for the warmth and light he felt in that ballroom, that he felt with Midoriya.

—But even though he wants it to be like that, he can still feel it burning inside of him; his hatred for his father’s fire, for his own fire—

“START!”
Immobilization is useless against him, Shouto thought as he reflexively formed spires of ice to rush at Midoriya. If he’s lucky they’ll be fast enough to push him out of the ring, but most likely…

“Survival Strategy!”

The ice passed through the open space Midoriya once stood. Shouto repositioned himself so that he had a clear path to Midoriya’s spot that wasn’t blocked by his own ice.

“Midoriya avoided Todoroki’s ice by transporting himself to his dimension! What crazy stuff will he reappear with to use for this fight?!”

Present Mic’s question was answered only a few seconds later, and the instant Shouto glimpsed the sudden appearance of multiple forms– he let loose a fast plume of fire towards them. Teddydrum Black rose above the flames with Midoriya and Izu-pingu in his arms before they could hit.

“Shouto!” He forced himself to not look at the man who considered himself his father. “So you’ve finally accepted it, excellent! With my blood running through your veins you will– Hey! What are you doing– Mhmm?!”

That caused Shouto to turn his head towards where Endeavor’s voice was coming from. The still mostly-broken Teddydrum White had an arm around the torso of the Number Two hero and its other hand pressed against his face – probably trying to just keep his mouth shut – It was positioning Endeavor back into an empty seat like a security guard dealing with an unruly audience member.

Even though the people around the spectacle were clearly confused as to what was happening, they were also frantically snapping photos with their phones and cameras. Social media was going to go crazy over this for sure.

“Eh? Why does it look like Teddydrum White is trying to put Endeavor on time-out? Is this allowed?!?” Present Mic asked incredulously.

“Just ignore it, the robot is trustworthy and I’m sure Midoriya’s reasons are valid. It won’t do any harm as long as Endeavor makes sure to control himself and not start brawling in the audience,” Aizawa dismissed the unusual sight without a second thought.
Shouto stiffened his face to keep chuckle from escaping. *Your favoritism is showing, Aizawa-sensei—*

A flash of pink caught the corner of his right eye, and Shouto just barely managed to put up a wall of ice to defend against Midoriya’s mannequin, the Champion of the Rose Bride. Its silver sword crashed into the ice with a clang, but he quickly realized the wall was too thin when its next move successfully impaled the sword through the wall, forcing him to back up closer to the iceberg made from his starting move.

Izu-pingu was using the ice to travel straight to Shouto, sliding on his belly like the penguin he was. Teddydrum Black, still carrying Midoriya, tried creeping its way around the edge of the ring unnoticed, also moving towards Shouto.

*Don’t get distracted, there are multiple opponents on this field–* He threw a column of fire at his ice, hoping to both interrupt Izu-pingu and remove an object that could potentially be used against him. The top half of it turned into a burst of steam and suddenly Izu-pingu exploded out of the ring. Shouto blinked at the flying penguin in shock.

“What was that explosion from?!” Present Mic yelled incredulously.

“The cooled air was heated in an instant, making it expand,” Aizawa answered in with a simple explanation.

Shouto shot himself to the other side of the ring with his ice, avoiding both the Champion that had moved around his wall and the crystal that was thrown at the spot he had once been.

*There’s too many to deal with to go on the offense, Shouto needs to take some of them out.*

Teddydrum Black and Midoriya lift into the air once more, but were slow in their approach, with the robot’s cannons at ready. The Champion on the other hand blurred towards him with frightening speed. He’s lost sight of the small, easily missed penguin.

*The robot is confined to the ring as long as it’s holding Midoriya; they don’t want to risk Shouto shooting them out of the air into an out of bounds space, but Midoriya needs the extra mobility to avoid getting hit. The mannequin is their vanguard. The penguin is their sneak attack.*

*Get rid of the vanguard first– The Champion approached from his right side for a reason…*
He noticed the red laserbeam headed his way in synch with the incoming Champion’s attack just in time to use his right arm to grow a thick wall to take the blow. He then sent thick spears of ice racing at the mannequin, who easily dodged it. It blurred out of sight for a moment, and Shouto turned his head to the right to see it on that side once more. As its sword tried to graze his side, Shouto had already finished moving his left arm across his chest to release a point-blank burst of fire.

The blade made a shallow cut on the side of his abdomen, but the mannequin was up in flames. Shouto pulled himself out of contact with the sword as the Champion turned to gray ashes.

“His left side... sometimes I look at him and think it's unsightly”

Pain shot through his jaw as Shouto grit his teeth at the sight.

He heard something rustle behind him and forced his tense arm to move behind him and grow a wall. Beating out the two squawks from Izu-pingu, his ice wall disappeared a moment later along with his opponents.

“Midoriya’s disappeared again but he failed to bring Todoroki with him!”

Pressing his left hand to his side, he could tell it wasn’t bleeding very much but it won’t close up anytime soon. The way this fight seemed like it could drag on spelled bad news for him. He was already breathing heavily and tiring.

*If it's a test of endurance, he won't win since its just him versus multiple fighters. He needs to figure out a way to take down Midoriya before they outlast him.*

“Shit. He blocked in time.”
Izuku was back in his Crystal World at the Dueling Arena in the arms of Teddydrum Black. Teddydrum White was a little ways away looking irritated after having to deal with Endeavor. The Champion in its new body had already been present as well as Nighteye’s penguin with Momoka’s Hand Mirror on stand by, and Izu-pingu was hanging his head in shame next to the ice wall that had been brought with them.

Izuku looked down at the cute penguin and sighed before petting his head, “It’s okay Izu-pingu. You tried your best to be stealthy. I’m the one that needs to improve on my stealth, you can only do what I can after all…”

It sounded simple in theory, but in reality it had taken awhile to figure out the particular capabilities of the penguins. They can use their respective human’s quirk and had the same basic physical skills and strength, but their lack of size and weight made them lack momentum and inertia compared to the humans. It made it much easier to throw Little Might out of the way than it would be to throw All Might.

For Izu-pingu it was even more complicated due to the Penguindrum. Izuku is the sole owner of the Penguindrum, so Izu-pingu can’t do most of the spells, but he could use Survival Strategy and Survival Strategy Complete.

The Survival Strategy spell became quite complicated when both of them wanted to use it; Izu-pingu can transport out of the Crystal World to where ever Izuku last used the spell, but if both of them were outside of the Crystal World when either of them used it, both of them would be transported back.

This fight would be easier for Izuku if he could use Toshi-pingu and Nighteye’s penguin – when will that penguin be named?— but Toshi-pingu acting as Little Might just looked way too much like All Might to use unless it was an emergency. Nighteye’s penguin isn’t as recognizable so he’d be safer for regular use, but with the Festival being broadcasted nationally there’d bound to be someone that noticed. Izuku just can’t risk people trying to answer the question of where he’s getting these penguins…

It’d be nice to use Teddydrum White too, but with a major injury like that it’d be best to only call it over if he absolutely needed to. At least it’s well enough to work on Endeavor control though.

“Okay, new plan everyone. Shouto-kun’s bad at close-range, so Teddydrum Black and me will go in close along with the Champion. Izu-pingu, try to linger around the outskirts to see if you can get a clear shot. Teddydrum White, you’re still on Endeavor control for now.”
Teddydrum White motioned his hands in a similar way to a how person would move to crack their knuckles.

Izuku furiously hoped that the brute of a man would have the sense to not start a fight with a giant robot in a crowd of people, because Teddydrum White was waiting in anticipation for the opportunity to throw hands. As protectors of children, the Teddydrums could sense the threat he posed and hated him for it.

*It would’ve been more convenient if Teddydrum Black was the one Izuku could assign to “Endeavor control”— Teddydrum Black was the more energetic of the two, but it was also more soft-hearted. Teddydrum White was the type of aggressor that wouldn’t hesitate to kill a man like the Number Two hero if Izuku gave the word for it.*

*Izuku very much disliked Endeavor and enjoyed the prospect of him having a karmatic fate—he probably even hated him—but he still doesn’t actively want him dead. Not only that, but what would he say to Shouto if his Teddydrum killed his father in what would basically be a school-yard brawl? And would the Teddydrum even be able to win? The man was the Number Two hero for a reason and Izuku doesn’t know if he can make fire hot enough to melt metal—he really needs to stop thinking about this hypothetical death match and focus…*

“The Prince best bring a proper sword and shield to this close-range fight if he wants to properly impress his Cinderella,” Momoka teased, giving him a sly look.

Izuku flushed. “Momoka-san, please don’t embarrass me by calling Shouto-kun “my Cinderella” when he meets you…” He did accept the silver colored sword and long shield that was offered by the Champion of the Rose Bride though. If they got too unwieldy he could always toss them.

“Well, time for Act 2!”

The crystal shards released next to Shouto, but Izuku doubted the boy would still be in the same spot when he returned. Which is why he was caught off guard by Shouto’s close range fire attack. Luckily his shield was already in front of him and all he had to do was crouch down. The metal got almost unbearably hot.

“Midoriya reappeared with a sword and shield befitting of knights and royalty!” Hizashi echoed throughout the stadium.
He ignored the heat to charge into Shouto, who had to form ice armor around his right side to crash against the heated shield, causing the ice to sizzle and partially melt. Teddydrum Black rushed towards Shouto from above while the Champion came at him from his left side, he hoped that was enough of a distraction… “Survival–!”

Shouto bodily threw himself into the Champion with his entire right side blazing on fire, both avoiding Teddydrum Black’s crushing body and his contact with Izuku’s shield. The Champion seemed like it never actually made contact with Shouto, though. It was too susceptible to fire so any body part too close to Shouto was instantly turned to ash. This time the mannequin rolled to put out the flames and rescue the left half of its body for use. It retreated for the time being.

*Maybe it’d be better to focus on pushing him out of the ring instead of transporting him? But he could just make ice behind himself to keep himself in the ring–*

He made strikes at Shouto with his sword in his right hand not to impale him, but to distract him enough to make it easier for his Teddydrum to grab him. In response, Shouto made some more armor-like ice to cover his right forearm that he used to deflect Izuku’s blows. When the Teddydrum moved in from behind its clanking metal body was too loud, giving it away. Shouto quickly turned his right side back around to freeze it in place with a large iceberg, but took a hit from Izuku in the process.

He moved back too quickly for Izuku to take advantage of their contact though. They began moving around each other in a dance, circling each other. When Izuku thrust his blade forward, Shouto would counter with his ice armor or dodge. When Shouto would try to get Izuku to back off by shooting flames at him, Izuku would protect his body with his shield. It wasn’t sustainable for either of them– but all Izuku had to do was wait for either his Teddydrum to melt itself out with the heat from its cannons and rockets or for Izu-pingu to get a clear shot.

“What do you feel right now, Shouto-kun?! What do you see?!” Izuku yelled as he struck at Shouto once more.

The sword clanged as it was deflected with ice armor. “I feel your sword, and I feel cold, but also warm. I see you, and I see my light shining and reflecting everywhere around you!” In time with the end of his remark, Shouto’s hand burst forth flames. The left side of his shirt was starting to burn off rapidly.

Vaguely, Izuku noted that Teddydrum Black was almost free, but had paused his melting of the ice. The Teddydrum could tell that this was an important moment for Shouto to get through– that these were important emotions that needed to be released, and that Shouto was a child in pain. Thus, it
waited patiently for Izuku and Shouto to finish despite it risking Izuku’s health and not being ordered to do so, because it wanted Izuku to help Shouto.

*Izu was so proud of his robots that transcended their mechanical parts, code, and servitude*

Izuku ducked his body and head behind his shield. The left side of his body and his left hand that supported the shield felt like they were burning, his palm felt like it was on a hot stove and was screaming at him— but he stood strong through the pain. It was like he was a puny knight fighting against a dragon that breathed both fire and ice.

“My fire doesn’t make you feel good anymore, right Midoriya?! It hurts— just like his does! My convictions are about more than just defying him!”

Shouto was a boiling mixture of anger and despair. The pain in his gray and blue eyes when he looked towards Izuku was as unbearable as the pain Shouto bottled up inside himself. From his expression, it almost seemed like he was about to burst into tears.

Shouto screamed in anguish, “Why do I have to hurt people the same way he does?!”

Izuku clenched his jaw and his vision started to blur from tears that he kept from falling.

*It wasn’t right that Shouto had to feel so tortured and pained about a part of himself because of the sins of his father. That he had to be in so much pain. That he had been hurt by the people who were supposed to protect him.*

—*If everything is caused by fate, then God must be incredibly unfair and cruel—*

Izuku threw the now too-hot shield at Shouto, forcing him to cut off his fire as he was hit by hot metal. Air hissed through Shouto’s teeth from the pain as he tossed the shield to the side. As Izuku gave chase with his sword, he vaguely noted that his own left hand was inflamed, pained, and red. It was spotted with blood from small patches of his flesh where his outer layer of skin had burnt onto the metal and torn off.

Izuku answered Shouto’s call, Shouto’s pain, “You don’t! You don’t have to be like him!”
Shouto sloppily deflected Izuku’s blade, the boy’s movements were becoming slow.

“You can be your own kind of hero, Shouto! It’s okay that your fire hurts! Most things in life have that duality…”

Another strike, another deflection.

“Fire feels both good and painful, it brings both life and destruction—*it’s exactly the same as love!*”

Izuku stood still for a moment, pointing his sword straight at Shouto’s heart. Even with his tears still unsplit, a small smile arose on his face.

He proudly confessed, “And I will accept both that good and that pain, because *that’s what it means to love!”*

Shouto’s eyes widened at his words. Izuku’s smile just grew as he thrust his next strike. Shouto stumbled back with his next deflection.

Teddydrum Black’s rockets audibly ignited as it finally finished melting the ice, and Shouto had to position his right hand around to his left side where Teddydrum Black was trying to tackle him from to freeze the robot in place with a small iceberg. He grunted at the solid puncture to the shoulder he took from Izuku as a result.

Izuku opened his mouth to shout his incantation, but had to stop when Shouto force him back with ice as well. He was pushed from the middle of the ring to almost the edge before the one-legged and one-armed Champion dashed him away.

Izuku recollected himself in time to glance from a distance as Izu-pingu’s second sneak attack went up in literal flames. The penguin had tried to use the frozen Teddydrum Black, who had been in the middle of melting the ice, as a hiding spot to launch his crystal from, but Shouto noticed his stand out black and white coloring and shot a burst of fire at the two. The air around them seemed to explode with steam, causing them to fly back through the air.

“I really made things harder for myself by encouraging him to use his fire, didn’t I?”
The Champion somehow managed to give him a look while only using a half-charred, faceless mannequin head.

Despite his difficulties, Izuku couldn’t keep a grin from growing on his face. “It was totally worth it though! Act 3 has already begun!”

Shouto looked exhausted from all his defensive maneuvering, it was time for Izuku to reach for his victory.

Izuku allowed the Champion to carry him back to push his offense. As they approached Izuku saw Teddydrum Black carry Izu-pingu towards Shouto as well from the opposite side.

Shouto whipped his head between the two ends of the pincer attack, and suddenly he straightened up through his hard breathing and gracefully extended his right arm.

He swiftly spun in place like an unskilled ice skater while ice spires spiraled around him out of his right side and hand, causing the ice to form all around him. The Champion jumped above the icy wave and Teddydrum Black flew above his end of the ice. From the air, Izuku could see the entire ground of the ring was covered by a thick, large block of jagged ice in an instant, with the only hole being where Shouto stood.

Then, he extended his left arm and fire ignited on his left side, and he began to twirl a second time. For the first time ever since Izuku had met the boy, he could see a grin on Shouto’s face.

“Our fight can just be an extension of our dance”

Izuku grinned back even as the spiraling hurricane of fire caused the ice to burst up into steam, instantly heated and expanded the air above the entire ring, and resulted in a giant-scaled explosion that forced Izuku and the Champion to fly back through the air.

“Survival Strategy!” he called out before he hit the stands. But when he stuck himself in Teddydrum Black’s arms and popped himself back to the Stadium, he was in the air outside of the ring.

“Midoriya has been forced out of the ring! Todoroki wins!” Midnight called out from behind a blockade of cement next to Cementoss.
Cheers roared through the spectators, but all Izuku could see was the form of Shouto lying on the ground in the middle of some ice debris. Teddydrum Black flew Izuku over, and once he was close he could see that Shouto was breathing even harder and was fully exhausted. He was also red all over like a boiled lobster and his right side was covered in ice as he cooled his body.

Through his huffing, Shouto was able to force out, “Wow…”

Shouto’s mis-matched eyes looked at Izuku in wonder.

“At the end– I was only thinking of the way we spun together for our dance– and that good warmth and light… But now I’m too warm.”

Izuku let out an involuntary laugh that rang with the happiness of a wedding bell.

Later, after Shouto had won against Iida and lost against Kacchan, Izuku wasn’t concerned about Shouto not using his fire for them. While it was a shame he had lost due to constraining himself, Izuku was sure that the excitement and joy of their encounter would be enough to help Shouto truly accept the part of himself that he had hated.

After the festival was over, Shouto pulled Midoriya over for a private conversation once more.

“How are your burns?” was the first thing out of his mouth. The image of Midoriya’s red left side had stayed with him even after the boy had professed his… acceptance.

Midoriya gave him a sad smile. “I’m okay, Shouto-kun. Recovery Girl was able to fix them just fine for the most part.”
Shouto’s eyes narrowed and his tone was grim when he pressed, “For the most part?”

Midoriya glanced down at his bandaged left hand. He hesitantly explained, “My palm was… pretty bad, from holding onto the shield for so long. She wasn’t able to completely fix it right away– but after a second round it should be fine. There will just be some faint scarring.”

Shouto’s gaze burned into Midoriya’s hand. He felt like he wanted to throw up.

Both of Midoriya’s hand took his face to tilt it forward into the Prince’s. Midoriya continued to smile at him. “I’m sorry… I know it must hurt you to know I’ve been hurt like this. But injuries are only to be expected from a place as intense as UA, since they’re preparing us for an intense line of work. You don’t have to feel guilty for doing your best, Shouto. I was the one who chose to defend against your fire the way I did.”

A bandaged thumb gently ghosted over his cheek. It was only then that Shouto realized he was softly crying. Only a couple of tears fell from his eyes, but Midoriya wiped at them all the same.

He put his right hand over Midoriya’s injured one. “You… That was a confession you gave before, wasn’t it? Like– ” like a love confession, he couldn’t say, “How did you– Why?”

Midoriya’s face turned red, but his green eyes didn’t stray from Shouto’s. He moved his uninjured right hand down the side of Shouto’s face and neck, all the way until it rested on Shouto’s chest right above his heart. Shout’s own face turned slightly red in response.

“How did you– Why?”

“Looking into your Fruit of Fate means that I looked into you, Shouto. I learned everything about you; your heavy pain, your faint joy, your unkind life and fate, and how despite all of that– you carry a kindness that is so deeply ingrained into your person and soul that neither your father’s nor your mother’s painful actions and words could extinguish it.”

Shout’s throat thickened at Midoriya’s words, but the Prince had even more to say, “I saw all of this, Shouto, and what can I say? I liked what I saw, I loved it– your kindness, your bravery, and all the flaws that fitted between them.”

Midoriya’s eyes crinkled as his smile grew. He whispered his next declaration, but it rang as loud in Shouto’s head as the confession the boy had yelled out on the field before, “I fell in love with you at first sight of your Fruit of Fate.”
He brought his hand off Shouto’s chest to bring it in front of Izu-pingu –*when did he get there?*– The penguin rested a familiar looking white and red rose in Midoriya’s palm. The rose was once more presented to Shouto.

With incomprehension, Shouto basked in Midoriya’s smile and offered gift.

*How is that possible? How was he able to see everything there was to Shouto and instead of judging him as deserving of pity or punishment, fall in love with him? How can he so simply decide that everything –even the things Shouto had inherited from his father or things like his hatred and anger– was something that was deserving of love?*

*Does that kind of miracle truly exist?*

“You…” Shouto could only question in dumbfounded wonder, “You really *liked it?* You really like me? *All of me?*”

Midoriya nodded firmly, but then his smile dropped a bit. “I understand that you don’t feel the same way, though. I mean– you’ve only just started to get to know me after all.”

Shouto paused for a moment, trying to fully process this information and find a way to explain his thought process.

He decided to just give up on careful wording and be as blunt as possible, “Well… You’re right that I’m not *in love* with you yet, but you really don’t have to worry about me lacking interest in this– You’ve already thoroughly seduced me.”

Midoriya sputtered with bewilderment that was matched by his expression, “Wha– *Seduced you?!* What are you talking about?!!”

He nodded seriously. “That’s right. Your dancing under candle light lit by my fire, your gentle smiling and touches, your *entirely exhausting* fight, your words, your rose, *both of your confessions*; You’ve *wooed* me. Are you trying to say that wasn’t your intention?”

“No!” The Prince instantly denied, “I– I was just doing what felt right and what I thought would help! Along with indulging myself a bit admittedly…”
Midoriya looked up at him shyly. “So… How do you feel then, about me?”

“I... don’t know exactly, I need more time to sort through my feelings– for you, myself, and my family. But…”

“May those who accept their fate be granted happiness”

The hand he held over Midoriya’s tightened, while his other hand –*his left hand*– gently accepted the offered rose. He made sure to be mindful of its thorns.

Shouto tried to keep his voice even, “I do know that I… probably like you. At the very least, I want what we have to grow. So– do you think after I have a while to work through my feelings that we can try… hanging out? Sometime?”

Midoriya practically recited a poem of his love for Shouto and that was the best he could do? Try hanging out? Honestly, he needs to step it up– that was just sad.

Despite the sad attempt at asking for a date, Midoriya beamed at him brighter than even fire itself. “Y-Yes! Definitely, yes! Then– do you want to call me Izuku?”

Shouto blinked at him. “Do you want me to call you Izuku?”

The boy in front of him nodded in embarrassment.

“Then… I’ll call you Izuku, yes. And you can keep calling me Shouto.”

While gracing him with a smile as beautiful as the rose in his hand, Izuku leaned up to press a chaste kiss to his scarred cheek once more. And again, Shouto went red all over– but this time, it also made him feel *inexplicably happy*.

Chapter End Notes
References from this chapter:
“Get up, you won’t be able to defeat third-rate villains, let alone All Might, if you get
knocked down by a hit like that.” “I can’t do it anymore. The children, they’re… like
him more and more every day. And Shouto, his left side… sometimes I look at him and
think it’s unsightly.” and “But you want to be a hero, right? That’s fine, you’re not
bound by his blood” are all from bnha.
Also, the Japanese word mawaru means to turn/spin/circle/revolve, so the title of this
chapter is a reference to mawaru penguindrum's title and whenever I emphasize that
things are "circling" in the story that's part of how the themes of this story reflect
mawaru penguindrum's themes.
The Storms that Brew on the Horizon

Tomura had just finished watching the UA Sports Festival with Kurogiri, and he had already known right from the very beginning that it would be utter bullshit this year.

He had known this because Eraserhead – the hero they literally murdered two weeks ago – was one of the announcers for the first years’ festival.

“What the fuck?! He’s dead! How the hell is he a commenter for this shit?!”

His nails were scraping his neck like crazy in agitation, causing blood to well up on his fingertips. Kurogiri gently took his hands by their wrists when he saw Tomura’s bad habit had worsened, but Tomura tore them away from his grip immediately.

“If you keep going like that you could seriously hurt yourself, Shigaraki Tomura,” Kurogiri sighed before looking back to the TV in front of them. “I had also thought Eraserhead was killed, but no matter how you look at it, it seems that his wounds weren’t as immediately fatal as we thought. Recovery Girl must have still been able to heal him in time.”

Tomura gestured at Kurogiri with useless anger. “Bone was showing from his head! How could crushing his skull not be immediately fatal?!”

Kurogiri shrugged helplessly. “There are many particularities behind human biology and health that could have led to the injury looking more serious than it actual was. The only thing we know for certain is that he is alive, and therefore the only conclusion possible is that it wasn’t fatal. Getting angry about it won’t do anything…”

Scoffing in response, Tomura settled in to deal with the bullshit Sports Festival.

And so the two of them watched in relative silence as the hero-wannabes went at it with their pointless games. The damn teddy bear robot that distracted them at the end of their operation made an appearance, along with a bunch of other new and weird shit. The penguin that looked like All Might never showed its face, but at this point it was clear who all of the weird bullshit belonged to.

“Midoriya Izuku, huh? I wonder how such a strange power could have developed…” Kurogiri aimlessly questioned.
“Fuck if I know how someone can get a penguin All Might from their quirk. It’s like he used a mod or something…”

In the end, an enraged looking Bakugou Katsuki was tied to the first-place stand of the podium and Tomura made a mental note to try to recruit the non-heroic kid when an opportunity arose, but there were more important things that needed to be dealt with first…

A different TV screen lit up once the festival had concluded. “Did the anomalies appear again, Tomura?”

“Yes, Sensei. Though there was a different penguin this time, a second robot in black, and a sword wielding mannequin. Apparently they come from the pocket dimension of a kid called Midoriya Izuku. I saw him at the USJ just before All Might arrived. Also, somehow Eraserhead is still alive…”

“I see. It’s disappointing that there were no actual fatalities to leave our mark, but you collected valuable experience and information nonetheless. What did the penguin look like this time?”

Tomura scratched at his neck with one hand. “It wore a crown and had freckles on its face, God knows how…”

“A crown? How… unexpected,” Sensei seemed to pause a moment before continuing with, “Does this Midoriya Izuku also happen to have freckles?”

His fingers twitches as they stopped their movements. “…He does.”

“Excuse my impudence, Sir,” Kurogiri cut in, “but could it be that you have prior knowledge concerning this boy’s pocket dimension quirk? When we mentioned the robot and strange penguin in our report of the USJ attack you seemed to accept their existence fairly quickly as well.”

“I guess you could say that.” The image in the TV turned his back to them and Sensei seemed to gaze into the air aimlessly even though he lacked the eyes to do so. “But this quirk… it appeared long ago and should have already been lost to time. I was quite disappointed that I failed to collect it—It was truly an extraordinary quirk. That it would appear once more in a different child, with three of the exact same beings that it had once created… I wonder how this could have come about…”
All for One turned his head back to them with a grin covering his scarred face. “But I suppose the most important thing is that fate has granted me a second chance. Make sure not to waste it, Shigaraki Tomura.”

In the end, Izuku and Shouto agree to place Shouto’s rose in a vase inside of their ballroom. As a creation from the Garden of Eden, the rose would never die, but it would also reappear back in the Crystal World the next time Izuku transported himself over. Izuku was told by Momoka—*for the sake of his Cinderella*, she specified, not wanting to give him hope for free info in the future— that there was an item that could be used to prevent things born of the Crystal World from automatically returning, but Shouto didn’t want to risk leaving the rose at his house where Endeavor might find it.

So for now, he was content with just visiting the rose with Izuku when opportunities for it came about in the future.

Izuku also asked Shouto to consider telling Shouta-sensei about his father’s abuse to see what the teachers could do about it. Not just because he shouldn’t have to live with the man anymore, but also because Endeavor’s Fruit of Fate was a flashing warning sign that the man’s life was going to sink to the bottom of the ocean like the Titanic at some point. It would really be for the best if Shouto started to prepare for separating himself from that coming storm as soon as possible.

After Izuku had told him that, Shouto was silent for a moment before speaking in a hushed voice, “Aizawa-sensei died for *us*, didn’t he? Have you also looked into his Fruit of Fate?”

Izuku answered the unasked question, “Yes to both, and you don’t need to worry about how he’ll react. He’ll believe you for sure, and he’ll do anything he can to help you. Shouta-sensei is trustworthy, I promise!”

Shouto blinked at him in surprise. “*Shouta-sensei*?”

Izuku blinked back before he waved his arms around in embarrassment. “S-Sorry, that must seem weird! I just— feel close to the people whose Fruit I’ve held—”
“Oh. So that’s why you started calling me Shouto. Along with, you know…” Shouto blushed slightly as he awkwardly referenced Izuku’s feelings, but then he recollected himself with, “Since you’re that certain about him, I’ll consider your suggestion.”

Relief flooded his body at that, thankful that he was able to make real progress with helping one of his loved ones.

_He hadn’t realized that a new problem would present itself in the near future._

The first years had two days off as the school went through the Sports Festivals for the other years. When he went home after the Sports Festival, his mother greeted him with home-made katsudon for dinner to celebrate, as well as some worried fretting from getting a call about his burnt hand.

_Izuku hadn’t had the nerve to tell Mom about his “In Progress” status, he doesn’t even know anything concrete about it yet so there was no point in worrying her about it. Or at least that was what he told himself._

Togata called Izuku to sing praises at him for his “extremely memorable performance, and could I have a chance to ride one of those robots once you get a harness please?” and Izuku thanked him and informed him that he would be added to the line of people waiting for a shot at riding the Teddydrums.

Izuku also watched the third years’ festival and called to return the favor but “what was with you losing your clothes like that Togata-senpai?! You might have placed higher if you didn’t have to worry about that!”

After the short break and a train ride full of people calling out; “Hey, you’re that boy who won the first and second rounds and almost won against the second-place winner!” “The guy with the robots is here!” “You’re Midoriya Izuku right?!” “What does the inside of your pocket dimension look like?” “Hey there penguin kid, good job!” “Where did you learn how to sword fight?” Izuku barely escaped with his life to arrive at school during a rainy morning and see a normal acting Iida, who apologized for worrying Izuku about him and his brother after having left the festival saying Ingenium was attacked by a villain. Izuku accepted Iida’s reassurance, but his worry failed to leave him.

However, he was then intercepted by an abnormally contemplative Kacchan before he could head to class with Iida. He was pulled over to an empty conference room.
“I overheard your conversation with half n’ half in the stadium.”

His stomach dropped at those words, but ultimately… “I-If anyone of our class had to learn about… what happened to Aizawa-sensei, I guess it’s best if it was you since you already know about my quirk. But– can you keep quiet about Shouto-kun’s situation? I’m currently working on it with him…”

Red eyes narrowed themselves at Izuku’s stuttering. “Of course you’re “working on it”– it’s like you’re physical incapable of leaving people in need to fend for themselves. But I guess I shouldn’t complain about it…”

Kacchan uncharacteristically glanced away, then spoke with an apprehensive tone, “ …The Number Two hero was there. Did you get a look at his Fruit too?”

Immediately, Izuku knew what this was about. He gently grasped at Kacchan’s arm and a view of his burning Fruit of Fate emerged. The flames still covered the entire apple, but they had died down even more compared to how they were earlier.

“His Fruit is also burning, Kacchan, but it’s so much worse– Not only is it partially rotted, but at this point even if I wanted to help him recover his fate, I don’t think there’s anything that could be done to avert it. You’re not like him– ”

“But I could’ve been!” Kacchan yelled, “If you didn’t pull my head out of my ass I could’ve ended up just like that fucker! A piss-poor excuse of a human being who hides behind being a “good” hero that wouldn’t be able to accept second-place even if my life depended on it!”

A hand scraped down Kacchan’s scowl. “Fuck! Who am I kidding?! I’m still like that, dammit! I couldn’t even accept a half-baked first-place!”

Izuku jostled the raging boy to take him out of his rant. “Don’t worry about how long it takes to change yourself, Katsuki. You’ve already made a lot of progress– your fruit is already looking better. Just keep doing your best to grow, alright? And if you think it would help, maybe some counseling or anger-management classes would help you further your progress?”

As Kacchan gave a harsh breath out, most of his self-inflicted anger seemed to escape into the air with it. After a few seconds, Kacchan dropped the matter and set his glare back on Izuku. “So how
did you get half n' half to use the fire side of his quirk against you, shitty Izuku?"

A small smile unconsciously formed on his face. “Oh, I just talked with him about his Fruit of Fate and ballroom danced with him.”

A single beat passed before Kacchan sighed, “…Sorry I fucking asked. Fucking ballroom danced with him– I can’t believe an actual real-life Prince Charming like you even exists!”

Izuku had to swallow down a giggle at that, but there was something else that had been on his mind, “Hey, I was wondering… Why do you call me Izuku now, Kacchan?”

Kacchan averted his eyes again. “You said that you wouldn’t accept “Deku” meaning “useless” anymore, but right now if I called you that– that meaning is too ingrained into how I view that name. So I won’t call you Deku again until I can mean it the way you accept the meaning as, since even I can tell you’re not useless anymore…”

“Deku can mean “dekiru”. Deku “can do it”, no matter if it’s impossible, even if it defies fate. I can be the Deku who changes fate and not Deku the useless child with no future. That’s what I want Deku to mean, from now on”

Kacchan sputtered incredulously and his body stiffened when Izuku closed his arms around him in a hug.

“Thank you, Katsuki…” –he really has changed a lot, hasn’t he?

“Don’t thank me for something like that, dammit!”

Kacchan pulled himself out of the hug, but Izuku knew he wasn’t too angry about it because he continued the conversation instead of storming away. “One more thing, that weird-ass mannequin is supposed to be the “Champion” for your arena but it's body was weak as fuck! Why would you call it that?!”

“The Champion of the Rose Bride isn’t the champion of the Dueling Arena and treasury because it’s invincible, Kacchan, it’s the champion because its opposition can never truly defeat it. When its body is destroyed, it just forms a new one at either of those places, and it can do this endlessly. No matter how many times it's put down, no matter how many battles its opponent wins– as long as the fight is
in its battlefield of choice, it will always win the war.”

He noticed that Kacchan was listening to him in a serious manner, so he emphasized his words with, “Not even I would be able to outlast it if the fight had to stay in its territory, and when I’m in the Crystal World, I’m unbelievably powerful.”

Kacchan examined him for another second, then said, “I want a chance to fight with this thing sometime.”

“Uh… but I just said– ”

“I know, shitty Izuku, but the point of fighting it wouldn’t be to win– it would be to get stronger.”

Izuku couldn’t help the proud smile he gave Kacchan in response.

For Hero informatics class, Shouta revealed that Midnight would be helping them choose their hero names along with the hero agency draft picks; Shouto had the most offers at 4,123, then Kacchan at 3,456, while Izuku himself had a hefty 1,995 offers. After that, the majority of the third-round participants received offers from around a couple hundred until it petered out.

“Usually it’s a bit more spread out, but this year three particulars stole most of the attention,” Shouta explained.

Izuku muttered to himself as his classmates discussed the results among themselves, “I’m sort of surprised I was in the same league as Shouto-kun and Kacchan considering I didn’t get past the final 8…”

“What are you saying, Midoriya? You won first-place in both other rounds! Not only that, but some agencies probably would’ve given you an offer anyway just to get a look at your Teddydrums,” Sero sighed from his desk next to Izuku’s, “In comparison, my 14 offers are clearly due to pity– I couldn’t do anything in my fight against Todoroki! Especially compared to how you did…”

Sero then gave him a shifty eyed look. “And will I ever be able to hear about what happened between you two? You’re still calling him Shouto-kun…”
“Hmm, maybe someday,” Izuku vaguely answered before trying to reassure the boy with, “And I’m sure at least a couple of your offers were based on more than just pity, Sero-kun. Don’t Mind!”

Sero just groaned and flopped onto his desk in exasperation.

After the commotion was over, Shouta explained that the names they chose would “bring them closer to cementing a certain image for the future that they saw for themselves”. Midnight explained that they should choose them carefully since they might get saddled with them for the rest of their career – No pressure, right? – and the name reveals began.

“Shining Hero: I Cannot Stop Twinkling~☆!”

“…It will be easier to say if you take out the “I” and contract it to Can’t Stop Twinkling.”

Midnight-sensei please just turn down the name!

As a person who took his princely image seriously, Izuku was unable to accept one of his classmates giving themselves a “knight” theme only to have a name like that. He waved Aoyama to come over as he left the front, and the boy obligingly lowered his ear to Izuku so he could whisper, “Aoyama-kun, uh– since your trying to project a grand knightly image, maybe you should use something like… the Twinkling Hero: Shining Knight?” That seemed like a good compromise at least…

Aoyama looked at him with a blank smile before giving him a thumbs up, rewriting his board, and running back to the front of the class.

“Twinkling Hero: Shining Knight~☆!”

“Oh, that’s much better kid! Good Job!”

Wow, Aoyama-kun actually just accepted it out right. That went better than he expected…

Being right next to him, Sero had heard the whole exchange. He also gave Izuku a thumbs up as he whispered, “Nice save.”
While his classmates continued to present their names, Izuku thought of his own for a minute before writing it down.

*Before he met Toshinori-san, Izuku had come up with a ton of “All Might” based names, but now his image of who he wants to be as a hero is completely different. “Prince of the Crystal” would be too wordy and calling himself a prince in his hero name would probably make him seem pretentious—This should be the name to go with.*

Tsuyu’s name “Rainy Season Hero: Froppy” was both cute and appropriately frog-like. Shouto going with his own name was a good fit for the cute and simple boy who was trying to define himself as his own person. And eventually, it was Kacchan’s turn. While his chosen name “Bakusatsuuo” was a great pun, it was also…

“King Explosion Murder!”

“No good. Try again…”

Ochako’s punny name was much better in comparison—“Uravity” matched her bubbly personality—but when Iida went up with just “Tenya” Izuku felt his worry for the boy surface. It was very unlike him…

Then, it was Izuku’s turn.

“Crystal Hero: Deku!”

–*Izuku is going to be Deku, the hero who changes fate*–

“Eh? Are you sure about that, Midoriya?” Kirishima asked in confusion. Most others in the class shared his confusion.

“Yeah,” Izuku gave a smile to go with his light-hearted but serious response, “I used to hate this name, but now it doesn’t mean “useless” to me anymore.”  *–The old Izuku had never been useless, he was starting to accept that in his heart— “A friend helped me see it as “you can do it, even if it’s impossible” and that’s the kind of hero I want to be!”*
Izuku glanced at Ochako-chan, and she gave him a blooming smile in return.

“Hmm– when you say it like that, it really is fitting.” Midnight winked at him. “Deku it is then!”

As Izuku turned to go back to his seat, he caught Shouta-sensei examining him with his single eye before the man closed it in fatigue once more. Izuku grinned even more at that.

Then, Kacchan gave his shocking revision.

With furrowed brows and a mean grin, Kacchan stuck out his board and announced, “Champion!”

Izuku’s eyes widened as he choked on air. He had to slap a hand over his mouth to keep himself quiet.

“That’s a pretty lofty name to live up to. When you lose battles people will criticize you even more harshly because of it~” Midnight stated this with a teasing tone, but Izuku got the impression that her message was a serious one.

Kacchan growled out with a grin still on his face, “I’ll just tell them to shut the fuck up because I won’t be the Champion because I never lose measly battles– I’ll be the Champion that wins the whole damn war!”

A giddy giggle erupted into Izuku’s palm, unable to contain itself, and Kacchan turned red as he shouted, “Shut up shitty Izuku!”

From her desk, Tsuyu made a sound of realization, “Ah, kero– Isn’t that the name of Izu-chan’s mannequin?”

“I said shut the fuck up!”

After that, the rest of the day went by normally. Izuku took notes for his classes, he managed to flag down both Shouto and Shinsou to join his usual group of friends for lunch, and he ended the day optimistic for the future.
The next day, Izuku woke up feeling the heavy chill of fate down his spine. Then he learned what was wrong with Iida.

It was plastered all over the news—Ingenium’s fate. Iida’s brother had been left paralyzed with his career as a hero cut short due to the Hero Killer Stain.

And yet, Iida still tried to act like not a single thing was wrong.

The first thing that morning, Izuku examined Iida with Conductor. His Fruit of Fate was burning all over with fire that flickered violently, and so at the start of lunch, he pulled Iida over to an empty conference room.

“Iida-kun, stop lying and pretending that you’re fine. I can see just from looking at you that you aren’t.”

Iida stared at him from behind the cold glare of his glasses before his friend turned his face away.

“Even if that’s the case, I don’t see how it’s any of your business, Midoriya-kun.”

At that, he sputtered out, “Wha—What are you talking about? You’re my friend and I’m worried for you! You don’t need to keep it all to yourself, Iida-kun, that’s not healthy. There are certain things about my quirk that you don’t know about—that let me see that you’re not okay—that maybe I can use to help—”

“You’re missing the point, Midoriya-kun,” Iida cut him off harshly, “I may not know anything about
this part of your quirk you’re referring to, but you’ve used it to help Bakugou and Todoroki, haven’t you?”

Shock rang through Izuku.

“How… How did you…”

“Both of their behavior changed drastically after interaction with you. Bakugou is one thing—it could have just been that losing a fight matured him a bit– but Todoroki was using fire since right at the start of your fight, even though he told me just the round before that he would never use it in such a way. And Todoroki is now friends with us, when he had previously stated he wasn’t interested in making friends. They both started out with notable behavioral or ideological issues, and both of these issues were reduced with your help, is that right? Perhaps you even helped Shinsou-kun in a similar way seeing that he is now friends with us as well?”

“Y-Yes,” Izuku swallowed thickly as he forced out the words, “That’s a fair description of what happened. And that’s why I want to–”

Iida gestured for him to stop with an outstretched palm. “But both of Bakugou and Todoroki certainly seem like the type of people who would usually never ask for help, so I’m assuming you just butted yourself into their problems after “seeing that they weren’t okay” as you described it.”

Izuku thought for a moment in consideration. “Technically, Shouto-kun did approach me first about it, but… I suppose the spirit of that is true.”

“I’m not sure what happened between you and Bakugou, or what happened between you and Todoroki, but I do know this– It isn’t right to insert yourself into other people’s affairs when they don’t want you to. That’s an incredibly invasive act. And in my case…” Iida’s face was as much of a stone wall as his words, “I don’t want you to.”

A gasp escaped Izuku’s lips. Dread and pain filled his chest as his world seemed to turn on its axis. It was like Iida’s words had formed into a sword that impaled his heart.

He could only let out a broken whisper, “I… But even if you don’t want my help, Iida, you should still get help from someone. You might hurt yourself, you’re probably even hurting yourself now! And you might even end up hurting other people!”
“I’m not hurting myself, and I don’t need anyone’s help! That’s your outsider-based opinion! I’m the one most able to decide for myself what I need— not you. Do you think that just because your quirk allows you to see such things that you have the right to invade people’s privacy and ignore their free-will? Because it doesn’t.”

Iida walked past where Izuku was standing frozen in place to grasp the doorknob to leave, and he quieted stated his finally words for their conversation.

“You’re a good person, Midoriya, and I know that these instincts to automatically come to other people’s aid are what will make you a great hero. But if you’re honestly not wanted, trying to force yourself into things is wrong, and it just makes you a nuisance. For the sake of our friendship, please respect my boundaries.”

The door was opened to let Iida pass through, and the click that sounded as it closed resounded in Izuku’s ears like a funeral bell. And in that moment, even with his hurricane of thoughts about himself and his actions, he knew that something was truly, truly wrong.

Iida hadn’t mentioned anything concerning the possibility of him hurting other people.
The Original Sin of Humanity

During the week leading up to the heroics course’s workplace training, Iida continued to pretend like nothing had changed, and Izuku didn’t try to speak with him about his Fruit of Fate a second time.

Instead, his thoughts circled around Iida’s words over and over.

“Do you think that just because your quirk allows you to see such things that you have the right to invade people’s privacy and ignore their free-will? Because it doesn’t… If you’re honestly not wanted, trying to force yourself into things is wrong, and it just makes you a nuisance”

“It isn’t right to insert yourself into other people’s affairs when they don’t want you to. That’s an incredibly invasive act. And in my case… I don’t want you to”

Has the way Izuku’s been going about this actually wrong?

He had thought it was okay since he had to help people, since the Fruit of Fate were things that people didn’t even realized existed and if there was a problem with them, it was Izuku’s job as the Prince of the Crystal and owner of Conductor to fix them. These were problems that could have dire consequences if left to fester for too long.

But Toshinori-san had once told him something similar, hadn’t he?

“I don’t think it would be appropriate for you to “take apart Todoroki’s world piece by piece, and then it put together in a strange new way that he could barely comprehend” when he hasn’t even spoken to you, let alone approached you about the subject”

Shouto-kun did approach him in the end, but that fact felt like an excuse when Izuku considered how hard he had tried to purposely work around Toshinori-san’s words by enticing Shouto-kun to approach him about Izuku’s quirk.

Spinning around in mental circles wouldn’t help him; he needed input from the people who were actually the subjects of this issue.
Shouto just responded in his usual stoic tone, “I didn’t want your help, but I was sort of too curious about what you were doing to stop you. I was somewhat concerned at first about how much you learned about me after looking into my Fruit, but I forgot about that by the end of our dance. And I feel like I’m really moving forward towards where I want to go now. You… fell in love with me when you saw all of me, so it ended up being a good thing– I’m glad that you did it.”

*That sort of helps but it also sort of doesn’t…?*

Kacchan just scoffed at him, “Of course I didn’t want your help, shitty Izuku! I was ready to fucking die before accepting help from the likes of you! But you were right to stick your nose into my shit– I didn’t know what was fucking good for me. This is about four-eyes, right? Just ignore his prissy whining and fix his shit if you want to so badly. Who gives a fuck about privacy anyway?!”

*That really doesn’t help…*

It was only after Izuku’s second meet up with Togata that he got the idea to ask Toshinori about all of this. For a boy that seemed like the type to be optimistically oblivious, he was surprisingly perceptive. He immediately noticed Izuku’s depressed mood and gently coaxed answers out of him.

“I… have this part of my quirk that lets me, uh– visualize if there’s something majorly wrong with them emotionally or mentally, but only in a general sense. I can also use it to look into them more thoroughly to know exactly what’s wrong by meeting certain conditions.”

Izuku stared at the iced tea he was holding instead of the attentively watching third year in front of him. “I’ve been using it to help my friends with their issues whenever I saw that there was something wrong with them, but I’ve never really asked if they needed the help because I know just based on how, uh– my quirk works that when problems grow to the extent I can see them, it’s usually somewhat dangerous to the person to leave things as they are.”

His hand clenched around his drink. “But now… one of my friends recently showed signs that his mind set changed into one that has the potential to both lead him to hurting himself and hurting others, but he refused my help, or even getting help from anyone else. I don’t want to ruin our friendship by intruding on his privacy when he explicitly told me not to, but I can’t leave him as he is if it might risk him or other people. I just don’t know what to do anymore…”

A large hand reached from across the small café table to firmly hold onto Izuku’s wrist in comfort. He looked up to see Togata with a serious expression and his bright, golden Fruit of Fate.
“Could this be about your classmate Iida Tenya, Ingenium’s younger brother?”

Izuku jolted in his seat. “H-How…”

“That seemed like the most logical choice for the person you could be talking about, because of what recently happened to his brother,” Togata easily answered his unasked question before continuing, “Listen Midoriya-kun, this a very mature situation for you to be dealing with, so it’s expected that you wouldn’t know what to do about it. Don’t feel like you’re lacking just because you don’t have that sort of experience.”

Togata’s usually cheerful voice held a somber tone to it, “In a situation where you know a friend could be a danger to themselves or others, the best thing to do is report it to a trusted authority figure or teacher that can properly watch over the situation and intervene if necessary. He may say that he doesn’t want help, but in this kind of circumstance, the safety of himself and others takes priority over his privacy and wishes.”

Izuku let go of his drink and allowed Togata to take hold of his hand.

“He might see this as you going behind his back, so I can’t promise that your friendship won’t take a hit. But sometimes— that’s just the kind of decision friends have to make to be the best friend they can be. Hero work is sometimes like that too… Always know that you can talk to me about this stuff.”

Izuku gave a wobbly smile, which Togata returned with his own small grin.

“Thank you, Togata-senpai…” I hope your fate stays as sparkling gold as it is in this moment, he didn’t voice the rest of his thoughts.

With that advice, he met up with Toshinori-san, both to talk about Iida’s Fruit of Fate and ask about his opinion on how Izuku handled addressing other people’s problems with their Fruit.

“My boy…” he sighed while placing a large, bony hand on his shoulder. Izuku was greeted with the sight of Toshinori’s mostly poisoned Fruit. “I’m very glad that you took the chance to trust me with the information concerning your quirk and I’m glad that you’re doing your best to help me overcome my inner demons, so I personally don’t mind that you looked into my Fruit. But I was told recently that different things are best for different people— If young Iida doesn’t want you to intrude into his life in such a way, then you shouldn’t.”
His voice was firm as he elaborated, “However, when it comes to cases that risk the health and safety of other people, I’ve been told that those types of behaviors must be reported. So while it might seem like you are infringing on Iida’s privacy by viewing the state of his Fruit of Fate and telling a teacher he may hurt himself or others, reporting this is the right thing to do. Please let us perform our duty to watch over young Iida in your place.”

Izuku glanced away from Toshinori’s earnest eyes to nervously swallow and ask a question that had been bothering him, “Toshinori-san… If– If I ever become less good, like– I do more things like this wrong, or I start hurting people, would I still be the type of person that can become a hero?”

“My boy,” Toshinori sounded pained, stretching one arm around Izuku to give him a half hug, “Just because you make mistakes doesn’t mean you’re not a good person. You don’t have to worry about the possibility of you becoming a person that actively hurts people– that’s just not the type of person you are.”

That blind faith closed Izuku’s throat shut. He doesn’t tell Toshinori about his In Progress status, or his suspicions on what it may entail.

Talking to both Togata-senpai and Toshinori-san was helpful, but it also made him question whether it was wrong of him to wait for Shouto-kun to make his own decision about reporting Endeavor. Why isn’t the difference between right and wrong more obvious? Wasn’t humanity’s knowledge of that supposed to be their original sin?

If no one actually has true knowledge about right and wrong, then that just means that the original sin and humanity’s collective punishment were empty, worthless things.

At the very least, Izuku knew his current moral issues were unrelated to his punishment, since it concerned actions he's been doing since before his status changed.

In the end, he decided to trust Shouta-sensei, Hizashi-sensei, Toshinori-san, and the Principal to handle the situation. But this brought him back to another issue; what to do about Hizashi-sensei’s poisoned core…

At the very least, there was nothing wrong with telling him about his condition and seeing if he would like assistance.

But of course, he didn’t want Izuku’s help.
Instead, after having been told about the broad explanation that a poisoned core indicates unhealthy thoughts of some kind concerning his quirk, Hizashi just smiled sadly at him from behind his orange face-covering and ruffled his hair. Izuku was greeted with the sight of the purple and gold half Fruit of Fate.

“Thanks for telling me, Izuku, but you don’t need to worry yourself about me. I already know why there’s poison and I have Shouta to help me through that issue. Your awesome teacher will be just fine! Don’t wear yourself down by trying to take on everyone’s problems– all you need to do is focus on yourself and support the people closest to you.”

You are close to me, but Izuku didn’t say that. He knew that Hizashi-sensei did accept their more intimate relationship, but as his teacher the man felt it was inappropriate to allow Izuku to burden himself with Hizashi’s problems.

There was one thing that Izuku could be considered the sole authority of, though, and that was in deciding who to grant knowledge concerning the Children of Fate and the Fruit of Fate. In this avenue, he was finally able to do some good upon being confronted by a blond student with a familiar smug expression on his face.

“Midoriya Izuku, the golden boy of class 1-A. I’m Monoma Neito from 1-B. It’s a pleasure to finally get the chance to properly introduce myself,” the Monoma drawled at him to divert his attention from his friends in the middle of the lunch room.

Izuku took one look at the guy’s condescending smirk and instantly knew what this was about. He told all of his friends except Shinsou to go on ahead. “Nice to meet you. Is it okay if Shinsou-kun comes along to talk too? You both need to be told about the same thing.”

Shinsou, who had joined up with them upon entering the lunch room, raised an eyebrow at him. “Oh? This is about that thing that I was cryptically told I need to know about, isn’t it? Glad I finally get to be let in on the secret, but what does this guy have to do with it?”

“He also got a note from the Principal on how he should use his quirk when it came to me. Right, Monoma-kun?”

Shinsou blinked at that while Monoma carefully observed their proceedings and nodded. “That’s correct. I was told I shouldn’t use my quirk on you at all. My quirk Copy lets me copy other people’s quirks to use them for myself.”
Izuku winced at that. “Oh, God. Yeah that’s– don’t ever use that on my quirk…” –Even if he doesn’t actually use the copied Conductor, just being in possession of it would be enough to tip him over the edge into become a full Child of Fate probably.

“So I’ve been told,” Monoma spoke with a cutting edge to his voice as he narrowed his eyes at Izuku, “But considering how much of a disadvantage this would give me if I were to go against you in future training sessions or Sports Festivals, I would at least like to hear the reason why it would apparently be a safety issue to copy your pocket dimension quirk.”

“Right. Let’s go somewhere we can talk in private.”

After pulling the two Potential Children of Fate into a secluded nearby hallway, Izuku transported all of them to the Crystal World. “This will be easier to explain here.”

Monoma glanced over his Prince of the Crystal outfit and immediately smirked while speaking in an annoying drawl, “Well– I knew class 1-A thought highly of themselves, but I had no idea any of you would be so pretentious as to image yourself as royalty.”

Talking with this guy is going to be a struggle, isn’t it...

“If this is about our supposed fame from the villain attack…” Izuku spoke in an even and neutral tone. Shinsou recognized it immediately and took a large side-step away. “Then you should talk with Tetsutetsu about what I told him when he came to our class spewing bullshit. I’m not having that conversation a second time.”

Monoma’s smirk faltered. “It– It’s not just about the villain attack! You guys must have big heads after doing so well in the Sports Festival, beating out most of 1-B while none of us even made it to the semifinals– I’m just trying to make sure you know you can’t look down on us!”

Monoma-kun was so touchy about this, did he have an inferiority complex or something?

“There is probably only one person in our class that would look down on you guys, and he recently had to be tied to the first-place podium because he didn’t win the way he wanted to. Please don’t confuse yourself by thinking that his behavior is reflective of our class as a whole. And I can at least say for myself that I don’t look down on you or any of your classmates.”
Monoma’s only response was a doubtful hum before he pushed the matter away with, “Can we please get to what we are actually here for now? I would rather not waste all of my lunch in this…” Monoma’s gaze momentarily wandered over the crystal dome and Crystal Palace that was looming over them. “…strange knock-off of a fairytale land.”

“Excuse me— but did I just hear you call my beautifully crafted world a knock-off?!” Izuku’s voice sounded off far away from where he was standing.

Right on que, Izu-pingu came waddling in with Momoka’s Hand Mirror.

Oh great, those two together are never going to shut up…

Izu-pingu joined their group and presented the image of Izuku’s reflection crossing its arms in offense. “Just for that, I’m not going to give you a real name. You just get to be Alice’s Sister— an unnamed, unimportant, lowlife side-character who never amounts to anything in the story!” –It’s almost incredible how Momoka-san always knows just what to say to mercilessly attack a person’s most fragile insecurities and despairing thoughts…

Monoma looked extremely confused and of course had no idea why there was a talking mirror or what Momoka was talking about, but he knew an attack on his person when he heard one— especially one that so specifically targeted his vulnerabilities. Apparently, that was enough to get him to ignore the impossibility of a talking mirror.

“Oh! I’m sorry, but aren’t you supposed to be the unimportant lowlife side-character who never amounts to anything?! You don’t even have your own character! You’re stuck using the reflection and image of an actual human being because you’re not a real person! What right do you have to tell me anything– I’m inherently better than you just by the virtue of actual existing!” –Apparently that was a talent Monoma-kun also possessed…

“What did you just say to me bitch—”

“Don’t talk to Momoka like that–”

“Okay! Okay, everyone just calm down!” Izuku threw his hand up to physically place himself between the two, he knew he needed to stop their train wreck of an argument when even Shinsou was getting involved. “Momoka-san, apologize for calling Monoma a lowlife who will never amount
to anything. Monoma-kun, apologize for saying that Momoka isn’t a real person and doesn’t exist.”

Glaring from the mirror, Momoka barked out an insincere, “Sorry.”

“Sorry,” Monoma’s drawled apology was equal in its insincerity.

*Note to self: never ever bring Monoma-kun back here again*

Turning to Shinsou, he continued, “Shinsou-kun, thank you for coming to Momoka’s defense. I appreciate it and I’m sure Momoka-san does too.”

“That’s right,” Momoka’s tone did a complete 180 and turned into that of a gentle mother’s that matched the kind smile she put on the face of Izuku’s reflection. “Thank you very much for being offended on my behalf, Hitoshi.”

Shinsou’s pale cheeks lit up with faint red as he averted his eyes and nodded in acceptance of their gratitude. Izuku was too busy staring at Momoka. “…You’re actually referring to him by his real name? I thought you called him Alice?”

“Hitoshi is still Alice, but because he’s Hitoshi I want to call him Hitoshi as well.”

Giving up on trying to make sense of Momoka’s behavior, Izuku decided to drastically and permanently change the subject of their conversation by taking his golden apple out of his chest. “Anyway– this is the Fruit of Fate, and it’s the reason why neither of you are allowed to mess with my quirk…”

He explained the system of fate through the incredulous looks his two listeners gave him, and how they really, really didn’t want to get involved in all of that by graduating into actual Children of Fate. When Monoma tried to start an argument about that—probably just for the sake of arguing rather than any genuine interest in damning himself—Izuku just cited the fact that one Child of fate he knew lost all of his stomach and one lung as part of his punishment, and Monoma dropped the matter with a pale face.

After solidifying that both of them would attempt to avoid their damnation, Izuku brought them back for lunch. However, Shinsou met up with him a second time at the end of the day, saying that he wanted to ask something about everything Izuku had told him.
The next time they went to the Crystal World, they appeared in the library. It seemed like Shinsou enjoyed Momoka’s presence, so Izuku thought it would be nice for the boy to get a view of Momoka’s portrait.

“That portrait is of Momoka-san when she was still the owner of the Penguindrum.” Izuku pointed at the picture that rested above Momoka’s Mirror. “She won’t say anything about how she ended up in a mirror, so don’t bother asking.”

Shinsou’s tired eyes gazed intensely at the picture. “…She looks young. And her outfit is even more outrageous than yours.”

“Haha! I used to be a cute child, right Alice?” Momoka boasted, sticking out the chest of Izuku’s image in the mirror.

Shinsou’s eye twitched at the “Alice” comment but didn’t say anything otherwise. It seemed like he didn’t know how he wanted to word what he wanted to ask.

“Shinsou-kun… since you’re here, there was something else that I wanted to tell you about,” Izuku tried to keep the nerves out of his voice, “You know how I said that the Fruit of Fate can have certain… negative conditions?”

“…You saw one of those things on my Fruit, didn’t you?” Shinsou sighed with exasperation.

“Y-Yes. You have a ring of fire burning around the outside. But also– this might be out of line for me to say, but sometimes conditions only affect the inside of the Fruit, especially the core which represents the person’s quirk. So… I was thinking that you might have had negative experiences concerning your quirk which could’ve led to you having an internal issue as well…”
Silence reigned for a while, then Shinsou examined him carefully and responded with a steady tone, “I’m guessing that the fire is from my desire to be a hero. As for the inside— is there a way for you to check for that without being too invasive?”

“Well…” Izuku glanced away. “Both methods I could use involve me removing your Fruit, but I can only really learn information about you from it by “looking into it”, which would let me know what your condition is as well as the reasonings for why it’s there. The other option is just opening it up manually and viewing the inside.”

“In that case, I want you to use the second option. If I do have a condition, I already have a good idea about where it came from— so I don’t need your help with that part of it.”

“If you’re honestly not wanted, trying to force yourself into things is wrong, and it just makes you a nuisance”

Izuku’s throat tightened as he nodded.

Gently, he placed his left hand on the side of Shinsou’s face to lean the tall boy forward towards him, with Shinsou stiffening at the intimate contact. His purple eyes widened as Izuku looked into them, and his right hand slipped itself into Shinsou’s chest. When it came out, it was holding a golden apple with a halo of red-orange fire around the top of it.

Hitoshi stared at his Fruit as though Izuku was holding the answers to the universe in his palm. Izuku allowed the Fruit to float out of his palm and into the air, where it slowly spun on its axis, and a sharp flick of his fingers split it into two halves with a resounding crack. A sharp exhale from Hitoshi echoed it.

Izuku plucked one half from the air to reveal the inside of the Fruit of Fate to the both of them. Thick purple dyed the core and branched out in veins into the meat of the insides.

“It’s poisoned…” Izuku softly explained.

“…If I remember correctly, you said that poisoning means an unhealthy, self-harming mind set?” Hitoshi asked with apprehension.

When Izuku nodded in confirmation, Hitoshi glanced away to let out a bitter laugh, “Ha! Yeah, I
When Hitoshi looked back at Izuku, the look in his eyes had changed, though. They were still
pained, but there was hope in them as well. “You’ve already been helping me out with it without
even knowing about it…”

The dread that Izuku had carried inside of him since hearing Iida’s word lightened at hearing
Hitoshi’s.

He gave his friend a small smile. “I’m so glad I’ve been of help to you, Hitoshi-kun…”

Hitoshi blushed faintly at Izuku’s happiness towards aiding him, but as he gazed at Izuku in thought,
his skin became pale once more and his brows furrowed.

“What I said to you during our fight… I was wrong, wasn’t I? About you not sacrificing anything.
What was your punishment for being a Child of Fate?” he asked with a low, heavy voice.

The smile was wiped off of Izuku’s face.

Hitoshi averted his eyes to look down at his feet. “I’m sorry— both for aggravating you about it
during the fight and for asking about it now. You don’t have to answer if you don’t want to.”

“It’s okay, it’s…” Izuku stared at his father’s portrait as he tried to speak through his closing throat,
“My punishment just says it’s “In Progress” right now, but I think it’s leading me up to a moral
downfall or something? There’s no real way to tell the specifics until it happens.” Hitoshi stiffened at
that, but Izuku continued regardless, “The real sacrifice had to do with my father’s punishment…”

He released the portion of Hitoshi’s Fruit into the air and clenched his fingers to cause the two halves
of the Fruit of Fate to snap back together again. Izuku cradled Hitoshi’s face to place it back into his
chest.

Izuku whispered his next words, “…His punishment was my death. He revived me using
Conductor, but had to use all of his Fruit of Fate for the process. That’s how I got my quirk. It wasn’t
a miracle, it was a tragedy.”
Hitoshi gasped as his eyes widened, and Izuku could feel his face tremble slightly from where he was still holding it. His friend clenched eyes and jaw hard enough that it looked like it hurt.

Hitoshi’s voice also trembled, “Fuck. I’m such a fucking idiot. I’m so sorry. I hurt you about something so horrible for a stupid competition. Everyone always said I would never amount to anything good, I should have expected this–”

“You’re not an idiot. You had no idea about any of this—there was no way for you to know in the first place,” Izuku cut him off with strong words. He placed his second hand on the other side of Hitoshi’s face and tighten his grip, getting Hitoshi’s attention and eyes to go back to him. “Everyone was wrong, Hitoshi, about both you and me. I am going to amount to something, and you are going to amount to good. I promise you that making a mistake like this doesn’t make them right.”

This is probably at least part of what’s poisoning Hitoshi’s Fruit of Fate…

Izuku gave a small smile to his friend. “But thank you for apologizing, what you said was… really hard to hear, so I appreciate it. I accept your apology—so try not to feel guilty about it anymore, alright?”

“…O-Okay,” was Hitoshi’s hoarse response.

Izuku let go of the tall boy’s face to allow him to straighten himself and a frown returned to Izuku’s face as he confessed, “At this point, though, I am a little worried if I will still be able to amount to good by the time my punishment sets in…”

Purple eyes blinked at him in confusion. “Are you talking about that “moral downfall” you mentioned? Maybe I’m making light of your situation too much, but honestly? I don’t see you turning into some crazed murderer or something even if it’s by the decree of some ultimate punishment from fate. Your personality is so different from that, that if I was fate— I’d just think it’d be too much work to bother with.”

It was Izuku’s turn to blink at Hitoshi, and when his mind fully processed that thought, a laugh rang out of him. “Ha! I never thought about fate like that before! That’s certainly an interesting perspective to have on the mystical force that guides the entirety of the universe!”

“Pfft– Little Izuku’s right, Alice. How did you come up with something like that?” Momoka giggled from the mirror.
A shrug and smirk answered them. “Hey— someone’s got to be the one to consider this kind of bullshit, and it’s clear that you’re much too fatalistic about fate to do it yourself. So it’s up to me to pick up the slack.”

Hitoshi’s smirk dropped as he gained a serious expression for his next words though, “Even if you don’t have the same amount of moral rigger as you do now, that won’t be the end of the world. Not everyone can be a moral paragon like All Might— just doing the best that you can will be enough for you to still amount to good, Midoriya.”

The ball of tension that had locked itself inside of Izuku since he read his punishment status half-way untangled itself from the relief given to him by Hitoshi, and he suddenly felt like he could breathe more easily. A smile lit his face once more.

“…Thank you, Hitoshi.”

“I’ve decided to tell Aizawa-sensei about… you know, but can’t we do it after workplace training is over?”

Izuku smiled at him gently—not even questioning Shouto’s assumption that Izuku would be present to support him during this— but he did inquire, “That’s great, Shouto-kun! Is there a particular reason why you want to wait until then though?”

Shouto averted his eyes from Izuku’s genuine gaze of affection—he knew Izuku wouldn’t like this one bit, but he had already decided on it…

“I think it would be too hard to deal with that and still manage to go to Endeavor’s agency for the training, so that’s why I want to wait.”
The moment of silence was brutally loud.

“I-I’m sorry? You want to go to Endeavor’s agency?! Why?! You don’t need to force yourself like that, it’s okay for you to be attentive to your feelings!” Izuku yelled in a worried manner.

Shouto felt a fire inside of him softly warming his chest at Izuku’s concern. “He’s a horrible father and person, but he’s still the Number Two hero— there must be something he’s doing right with his work. I want to use him to advance my own career as much as possible.”

He unconsciously glanced down at his left hand. “Also… I visited my mother recently. That helped me realize that I don’t need to hold on to my conviction to not use my fire. He’s the best person to teach me how to use that part of my quirk, and there’s a lot of work I need to do to catch up on it…”

There was more silence, before warm arms wrapped around him. Izuku spoke with a soft and kind voice, “I’m happy for you, Shouto.”

He felt himself stiffen, but then released the tension in his body to return Izuku’s hug.

Izuku sighed, “Well, if you’re so set on it, there’s nothing I can do to stop you— but will you at least agree to a backup plan to remove you if he’s endangering your safety? Actually, it’d be good for you to have that just for being at home regularly too…” Izuku backed himself out of their embrace to look at Shouto, but still kept his hands placed on Shouto’s arms.

“He’s not going to do anything when other people are there to watch him.”

“Maybe if it was all third-parties yeah, but there are times when the only people around will be the people from his agency, right?” Izuku firmly explained, “In that case, he might be able to get away with something since he can threaten to fire them if they try to report his behavior.”

Shouto blinked at that. “Oh… I guess you have a point. That sounds like something he would do. What did you have in mind, though?”

After being spirited away to the Crystal World, Shouto was standing in front of a mirror featuring his image alongside an image of Izuku with pink irises —This must be that “Momoka-san” Izuku told him about.
“Momoka-san, Shouto-kun wants to go to his father’s agency for the workplace training I told you about. Do you have anything that could bring him back here if he needs to leave?”

Momoka narrowed her eyes at them. “Cinderella wants to voluntarily be involved with the Evil Queen who forced him into pain, isolation, and servitude?”

_Evil Queen? Cinderella?

“Evil Queen?” Izuku echoed his thoughts, “Not that I don’t think it’s fitting but…”

“You know, like the Evil Queen from Snow White who was jealous of her beauty? In this case he’s also doubling as Cinderella’s evil stepmother.”

“Do you _really_ have to mix stories like that? This is getting confusing…”

Shouto turned that idea over in his mind before asking, “Wait… Does that mean All Might is _Snow White_?”

Momoka giggled with a smirk, “Haha! That’s right, my Prince’s dear Cinderella!”

Izuku flushed and covered his cheeks with his hands at her words. “M-Momoka-san! I told you to not call him that!”

“Does that mean I get to be Izuku’s princess?”

The two stopped to stare at him.

Shouto promptly turned red when he realized he lost his brain-to-mouth filter. “That… That was a stupid question– ”

Momoka cut off his attempt to salvage the situation by chiming, “You will be his _prince_, Shouto, my
dear future in-law and child that needs to be protected from the evil of *adults*. Unless, of course, you *want* to be his princess instead.”

A sly smile was sent Izuku’s way. “*Keep this one*, little Izuku. I sense great things from him. Also, in the treasury there’s a ball of red string that you can make bracelets out of. If you kiss a bracelet and say “You Will be Our Red String of Fate”, then when Cinderella wears it he can use it to complete the Survival Strategy spell exactly one time. Though he’ll only be able to transport himself to the library.”

A red looking Izuku sighed at Momoka’s antics but thanked her for the help. From what Shouto has heard, she’s not usually so forth coming with information, but it seemed like she likes him at least.

As Izuku guided him to the treasury, Shouto realized he forgot something.

“Where will you be going for your workplace training, Izuku?”

Izuku beamed in excitement.

“I got an offer from the Winged Hero: Hawks’s agency! Not only is Hawks the Number Three hero, but he can fly too—so I’m hoping to learn more about how to utilize my Teddydrums’ flight! Also, we’re both bird-themed, kind of, so why not?”
After hearing that Iida was headed to a hero agency in Hosu City, Izuku freaked out. But Shouta-sensei assured him that the teachers in the know for the condition of Iida’s Fruit had already ascertained that Iida could be planning on pursuing the Hero Killer, so they had contacted the head of the agency—a hero named Manual—to inform him of the risk. Manual promised that he wouldn’t let Iida out of his sight.

“Since he hasn’t actually done anything, and there’s no proof that this is what he’s planning, we can’t prevent him from going,” Shoua explained, “I will be speaking to him before he leaves to reinforce that the teachers are aware of this risk, though, to dissuade him from trying something.”

Izuku tried to tell himself that things would be okay. He even tried venting about the situation to Togata to release some of his tension—what was the likelihood that Iida would even be able to find the Hero Killer, that the Hero Killer was even still there, even if he did manage to lose Manual?

But unfortunately, Izuku knew fate. And he knew that if something unlikely was meant to be, fate would find a way to make it happen.

All he could do was hope that it wasn’t meant to be.

During that same conversation, Shouta also asked him his opinion on whether Hitoshi would be a good candidate to join their class and whether he could become a successful hero in the future.

Shouta also had to wrestle him down into a chair to physically stop his endless babbling about how “Hitoshi will be a great hero and I didn’t even look into his Fruit but I know that he is such a good person but I don’t think he knows how good he is but I want him to know so badly—Please give him a chance, Shouta-sensei, I don’t know how but in someway fate’s been so cruel to him, he needs this chance, please—”

After Izuku had calmed down and felt thoroughly embarrassed of his behavior, Shouta assured him he would take Izuku’s testimony into consideration.

Sometime later in the week, he also found out that Tokoyami was going to Hawks’s agency as well—making him consider that perhaps Hawks was purposefully choosing bird-themed students. He doesn’t really know what it would say about the man if he was, but he can’t hold it against him when that consideration had also crossed Izuku’s own mind for both this training and the second-round of
the Sports Festival.

After hearing Izuku was going to the same place as him, Tokoyami had this strange look on his face—almost like he was both excited for and despairing the situation simultaneously. Izuku had no idea why that would be, though, so maybe he was just looking into it too much.

Before heading off to workplace training, there was one more thing Izuku absolutely had to know as soon as possible. At this point, not knowing was keeping him up at night. Learning this piece of information was essential if he wanted to have a productive week.

“Toshinori-san!” Izuku launched right into it as soon as he had cornered the man in a private conference room, “What did Sir Nighteye decide for his penguin’s name?”

Toshinori blinked at him. Then shied back while hesitantly asking, “Is… that’s not something that needs to be discussed now, is it? I’m sure you have much better–”

“So you have been purposely avoiding giving me the answer to this.” Toshinori stiffened at being caught red-handed. “What’s so bad about naming Nighteye’s penguin that you wanted to avoid it?”

Sighing, Toshinori glared at the ground.

“…It’s Yagi.”

“…Excuse me?”

“Nighteye’s name for his penguin—” Toshinori started again, with a stronger but more exasperated tone, “is Yagi!”

Exactly three seconds passed while Izuku stared blankly at Toshinori.

On the fourth second, he began howling with laughter, “Ha! Oh my God! Yagi! He named it after you?! Because they annoy you so much?!”
“It’s not funny! It’s bad enough that Toshi-pingu mocks me without even being capable of speech! I don’t need a fat, flightless bird named after me!”

“This is the best! I wish I could tell Togata-senpai everything now just so I could tell him about the penguin Nighteye named Yagi! Ha!”

“I said it’s not funny! Stop laughing at me!”

And so, it was with a clearer but still worried mind that Izuku and Ochako sent off Iida at the train station the morning of the beginning of their workplace training week with the promise to listen to him if he needed to talk.

*However, he already knew that talk would never come…*

It was during the long ride to Kyushu on the bullet train that Tokoyami dramatically began a very unexpected conversation.

“Midoriya…” The dark bird boy eyed him carefully from his seat across from Izuku’s. “You… can see and reach into the hearts of others, can you not?”

Izuku choked on air.

“How– How did you– !”

“It was plain to see, after you touched both Bakugou and Todoroki’s hearts.” Tokoyami closed his eyes, sitting back in his seat while nodding to himself. “That is two of the most troubled in our class that have been healed by your presence. Your capability for understanding human thoughts and emotions with only behavioral ques to go off of must be quite extraordinary indeed. You are a
Creator of Madness that works to bring order to those who madness dwells within…”

Wait... so he’s referring to “hearts” figuratively then? What a relief...

Significantly calmed down, Izuku questioned Tokoyami in a more collected manner, “You’re the second person that’s noticed I’m connected to Kacchan’s and Shouto-kun’s change in behavior… is it really so obvious?”

“Perhaps our more unobservant classmates wouldn’t have noticed, but even one with an average sense of observation would notice that both you and Todoroki have suddenly started referring to each other by your personal names and started spending time together.”

“Ah… I see.” He has a good point, that’s a pretty obvious que something happened...

“The reason why I bring this up,” Tokoyami continued, placing a hand on his chest in a flourish, “is because due to this— you must have already realized the troubles that dwell within me, correct?”

Conductor turned on to show Tokoyami’s perfectly golden Fruit of Fate.

People need to stop putting their conditions inside of their Fruit where he can’t see them...

Izuku decided to cold read this.

“Not to the same extent as with Kacchan or Shouto-kun, but…” If it’s inside the Fruit, it’s probably— “your quirk...”

Tokoyami’s eyes widened slightly for a second.

“You’re having some sort of issue with your quirk, I think?”

Crossing his arms over his chest, Tokoyami gained a satisfied look on his face that matched his knowing tone, “It is as you say. As I thought… you had already seen through me from the very beginning...”
No, it’s just that you told me just now… Izuku didn’t say.

“That is why I knew from the moment that you said we were going to the same place for the workplace training.” Tokoyami continued his long-winded introduction to whatever issue he wanted to talk about, “that it must be my turn to receive your guidance. The alignment of our persons could only be the work of fate. It was simply meant to be.”

Well now it is! Talk about self-fulfilling prophecy… Wait a second, is this how Izuku sounds like to other people when he talks? That certainly sounded like the kind of thing he would say… But more importantly–

“It isn’t right to insert yourself into other people’s affairs when they don’t want you to. That’s an incredibly invasive act. And in my case… I don’t want you to”

“Do you… want my guidance, Tokoyami-kun?” Izuku asked with wary apprehension.

Tokoyami nodded. “It would be most helpful.”

A giddy sense of relief filled Izuku’s core and Tokoyami instantly became Izuku’s new favorite person.

Finally! A person that wants help!

He forced himself to keep a smile off his face as he asked, “So what problem are you having with Dark Shadow? Does this have to do with what you said during the Sports Festival about him being harder to control at night?”

Tokoyami hummed in confirmation, “Yes. Truthfully, I was somewhat understating the matter. He becomes so unruly and aggressive at night that I am hesitant to sleep without a light present to assist in keeping him down.”

The bird boy then averted his gaze to look down at his hands, which were nervously fiddling with each other. “Perhaps this is too outside of your expertise to fully address, but do you have any idea on how I might learn to control him more?”
Izuku turned the matter over in his thoughts and realized something, “Dark Shadow is sentient, right? And can make decisions apart from your own.” —even though he doesn’t have his own Fruit.

“That is correct.”

“But he’s connected to your life and being; as in, he can only die when you die?”

“That is also correct.”

Izuku let his smile bloom on his face. “In that case— he’s just like Izu-pingu!”

Tokoyami stared at him in confusion.

“Your tiny, adorable penguin…” disbelief was clear in his tone, “is like my monstrous, raging Being of Darkness?”

“Yes,” Izuku easily dismissed the boy’s doubts, “Firstly; they’re both birds.”

One of Tokoyami’s eyes twitched.

Izuku ignored it. “Secondly; Izu-pingu is also connected to my life and being, and is also sentient just like Dark Shadow.”

Tokoyami steepled his hands in thought. “Is that so… have you ever had any problems with getting Izu-pingu to listen to you?”

“Not exactly, but I do have another penguin that’s connected to someone else that’s known to… not get along with his human, to say the least. So the penguins are capable of rebelling, but all listen to me anyways.”

Tokoyami tilted his feathered head as his curiosity increased. “How intriguing. Still, I imagine
penguins would be easier to control than Dark Shadow since they’re more docile.”

*He doesn’t know if he would describe them, or at least Toshi-pingu, as docile…*

“There’s something I don’t get though…” Izuku stared into Tokoyami’s golden Fruit of Fate despite knowing he couldn’t see the answers there. “Why is Dark Shadow acting out in the first place?”

His classmate blinked at him. “What do you mean?”

“I mean— if you’re comparing the situation to trying to tame an animal, the animal in question isn’t acting out for no reason. They only become violent because of *something*; hunger, feeling threatened, trying to defend its territory— When it comes to aggression and violence, they mostly work the same as people, except people can also consider *enjoyment of violence* as part of their reasoning…” Izuku explained his thoughts in a serious manner.

He bored his eyes into Tokoyami’s. “So, what’s *Dark Shadow’s* reason?”

Looking down at his seemingly normal shadow, Tokoyami heavily intoned, “…*I don’t know.* I had never considered that before.”

Izuku looked away from Tokoyami’s Fruit of Fate to also looked down at Tokoyami’s shadow, and thought of how *crushed* Izu-pingu would be if he ever heard Izuku call him a *monstrous, raging Being of Darkness*.

“You know… one thing that’s sometimes annoying is that the penguins can’t speak, so it can be hard to understand the depths of their thoughts and feelings.”

Izuku turned off Conductor. He recognized that in this situation, what Tokoyami needed wasn’t *him* being the one to tell him what was wrong.

“But Dark Shadow *can* speak. He can tell you everything about what his reasonings and feelings are like if he lets you listen, and if you let yourself listen to what he is saying.”

He waited until Tokoyami looked back up at him so they could properly make eye contact, before
emphasizing his point, “So, my advice is to start trying to talk to him more. Just start small, with little things like what he likes, and his thoughts throughout the day, and then maybe he will tell you himself what you guys can do together to come to an agreement.”

“That was so beautiful… It makes me want to cry a little! Your friend is so much nicer than you Fumikage!” a distorted voice cried out.

Both Izuku and Tokoyami whipped their heads around to see Dark Shadow lurking to the side away from the train windows. He was rubbing at one of his lit-up eyes with a large claw. “D-Dark Shadow!” Tokoyami exclaimed in shock.

Dark Shadow sniffed quietly before crossing his arms over his imitation of a chest. “What, are you going to tell me I’m not allowed to be out on the train? You guys are the ones that were talking about me when I can hear you!” he defensively accused.

“I don’t have a problem with you being out, Dark Shadow! I think this would be a nice chance to get to know you better.” Izuku glanced at Tokoyami, hoping he would pick up the message.

Tokoyami looked into Izuku’s eyes, then looked back at Dark Shadow. “To conserve energy for the workplace training, I don’t believe it would be wise for you to stay out the whole ride– But… there is nothing wrong with you getting the chance to be out for a while.”

Gesturing to the seat next to him, Tokoyami crouched in on himself while nervously offering, “Do you… want to sit with us, Dark Shadow?”

Warily eyeing his human, Dark Shadow accused, “Do you even want me to sit with you, Fumikage?”

“I do!” Tokoyami leaned forward and shouted, before pulling back to recollect himself. His next words were a quiet murmur, “I’m sorry, Dark Shadow, it seems that I haven’t paid enough attention to what you want. So… if you want to sit with me and Midoriya, I also want to sit with you.”

Dark Shadow gazed at Tokoyami for a moment. Then, his beak formed a sad smile.

“You were always the type of child that kept your deepest, most honest feelings to yourself
because you were scared of what would happen when you let them free. While I was the type of child that simply couldn’t understand why you would bother hiding those things in the first place,” Dark Shadow sighed fondly and floated into the seat next to Tokoyami, “When it comes to that kind of thing, meeting in the middle is always the best way to make children play nice, isn’t it?”

A large, black claw reached up to ruffle Tokoyami’s feathers. “I may get wild sometimes—and I’m sorry about that– but the thing that I always want most of all is to protect you, Fumikage! So you don’t need to be scared of me– I promise…”

Tokoyami’s red eyes widened and he crouched into himself a little more, as though he was trying to hide his blush. Though it couldn’t really be seen through the feathers and beak anyway.

“Thank you, Dark Shadow…”

Activating Conductor, Izuku could see water dripping out of the center of the bottom of Tokoyami’s Fruit of Fate.

If he had to guess, Izuku would say that there’s probably also some poison in his core but… It seems like that will go away on its own just fine as well.

Izuku watched over the two with a small smile on his face.

After hours of transit, Izuku and Tokoyami were finally in Kyushu at the agency owned by the Number Three hero. Their introduction to said top hero was an… interesting experience to say the least.

The first sight of Hawks was of him landing gracefully onto the roof of the building after flying back from a patrol, and it made a cutting impression.
He was young for a pro hero, especially one of his rank, but in the air he looked every bit of the reliable, seasoned hero that he was. Izuku had already seen the hero from pictures and videos on TV and the internet of course, but none of those images could properly give life to the man’s bright red wings. It was a color that would be more associated with some tropical bird than any kind of hawk, but their large size and encompassing wingspan certainly conveyed the type of power that is associated with those birds of prey.

Hawks’s Might Wings fluttered slightly as he touched down on the cushioned landing pad, and Izuku looked forward to getting to see the hero fully stretch them out while in the midst of a flight. Even just catching the tail end of his flying was a memorable sight. Descending from the heavens, he almost looked like an angel.

Then when Hawks sauntered over with a lazy grin and half-lidded eyes to casually talk to them, he lost most of the impressive image he projected earlier.

“Hey– the hatchlings have arrived! I hope your guys’ trip wasn’t too tiring, because I pride myself on going full speed 100% of the time. The only free time heroes’ have is when they sleep, you know, but man I wish I could just laze around!” Hawks joked while sticking out his hand for handshakes.

Tokoyami received him with his usual reserved manner while Izuku felt a nervous smile on his face. When he returned the handshake, Hawks’s loose grip and low-energy movement seemed to signal that he saw it as a completely obligatory social interaction.

“The Jet-Black Hero: Tsukuyomi, Tokoyami Fumikage, and the Crystal Hero: Deku, Midoriya Izuku, right? One of my sidekicks will lead you to the rooms you’ll be staying in and where you can change into your hero costumes. After a lunch break you’ll both get to come on patrol with me and my sidekicks,” Hawks raced through their introductions, pointing at each of them respectively, while ambling to the stairs leading down into the building before either of them could get a word out. He waved at them without looking back as he descended the stairs out of their sight.

“Sorry about the rudeness. When it comes to the public, he tries harder to slow down so they know he’s paying attention to them, but otherwise when it comes to work he’s always speeding through things as fast as possible…” the sidekick that brought them up to the roof, who had introduced himself as Horus, awkwardly explained, rubbing at the back of his head.

Izuku kindly responded with, “Ah… That’s understandable. As the Number Three hero, he must be very busy.”
Tokoyami crossed his arms over his chest. “There is such a thing as going too fast, though…”

Questioningly, Izuku glanced at the elevator that they themselves had taken to get up to the roof. The sidekick noticed his gaze.

“We had the elevator of this building modified to reach the roof in case of medical emergencies, but Hawks never takes it himself if he can help it. He doesn’t like waiting for the elevator to come up.” Horus shrugged as he pressed the elevator button to head back down.

“Is that so…” Hawks seemed very laid-back in his interviews, but he actually takes his work quite seriously. It’s like all three of the top three heroes are consumed by their work in different ways.

*Considering the Fruit of Fate for the other two of the top three heroes, that doesn’t really bode well for Hawks…*

Then the two of them got to see yet another side of the Number Three hero, one that was more similar to the kind of image he projected to the media.

Izuku hadn’t expected the support department to be able to finish making the desired adjustments to his costume with only a week to work on it, so he had been surprised to hear that his costume now had his requested long, warm black coat featuring coat tails and golden shoulder pads that was designed to be easily removed and left open to show the signature regal golden buttons and trim of his shirt. The red cape had been redesigned to be attached to the coat now instead of his shirt and his penguin headphones had been transitioned to double as ear protectors. He now also had a holder on his belt for his sword and its sheath, and of course, two harnesses were delivered for him to attach to each of his Teddydrums.

When he opened his case to change into his costume, though, his confusion dissipated upon seeing a note written by his previous teammate from the support department.

*Ten Million!*

*I personally rushed your order out in time for your workplace training, so don’t you dare forget to bring me to your babies’ Workshop! Consider this my entrance fee!*

-Hatsume Mei

*Damn, he was hoping that Hatsume-san would forget. How naïve of him…*
Tokoyami read the note from over his shoulder. “I believe “Creator of Madness” is a title that is more appropriate for that girl, now…”

“The shoe definitely fits…”

Just as they had both finished changing into their costumes – Izuku vaguely noted that the long length of the coat, with its coat tails stopping around his knees, made him look even more penguin-like than previously – Hawks dropped by out of nowhere. “Hey, Midoriya-kun! Did you get a harness like they talked about during the Sports Festival, cause if you have one…” he trailed off upon seeing Izuku in his costume. Hawks’s staring made his hawk-like black eye-markings and brown irises pop out.

Izuku glanced around himself nervously, trying to find something else that the hero could be looking at, but it was clear that his stare was focused on none other than Izuku. “Uh… is there something wrong? Hawks-san?”

Hawks blinked once, then a sprawling grin stretched across his face and he pointed at Izuku. “You’re penguin-themed!” he exclaimed in excitement.

Izuku blinked back at him. “…Yes?”

“This is great!” Hawks pumped his fist in the air. “Now all three of us are birds!”

Off to the side, Tokoyami choked on air, but Hawks ignored it. Instead, his half-lidded eyes widened and he slapped a hand to his face as though he had divined an outstanding realization. His grin grew even wider.

Hawks laughed, “Ha! You’re a penguin! That can fly! Oh my God, this is– this is incredible! I’m so glad I sent you an offer!”

“Thanks, I guess?”

With narrowed eyes, Tokoyami could no longer contain his exasperation, “Why– what are you even talking about with all three of us being birds?! And why does something like that matter?!”
Hawks presented one of his small red feathers to them, pinching it between his thumb and forefinger. “Well you see, Tokoyami-kun, part of the reason why I chose you is because we’re both birds! And I decided to make Midoriya-kun an honorary bird because of his penguin mascot, but now I see that he’s an actual bird just like us!”

Tokoyami stared at the bird hero with his mouth agape. “Are you joking…?!”

“No, I’m 20% serious.”

Izuku nodded to himself. “That makes sense…”

“It doesn’t!” Tokoyami yelled at him, “It doesn’t make sense at all! Why does it matter if we’re all bird-themed?!”

“Aesthetic!” both Izuku and Hawks answered at the same time.

Tokoyami suddenly lost all will to fight. He sighed in defeat and just turned his back on them to silently mope away. “My normal common sense is no match for the chaos brought by the Number Three hero and the Prince of Hearts and Madness…” –His epithet for Izuku was even more outrageous now.

Seeing that Izuku was on the same page as him, Hawks stuck his palm out towards him for a high-five with a smirk on his face. Izuku hesitantly returned the high-five. As their hands slapped together, Izuku saw that the top half of the Fruit of Fate in Hawks’s chest was frozen.

Why does fate always have to make everything complicated…?
“Hello? Gran Torino sir, are you in here– Oh dear…”

Gran Torino, a hero that Mirio had known to be All Might’s old teacher due to Sir mentioning him previously, sent Mirio an offer to go to his agency for his workplace training this year. Sir had suggested for Mirio to try this new opportunity –stating that getting some mentoring from a new perspective would help him broaden his horizons– but for some reason had looked put off about the idea despite advocating for it.

Could it be because of Sir’s and All Might’s separation? But it seemed like they had begun talking again after getting acquainted with Midoriya-kun…

Nevertheless, Mirio accepted Sir’s suggestion and was now at the rundown building of Gran Torino’s agency to carefully examine the scene before him. There was a short, old man –presumably Gran Torino– face down on the ground on top of some sausage-links, with red liquid surrounding him that looked to viscous and bright to be blood –ketchup maybe?– Still, the man had clearly fallen and might be unconscious.

He rushed to the Gran Torino’s side to take his pulse, only for the old man to suddenly pop back up on his own with a smile on his face. “I’m alive!”

Mirio responded with a jovial but professional tone, “Haha! Well that’s good to hear! Still, you may still require medical assistance, so may I take your pulse and call an ambulance for you sir?”

Gran Torino stared at him with his dumb smile for a second before his face pinched into a grouchy pout. “Hmf! You’re too well trained for that prank to be fun– as expected of a protégé from Nighteye. What’s your name, boy?”

Mirio straightened up to give an energetic grin and stuck his thumb towards his chest. “Lemillion! But you can refer to me using my civilian name, Togata Mirio!” He wasn’t put off by the strange prank– there were lots of different types of humor in the world.

Gran Torino nodded at him approvingly and a mean grin formed on his wrinkled face. “Let’s see what your made of kid!” he exclaimed as he rushed at Mirio.

Not having enough time to dodge, Mirio used his quirk Permeable to turn his torso intangible and Gran Torino passed through his body to land on the wall behind him just as his shirt fell through and onto the floor.
Mirio spun around preparing for a second hit, but Gran Torino just scowled at him. “Losing your shirt is a penalty! When you lose all of your clothing, you lose! And we start over again and again until I say you’ve improved your precision enough to stop.”

*Well, this just got a lot harder…*

Even so, Mirio grinned at the challenge.

*“Yes, sir!”*
“Shinsou, after school today report to classroom 1-A. Eraserhead wants to speak with you.”

Those words from Cementoss-sensei pushed a nervous anticipation into Hitoshi that he carried with him throughout the entire day. He forced himself to not wonder why he was being called upon, not wanting to get his hopes up. That nervous anticipation grew as he walked towards 1-A and peaked when he stood directly in front of the closed door. He stared at it stupidly instead of opening it.

_Come on, Hitoshi, get a grip. Calm down and just lift your hand to open the door– you can do this…_

The door opened with a loud click, followed by his loud footsteps as he entered the mostly empty room.

Eraserhead was behind the podium leafing through some papers with the eye covered by his medical eyepatch facing Hitoshi. At the sound of the door, he immediately turned his head to look at him with his other eye.

“None of you guys have seen our homeroom teacher, Eraserhead, yet– have you?... He’s also missing his left eye. They couldn’t fix it. He’s half blind now.”

Hitoshi felt his throat thicken at the reminder of his hero’s injury and forced himself to not gulp.

Eraserhead spoke with a cool, stoic tone, “Shinsou Hitoshi, are you still interested in joining the heroics course?”

Hope involuntarily sprang up in his chest– he pushed it back down so that he could answer without sounding embarrassingly desperate, “Yes.”

His hero nodded absentmindedly, as though he had already figured that but was simply confirming it, and got straight to the heart of the matter, “As you know probably know, there is currently an available spot in my class, and I believe you have enough potential to fill it.”

_Is this happening? Is this really happening? Is something like this even possible, for someone like_
“May those who defy their fate be granted glory”

“However, I would like to raise your physical abilities first before officially admitting you. With my class gone for the week, this is the perfect opportunity to begin your training. When you can be admitted depends on you and how fast you progress. Compared to the other heroics students, you’re already lagging far behind, so if I see that you aren’t giving this your all I will pass you over to look for another candidate. Do you understand this?” Eraserhead stared down at him with his single, intimidating black eye.

“Yes!” Hitoshi shouted out frantically before he pulled himself together, “I understand perfectly, Eraserhead-sensei. This is my only chance, I don’t plan on wasting it.”

Eraserhead looked over his emotional outburst. “Good, and call me Aizawa. We start now. First thing once school ends every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday meet me at the training grounds I will be showing you today for a two-hour session. Every Saturday we will have an extended four-hour session starting at 8 am, and I will provide lunch after the session is over. For this week, we will be meeting every day though to take advantage of the extra time I have. Do you have any objections, or do you believe your foster parents will have any?”

“No, Aizawa-sensei. And my foster parents won’t care.” And Hitoshi should really just leave it at that, should really just accept his good fortune without question, but he couldn’t help but ask, “May I… know the reason why you chose me for this opportunity?”

“Your quirk is perfect for non-combative villain take downs and deescalating conflicts,” Aizawa answered with a professional sense of critical examination, “Of course, the potential of one’s quirk isn’t the only thing that gets taken into account– a person’s character is also an essential aspect when looking for an ideal future hero. I understand that quirks like the kind you have are often looked at with mistrust, but I don’t prescribe to that type of irrational thinking and assumptions– ”

Hitoshi breathed in sharply despite feeling like he was physically incapable of breathing.

“–Admittedly, I would usually wait for a longer time before presenting an offer like this so that I and other members of the faculty could observe you for a time to more fully understand your personality and character. But as far as I’m concerned, that legwork has already been done in this case.”
Hitoshi’s confusion allowed him to emerge from his giddy sense of wonder and breathlessness to furrow his brows and ask, “What do you mean by that, exactly?”

“Midoriya vouched for you, *extensively,*” Aizawa emphasized that word with a frustrated echo to his voice, as though Midoriya had been exhaustingly excessive with his vouching, but his next words rang with sincerity, “He’s skilled in judging people’s character and I trust his word implicitly, there’s no point in wasting time verifying it for myself when that’s good enough for me.”

Light happiness filled his chest, to think that he would have a friend now that was willing to vouch for him, and to the point where it annoyed his teacher even. He would’ve thanked Midoriya if he wasn’t so embarrassed by the “to the point where it annoyed his teacher, who happened to be Hitoshi’s favorite hero” part.

“You must really trust him a lot, then…” From what he knew, Eraserhead wasn’t the type of person that just took people’s word for it.

Aizawa gave a casual shrug in response, but Hitoshi knew that this kind of thing was anything but casual. The man left the podium to walk towards the door.

“You can call your foster parents to inform them your new training schedule, then we’ll head down to the lockers so you can change into your PE outfit.”

Hitoshi obligingly took out his phone despite knowing that the family he lived with wouldn’t give a shit about him staying out later or his training other than in expressing their disbelief at him even being considered for the heroics course. But right now, their disbelief wouldn’t bother him one bit—Aizawa-sensei’s belief in him was the only thing that mattered in this moment.

It’s been a full two days since Izuku started his workplace training and for the life of him, he could not figure out what was “stuck” about Hawks.
In fact, Hawks was probably the least-stuck person Izuku had ever seen in his life. It was probably physically impossible for him to go through his hero work faster than he already was. His feathers could separate from his wings for him to control, giving him the immense power of efficient multi-tasking, and his speedy flying gave him an equally speedy response time to crime.

Hawks was so fast, that it was actually more efficient for him to leave his sidekicks to run after him. By the time he had resolved an incident, his sidekicks would have finally caught up to perform clean up duty with the area and police, and he would leave to continue the patrol looking for problems from the air.

Endeavor may have the highest record for number of cases resolved, but he also had at least 20 years of a head start compared to Hawks. At the rate Hawks was going, he was sure to surpass his record in the near future.

Izuku had brought out both Teddydrums to ride on Teddydrum Black with a white harness while Teddydrum White was free to remotely assist, and while they could easily keep up with Hawks’s more leisurely paced crime-scanning speed, they had to push it to full throttle to follow him once he really got going. Most of the first day was spent on getting the Teddydrums to learn how to push their rockets to go faster and catch up without breaking their engines. And despite Izuku telling Teddydrum White to actively aid Hawks depending on the situation they encountered, Hawks was so good at doing everything by himself that he only ever asked for the robot to do heavy-lifting work for him, which would require the combined use of many feathers for him to accomplish himself.

Even though Izu-pingu was hiding in the empty holding space inside Teddydrum Black’s chest to be taken out when needed, he was never put to use, and Izuku himself hadn’t even gotten the chance to personally help either.

*Izuku just wasn’t acting fast enough. By the time he gets an idea of what to do, Hawks-san was already in the middle of doing his own thing and him acting would just get in the way. That had been his problem during his fight with Shouto-kun as well. He needs to be faster if he wants the opportunity to bring a fight to his world.*

Izuku could tell that Teddydrum Black had been proud and satisfied to get what it saw as the most important job—guarding Izuku—even if he didn’t actually get to do much other than fly Izuku around, but Teddydrum White had been frustrated to only help out in such a minor way when Izuku had ordered it to listen to Hawks and help the hero to the best of his ability. At the end of their first patrol, he made sure to assure Teddydrum White that it had done an excellent job and to tell both of them how proud he was of them for learning how to keep up with the speedy Number Three hero. At the very least, Izuku himself got some major practice on riding and directing his Teddydrums during flight just by trying to keep up with Hawks.
Tokoyami, unfortunately, had been left to trail behind along with the sidekicks. Izuku offered him a chance to ride Teddydrum White to keep up after seeing this, but his classmate turned him down stating that he had to rely on himself to properly make use of this training period. Even with this, though, he still seemed frustrated at Hawks rushing ahead and his inability to keep pace.

“Why did you specifically choose me to send an offer to, Hawks-san?” Tokoyami questioned Hawks at the end of their first patrol. Izuku stopped what he was doing to watch the two and listen in. “Besides the bird thing…”

Hawks got up from the couch that he had been laying on—dammit, it seems like he hardly ever rests, Izuku wants to tell him to sit back down. Just watching the hero is making him tired—“Well, another 50% of the reason I chose both of you is cause I wanted to hear a first-hand account on what happened with UA’s villain attack, and I wanted to pick out kids that might be able to keep up with me and showed promise.”

—Shouta-sensei face down on the ground, blood everywhere around him, Fruit of Fate gone, how could this have happened—

Izuku felt his body still unnaturally.

Tokoyami narrowed his eyes at Hawks and immediately stated, “I will tell you about it. Don’t bother Midoriya.”

Flinching back, Izuku exclaimed, “I’m fine with telling Hawks-san about what I know too, Tokoyami-kun. I’m the one that got a look at the leaders so—”

“It is because of your increased exposure that you came out of the attack worse, Midoriya,” Tokoyami’s voice was as firm as his will, “Number Three hero or not, I will not stand by and let Hawks trouble you with an issue that clearly bothers you deeply. I remember very well the words that you said that day to that crowd of annoyances.”

“There was a moment, when it looked like our teacher was dead. Do you want to know what the leader of the villains said to me, and my friend, and the guy who transferred to general education, when we saw him? He said, Is this your guys’ first time seeing a dead body? Those of you that I leave alive should get used to the sight, if you really aim to be so called heroes”

Izuku felt a remainder of the nervous dread and horror he felt on that day when Shouta-sensei was
supposed to die turn his insides. *He wondered what Tokoyami would say if he also knew their teacher had died for them during that incident.*

Hawks interrupted before Izuku could force himself to try and argue back, “That’s fine, I don’t mind only getting the story from one of you.”

He waved at the two of them dismissively with a lazy smile still on his face, but Izuku could feel that Hawks’s stares when looking at him had become more focused.

On the third day of Izuku’s workplace training, he had finally gotten the opportunity to act as a real hero.

They had started patrol early in the morning and for that day he had switched out his robots so that he was riding Teddydrum White with a black harness while Teddydrum Black was free to assist. There had been a villain with three long, metal tentacles protruding from his body with sharp ends that almost seemed to be capable of extending indefinitely attempting to take three adult bystanders – two men and one woman – hostage while a crowd of civilians stayed back out of fear, crying for a hero to come. Hawks easily countered before he even finished descending from the air, using a couple of feathers to pull each hostage away from the man’s grip and another couple to pull the villain into the air where he’d be helpless.

Then, a little girl ran out of the part of the crowd that was beside the villain heading towards the freed female hostage, and a forth tentacle burst from the villain’s side towards the child. Panic erupted in Izuku’s chest and flying next to him, Hawks let out a curse and rapidly dive bombed the rest of his descent to get between the villain and the girl.

But Teddydrums can sense threats to children like a bloodhound can scent out a fox– Teddydrum Black had started its dive bomb before Hawks and had gotten there first, causing Hawks to skillfully stop himself in time to keep from ramming into the robot. Just after Hawks would have been in place, Teddydrum Black took the hit, holding the girl back with one arm while getting speared through the torso then grabbing onto it with its other to stop the metal limb from going further. Hawks used more feathers to hold two of the villain’s tentacles in place and grabbed onto the third on himself as well as with some feathers. A fifth limb then popped out of the villain’s back, and Hawks caught it with more feathers yet again.

*They needed to remove the villain from the crowd to stop him from attempting to take more hostages– “Survival Strategy!”*

The villain whipped his head around in confusion at the change of scenery, but Izuku didn’t pay it
any attention— the villain had already been immobilized enough for him. He held his hand out towards the villain while still on the back of Teddydrum White.

“Will of the Crystal Princess!”

Thick, glittering crystal burst out of the ground of the Dueling Arena to encase the villain and the entirety of his limbs, except for the areas where Hawks and Teddydrum Black were still holding on. The villain’s head stuck out uncomfortably from the crystal to slightly turn and glance at Izuku, and even more confusion clouded his face.

“What— What just happened?! And what are you wearing?!” the villain’s deep voice exclaimed.

Okay, Izuku is officially done with this shit—

“Why does everyone think my Prince of the Crystal uniform looks weird?! Yeah, it’s the combination of prince and idol fashion and it’s kind of feminine for a boy, but have you seen some of the hero and villain costumes people wear?! It’s basically the same thing! You’re a villain that just got captured by a high schooler— get your priorities in order!” Izuku ranted while jumping out of the harness and off Teddydrum White’s back.

The villain shied away as much as he could while stuck inside of a rock and Hawks walked in front of his line of vision while heading towards the little girl that Teddydrum Black was now carrying in its arms—did he do that on purpose to redirect Izuku’s attention?

“How are you doing kid, what’s your name?” Hawks asked in a soft voice. He didn’t have to lean down to make eye contact with her, the position of the Teddydrum’s arms were on the same level as his head. Now that Izuku could examine her more carefully, he judged the girl to be around 5-years-old. She was absolutely tiny compared to the gulfing arms of the robot.

“My name’s Himemi, I’m okay. Thank you for saving Mama, mister Hawks!” the girl gave a genuine thanks in her high-pitched voice, but then quickly looked away from the Number Three hero to do a once over of Izuku’s princely outfit and gaze at him with sparkling eyes of adoration as he walked towards her, “Thank you for saving me, mister teddy bear and mister Prince!” Her hands cupped her reddening cheeks and a grin lit up her face. “I can’t believe I got saved by a real prince, all of my friends are going to be so jealous!”

Izuku’s own face turned red. Oh no, he can already see where this is headed…
“Uh, you’re welcome. I’m, uh– not actually a real prince, you know, I just look like a prince. My hero name is the Crystal Hero: Deku, and this is Teddydrum Black! And Hawks did most of the work, so you should thank him properly too…”

“Thank you mister Hawks!” the child obliging chimed and turned her head towards Hawks for a single second before whipping it right back towards Izuku with a look of incomprehension. “Are you sure you’re not a real prince though… do you not have a castle or kingdom?”

Before Izuku could answer, Teddydrum Black turned on its rockets to bring the girl to the edge of the tower and point towards the Crystal Palace and sweep its arm all around to encompass the whole Crystal World.

“Woah! You have a real fairytale castle and kingdom! See, I was right– you are a real prince!”

Oh no…

“Um, I don’t think this place legally qualifies as a sovereign nation so I’m still not actually a prince–”

Hawks flew up to hover next to Teddydrum Black and Himemi, and whistled at the sight of the Crystal Palace. He drawled, “With a castle like that, I’m pretty sure you can call yourself a prince all you want…”

“Right! He’s totally a real prince!” Hawks suddenly became relevant to Himemi’s world and she turned towards him to gush over Izuku.

Hawks smiled at her kindly, but there was mischief in his eyes. He replied with a teasing tone, “You’re absolutely right, Himemi-chan!”

He is not helping!

“Can– Can I see the castle too?” Izuku just glared at the villain. “Right… sorry for asking…”
Izuku sighed and gave up the hopeless cause. “Do you know if the police have a way to crack him out of the crystal, Hawks? I can only remove it when he’s here, but it might be better to just deliver him as he is. Nothing can break it from the inside, but you should still be able to break it from the outside if you try hard enough…”

Hawks waved at him dismissively. “Ah– I’m sure they’ll figure something out.” –That’s _not_ a very reassuring answer.

Hawks flew back down to stand beside Izuku, gave him an obvious and deliberate once over, then carefully did not mention anything at all about Izuku’s outfit change. “Anyways, can you take us back now?”

Izuku popped them back into the streets, and Teddydrum Black delivered Himemi to the woman she had been running towards.

“Mama, Prince Deku saved me! He has a castle and crown and everything!”

_No! That’s wrong!

“My name is– ”

“That’s right! My trainee here –the Crystal Hero: _Prince Deku_– rescued your daughter while riding atop this white robot and aided by his animal-like companion –Teddydrum Black– in a true princely fashion!” Hawks grinned at Himemi’s mother while projecting the air of an honest and innocent man.

The woman smiled at them with gratitude and relief clear in her eyes, “I saw! Thank you very much for rescuing me and my dear Himemi; Prince Deku, Hawks, Teddydrum Black…”

The crowd started cheering; “Way to go Prince Deku!” “What an impressive student you are, Prince Deku!” “I wish I could be rescued by a prince-hero one day, how dreamy!”

Izuku stared at Hawks in wide-eyed horror even as he waved Himemi and the crowd goodbye, and whispered, “…Why?”
Hawks just gave him a smile and patted his shoulder. “In the future, your marketing team will thank me for this—trust me!”

Hawks lifted up into the air, and Izuku had to quickly deliver Teddydrum Black to the Workshop for repairs then get back on Teddydrum White to follow after him. He was only able to catch up when the hero stopped for his next incident, a store robbery, which he ended within the span of maybe 10 seconds.

“But—do you know how stuck up it sounds to call myself a prince in my hero name?! That’s why I didn’t include it in the first place!”

Hawks side-eyed him with a neutral expression and half-lidded eyes. “But in there you’re called the Prince of the Crystal, right?”

Izuku blinked at him. “Well, yes. But the hero Deku and the Prince of the Crystal are like two different images of me—”

“Are they really?” Hawks’s eyes looked over his hero costume then returned to Izuku’s eyes. “You may not have a crown right now, but you still look very much like a prince. And princes are supposed to be heroic—combining the two isn’t a bad idea.”

Once again, Hawks flapped his wings to enter the air, and Izuku followed behind. He didn’t look back at Izuku as he spoke over the wind.

“In my opinion, you shouldn’t be worried about whether calling yourself a prince to the public will make them think you’re undeserving of the title. You can definitely show them that it suits you, so don’t be afraid to be to elevate yourself and your image higher! There’s no need to limit yourself like that—aren’t you the one who’s been able to keep up with me this whole time even when there are pro heroes that fail to? I don’t know what you look for in your heroes, but I think that the best heroes are the ones that reach for high ambitions.”

Izuku didn’t respond, instead choosing to look over the view of the city down below him.

*He had always considered his goals to be “high ambitions”. First in aiming to be a hero with no quirk, and now in aiming to be a hero that changes fate. To him—changing fate was the highest ambition a person could reach for.*
But he had also never really considered his goals in relation to other people outside of “trying his best to save them”, he had never thought about actively projecting the image of being “a great hero” outside of being able to show up to a scene and reassure the hearts of people by saying “I am here!”

He wasn’t in it for the fame or glory– he just wanted to help people

—But how can glory not be part of that image? Isn’t he the one that declared “May those who defy their fate be granted glory” to the entire nation just a little over a week ago?—

For that moment, though, he wasn’t thinking of speaking as Izuku the future Hero, he was speaking as the Prince of the Crystal. And the Prince of the Crystal almost felt like a completely different person than Izuku.

The Prince was confident, he was eloquent, he projected a princely air without even trying, he was the pinnacle, he could be so accidently romantic that he wooed a previously emotionally-repressed boy in less than 24 hours, and he was glorious—

But Izuku was the one that was doing all of that, wasn’t he? But he was also the one who was almost too nervous to answer questions in class, and the one who became a bumbling mess when trying to convince his homeroom teacher to give his friend a chance to be a hero, and the one who hadn’t even fully resolved his crisis of morality yet—

It almost seemed impossible for Izuku the hero-in-training and the Prince of the Crystal to be the same person. But they already were, weren’t they? That’s why Deku could be a hero who changes fate, because the Prince of the Crystal changes fate.

—This whole time, he had truly believed he wouldn’t amount to anything, that he had no future, that he was worthless, and useless, because he was born a “Deku” that was fated to have no quirk. That would make sense, wouldn’t it? That’s what people have told him since he was 4. He had heard it so many times, had it said right to his face so many times, of course he would come to believe it himself—

He closed his eyes and leaned back in his makeshift seat, feeling the rush of the wind. It streamed around his face, visor, and headphones to ruffle his curls.

Perhaps Izuku’s past view on who “Deku” and “Izuku” were was still holding him back even
Izuku opened his eyes to gaze at the wide, stretched-out wings of the hero flying ahead of him. Hawks looked magnificent like this— in the midst of his sky that so few people could reach on their own. Izuku once again thought of an angel flying above the Earth and God’s creations.

He thought back to an interview he had previously seen, where Hawks had said that he didn’t give much thought to actively maintaining a high ranking. Everyone had laughed at his words.

How could they not think it was a joke? At the age of 18, Hawks had already opened his own hero agency and reached a placing in the top 10 of the hero billboard chart for Japan, and just last year he had risen to Number Three hero at the age of 21. There was a reason why everyone called him precocious; he was the rising star speeding ahead of his generation. And just now, he said that he valued ambition in heroes…

But if that was the case…

Why isn’t the problem with his Fruit of Fate burning, the condition that is associated with desire and ambition, then? Why is it frozen instead? How can he be frozen in place— unable to move forward in his life someway— when he’s putting in so much effort to move forward ahead of everyone else?

Hawks has risen higher and faster than anyone had thought possible, and he values ambition, but does he even hold any ambitions for himself? Everyone else assumes that he does…

But Izuku—the Prince of the Crystal— is anything but like everyone else

The patrol drags on longer than expected, and by the time Izuku brought the repaired Teddydrum Black out and both Hawks and Izuku were landing on the roof of the hero agency, it was way past lunch. They were both thoroughly chilled even with their heavy coats due to the excessive flying.

Seeing its master shivering, Teddydrum Black brought out its cannons solely to rev them up to heat its body and hold up Izuku close to its chest. Teddydrum White let its counterpart have this honor, knowing that Teddydrum Black heavily enjoyed engaging in physical affection.

Izuku let out a hum as he cuddled into the warm arms and chest. Metal really shouldn’t feel so cozy, but the Teddydrums were made to provide comfort as well as protection, and could therefore surpass
their physical limitations to bestow a sense of comfort to the children that need it.

Hawks snorted in a joking manner, “Man, I wish I had my own personal teddy bear heater. That looks nice…”

He then tried to walk to the stairs – because he was an unintentionally ignorant man who was completely unaware that Teddydrum Black would rather personally tear its limbs off its body than actively deny a person comfort. But as Izuku foresaw the moment those words left Hawks’s mouth, Teddydrum Black swiftly adjusted Izuku free one arm, then used said arm to intercept Hawks, pulling him off the ground into its chest.

“Ack–!” Hawks’s face was squished into the metal, but the Teddydrum was mindful of his wings. His wings fidgeted like he was preparing to use his quirk to pull himself out of the robot’s grip, but then Teddydrum Black began to gently stroke the bright red wings, and they stopped.

Izuku snorted at him, “Teddydrum Black isn’t following any orders right now. It’s doing what it wants.”

Hawks’s wings fidgeted like he was preparing to use his quirk to pull himself out of the robot’s grip, but then Teddydrum Black began to gently stroke the bright red wings, and they stopped.

“Oh, this is– this is actually really nice… How does a metal robot feel better than my expensive, top-hero salary purchased bed…?” Hawks’s eyes fluttered closed as he unconsciously snuggled his face further into Teddydrum Black’s chest. “Mhmm, gotta go… do shit though…” he groggily complained, but his hands clutched the robot instead of attempting to pry himself away.

Teddydrum Black looked at Teddydrum White, who somehow understood its request and started up its own cannons. Izuku was then gently handed off to Teddydrum White so Teddydrum Black could close its second arm around Hawks. The added support allowed the robot to further lift Hawk’s body to curl up in its arms and to elongate its strokes for Hawks’s wings.

The man’s breathing evened out as he fell asleep.

And that… that told Izuku that something was really wrong here, because the sense of comfort the Teddydrums can provide is proportional to the amount of comfort that is needed, and Hawks apparently needed so much of it that Teddydrum Black needed to wayside Izuku to focus more on Hawks, and he fell asleep almost immediately after the cuddling was initiated.
Why does he have such a significant need for emotional and physical affection? Does he not have anyone in his life that can provide it? And exactly how exhausted was he?

Teddydrum Black’s glowing, red eyes looked into Izuku’s as he cuddled Hawks like he was an injured baby bird. The message was clear– *Can we keep him?*

Izuku tried his best to explain human ethics to the robot, “Hawks is his own person and has his own life, Teddydrum Black. Once his nap is finished you need to let him go.” Even as he said this, though, he was eyeing Hawks in concern that bordered on dread.

Teddydrum Black hung its head in disappointment, and Teddydrum White patted it on the back in consolation. Meanwhile, Izuku used the comm-frequency that Hawks and him had been using to keep in touch with the lagging sidekicks.

“Um, Horus-san? Hawks-san fell asleep.”

“What– What do you mean by *he fell asleep*? Are you sure he isn’t just resting his eyes or something?”

“One of my Teddydrums started acting like his personal heater, and he fell asleep. He looks completely dead to the world right now.”

“…Really? Wow, that’s– I knew that the guy slept –*in theory*– but I’ve never seen him *actually sleeping*. Hawks is always the first to arrive and the last to call it a day.”

Izuku’s concern grew even more.

“Can I just… take him to my pocket dimension so he can wake up on his own? That way we wouldn’t need to separate him from Teddydrum Black and accidently wake him up.”

“If you have a good place for it, go right ahead kid! The boss needs all the extra rest he can get– us sidekicks can handle things for him in the meantime.”
“Sounds good. I’ll let you know when he’s awake.”

Izuku ended the call and looked back to the sleeping Hawks with furrowed brows, thinking of his half-frozen Fruit of Fate. His face was relaxed in a way that made Izuku realize that for all Hawks acted like he was relaxed and laid-back in his daily life, _he really wasn’t._

_Maybe it’s not so much that he’s “stuck in place” as it is that he’s stuck going too fast?_

_At the same time Izuku still felt like he was missing something…_

“If you’re honestly not wanted, trying to force yourself into things is wrong, and it just makes you a nuisance”

_Even if that’s the case, there’s a limit to how much Izuku can force himself to ignore for the good of personal privacy_

Izuku checked his penguin-faced watch.

He muttered to himself, “It’s 3:00pm now. I leave Hawks’s agency at 5:00pm on Friday, so I have approximately 50 hours to permanently insert myself into the Number Three hero’s life to the point that he’d be willing to stay in contact with me after the workplace training is over…”

Teddydrum Black nodded vigorously in approval of his plan.

_Well, Hawks did say that he likes heroes who reach for high ambitions…_

“Alright! Now that you can make it through most of a fight without losing your pants, let’s see how
you translate that increased precision into your actual fighting.”

With that declaration, Mirio put on his Lemillion costume and boarded a train headed to Shibuya with Gran Torino for some patrolling at around 5:00pm. But they never made it to Shibuya.

Instead, the train was halted when passing through Hosu City by a monster that had brains peeking out of its head. Gran Torino jet kicked it out of the train and Mirio followed.

When the monster crashed into a random road in Hosu and they saw the chaos that had enveloped the city, Gran Torino yelled out, “This looks like a Nomu, the creature that the League of Villains used to attack the USJ at UA! I hope Nighteye wasn’t exaggerating about how good you were, Lemillion, cause in this situation we’re going to need all hands on deck— including provisional license holders!”

Mirio grinned as he prepared to phase into the ground to launch his own attack on the Nomu. He hoped to finish this quickly to check on something. “From what I know, Sir isn’t the type of person who exaggerates!”

Once upon a time, there lived a pawn who served an evil Witch with the belief that the Witch had chosen him, the Huntsman.

But the truth was, he had not been chosen. The Huntsman descended from one of the fair knights that had been fated to battle the Witch, and so when tragedy struck him as an innocent child, the Witch took advantage of the tragedy to mold him into the corrupted image of the Huntsman as a form of revenge. In this way, the child was punished by fate for the curse of his ascendant. But the Huntsman did not know this.

The Witch distorted the Huntsman’s view of the world with a mixture of truth and lies, with the biggest lie being that the Witch wanted and loved the Huntsman, and that this was why he had been chosen to become the Witch’s successor. When in reality, he was simply being conditioned to become an independent extension of the Witch’s own power. The ignorant Huntsman was so happy to have been chosen, that he could not see that he was actually unchosen.
And so, now that the Witch has once again begun his war against Snow White, the Huntsman will continue to lead the charge. But the Witch’s war was not one to be fought against only Snow White—his war was one against the entirety of good and the entirety of society, for he wished to bring about a revolution to mold the world into the image of himself. Thus, he passed on this wish to the Huntsman.

However, the Witch and his order are not the only forces of evil moving to bring revolution to society. One Black Knight has begun to rise above the rest to revolutionize the order of the knights. His revolution is not one that is aimed to act against the entirety of good, but one that wished to strengthen it. He excuses his ill means with his intention to bring about a better end.

The Black Knight’s revolution is incompatible with the Witch’s and Huntsman’s revolution. Thus, the Huntsman’s next move aims to combat both the society that he wishes to revolutionize and the revolution of the Black Knight.

The beginning of this next move has already begun.

Which side will achieve victory in the next battle of this war; that of good, that of evil, or that of something in between? Which side will fall into defeat?

Ultimately, the answers to these questions are not so important for the story of this war. The real question that should be asked is— which of these sides will succeed in initiating their revolution?

Only fate will decide, perhaps.

A golden book closed shut once the reader had reached the end of the black inked words and could see only blank pages followed.

“The beginning of this next move has already begun? Can you really call this a prophecy if it’s only delivered after its begun? Well, I suppose that isn’t important. What is important is how you will insert yourself into this tale, my dear Prince of the Crystal…”
Cursed be Those who are Chosen by the Wheel of Fortune

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hawks is a hero that is chosen by society, but Takahiro is a child that is forgotten and unwanted.

It had been years since Hawks had heard that name; “Takahiro”. No one he knew in his current life called him by that name—most of those people probably didn’t even know that was his name. He didn’t think it really mattered now, though, because Hawks almost felt like a completely different person than Takahiro.

Takahiro had always had an incredible quirk, a quirk that people had always told him would make him a great hero. But none of that mattered, because his quirk could never give him what he wanted most.

His beautiful and wonderous Mighty Wings had never been enough to get his dead-beat parents’ attention. They lived a run-down place because neither of them could manage to hold down a job and keep a lid on their addictions of choice for long, and they constantly argued over it. Takahiro had often questioned why they had even gotten married and had him in the first place, since it seemed that they had never cared for each other, and had never really cared for him.

It wasn’t like they were out right negligent; He was fed—most of the time, he was clothed, he had a bed to sleep in, and they had even once let him keep the spare change he had found in the couch to buy himself an extremely discounted Endeavor plushie. But they acted as though whether he existed or not was irrelevant, and all the times they had absent-mindedly responded to him with “love you too” felt hollowed of meaning.

Takahiro hadn’t bothered wishing to whatever God or gods that exist in this universe that he would one day wake up and find that his parents actually meant those words when they said them, or find that his parents were actually happy to see him and each other, or find that they no longer lived in the gutter— if being born with an incredible quirk couldn’t get him these things, then he didn’t know any other way to bring about that kind of miracle.

Then came the day when his incredible quirk did change things, but not in the way he had hoped it would.

Sometime while he was still in elementary school, he had saved a family from a high-speed car accident using his quirk and earned the attention of some government officials from the Hero Public
“This boy is blessed with incredible talent. He simply must become a hero. From now on, I will provide support for him and his entire family”

Neither his parents nor the Hero Public Safety Commission actually asked him if he wanted to be a hero, but that was okay. He would just have to accept the fate that society had thrust upon him, since it was clear that it wasn’t interested in him amounting to anything else or having any other future.

His parents’ attitude towards him did a total 180. Now that the government was financially supporting their family –because of Takahiro’s hard work and training– they became happy to see him, they became grateful he was born, and they seemed happier.

But their “love you too”s still felt hollow

And that had hurt– to know that even with all of that he still couldn’t get what he really wanted, that he still wasn’t truly chosen by his parents, wasn’t truly loved

At some point, he had picked out his hero name, and it seemed like everyone promptly forgot that he used to be Takahiro.

The government agents that watched over him only called him Hawks, his teachers and classmates at Shiketsu High School had eventually transitioned into just using Hawks –“since it suited him and his quirk so well”, they had said– and when he made his debut, his parents had an interview to gush about how proud they were of Hawks.

When his career started, his government beneficiaries told him that they were going to stop financially supporting his parents, but he could send part of his paycheck to them to support them himself. He declined, and they hadn’t spoken to him since.

Everyone said that money can’t buy love –which Takahiro had proven to be true– but apparently love can buy money just fine. It was too bad for his parents’ wallet that his residual love for them had run out a long time ago.

In any case, the message had been clear–
Hawks was wanted, not Takahiro. Hawks would be remembered, not Takahiro.

Hawks was chosen. Not Takahiro.

So now, Hawks was just Hawks. And Hawks was a hero that was too fast for his own good.

His quirk let him speed through hero work and the hero rankings like nothing anyone had ever seen, and he didn’t see a point in slowing down when it could cost the lives and safety of other people. He liked that he could help people, and that he could help the public feel more secure by presenting the image of a successful, reliable hero and by fulfilling his potential to be the best hero he could be.

But he didn’t ask himself whether he actually liked being a hero—there was no point when he was so suited for it. When there was nothing else he could be, and nothing else he aspired to be.

—When the government had invested so much time and money into Hawks that they would throw a fit if he tried to quit—

It was simply meant to be.

Surely, it was for the best that he was thrust into this career; society would be worse off for it if he hadn’t been

He enjoyed his gilded cage like the privilege it was

—Or at least that’s what he told himself—

And what a nice cage it is; he has a nice suite in his agency building and a luxury condo a few minutes away that he hardly ever uses because he’s always working, he has more money than he knows what to do with, he gets to fly around using his wings whenever he goes patrolling, most of the other pro heroes respect him, most of the public adore him. Some of the people who he had saved had even told him a genuine “I love you”
But the thing that really made it worth it was that he could emulate the hero he had watched his entire life. Not in personality — God no his personality was awful even Hawks could admit that — but in striving for a goal as a hero that could be considered impossible.

Hawks worked as fast as he could to bring about the day that heroes would have more free time than they knew what to do with, and Endeavor was the only hero serious about trying to surpass All Might to become Number One.

People would say that both of these goals could never happen; that the world could never be that peaceful, that All Might was unbeatable — but Hawks thinks that there is value in reaching for these goals with all they had anyway.

—Because if he didn’t have a larger purpose to strive for with all the work that he did, then the only thing keeping him in his cage would just be the fact that he can’t leave it, and that would be a horrible thing indeed—

So Hawks spent his life in the heart of his city rising early to begin work, working into the late hours of the day, and working during the majority of his weekend — because apparently evil doesn’t respect the sanctity of keeping normal work hours and holidays — rushing full speed ahead to reach an unattainable, shining sun.

Which why he was especially confused to slowly awaken in a nest made of cushions, blankets, and pillows surrounded by what seemed to be a meadow in the dark of night.

Hawks was laying on his side, and there was a huge, warm, metal arm wrapped over his body and the soft blanket that was on top of it that was carefully not resting its weight on him. His wings and back also felt extremely warm, and he turned his body over to see one of his trainee’s oversized teddy bear robots lying next to him in the nest. The red lights of its eyes acted like a nightlight, helping to dimly illuminate the area around them.

He stared at Teddydrum Black. Teddydrum Black just stared back.

At a complete loss, Hawks turned to humor, “You know, people have told me a couple of different awkward “morning after” stories, but whenever I thought about how mine might be like — this was not how I imagined it.”
Teddydrum Black tilted its head in what seemed like a sign of confusion, and suddenly Hawks felt extremely dirty for making a sex-related joke to what could be considered a symbol of childhood innocence. The awkwardness of the situation increased ten-fold.

Desperate to distract himself from the awkward tension and make at least some headway into figuring out where the fuck he was, he attempted to sit up, and the arm was lifted to allow his movement. Hawks fluttered his wings a bit, fluffing them to air his feathers out.

It was hard to see any particular features of the meadow, but Hawks could see that it was perfectly circular and stretched for a while until it reached the tree line of a forest. On one side, he could hear a babbling brook that was hidden by the darkness as well as the sounds of crickets, cicadas, and other signs that night-active fauna were about. The glowing light of various fireflies dancing about helped finish off the serene atmosphere of this little piece of nature.

Then Hawks glanced upwards, and couldn’t look away.

Above him the crescent moon was a brilliant white glow, but rather than being the main focus, it was just an accompaniment to the countless shining stars that filled the entirety of the sky. It seemed like entire galaxies were on display—dying the black sky in a radiant mix of purple, blue, and green. Hawks felt like he could spend eternity just gazing up in awe at the dazzling sight, trying to count every single star that it held.

This was the type of night sky that one could only find out in the isolation of total wilderness, a sight that was unattainable for a boy that had lived his whole life in the city.

_How wonderful would it be to fly through a sky like this…_

“Hawks-san, you’re awake! Did you have a good rest? I tried to make sure you were as comfortable as possible, but you were still sleeping outside —sort of— so I’m not sure if I succeeded or not…”

It was only now that he noticed his hero costume’s visor and ear protectors, as well as his boots, had been removed. Though the kid had left on his coat—probably for the warmth. He looked down from the sky to turn his head to where he could hear incoming footsteps crunching through the grass.

Making his way towards Hawks was the owner of the robot still lying next to him. Midoriya’s cloak fluttered behind him from his brisk pace and even in the dark his spiked crown glittered in the
starlight, casting glimmers of light onto his dark green curls.

“Prince” is a spot-on description for this boy

Then he remembered Midoriya had asked him a question. “Don’t worry about it Midoriya-kun, that was probably the coziest sleep I’ve ever had! Though, I’m confused as to how I ended up asleep in the first place. Where are we anyway?”

Midoriya smiled at him, but for some reason it felt hollow – why didn’t he like that answer?

“You fell asleep when Teddydrum Black started warming you up after patrol. I told Horus-san, and he said I could bring you to the Crystal World for a nap. You’ve been sleeping for about two hours now.”

“Two hours?! You really shouldn’t have bothered, kid, I would’ve been fine with you just waking me up…” he trailed off as he re-examined his surroundings and asked in confusion, “Is the Crystal World what you call your pocket dimension? I didn’t see anything like this when we were here early today…”

Midoriya plopped himself down next to Hawks in the pile of blankets, then pulled out a retro-looking remote with many different dials and knobs. His smile became genuine and he explained with a grandiose tone, “Yes! This is an enclosed section of the Crystal World called the Garden of Eden that was made to look like an entirely separate land. You can control its time of day, what weather it has, and even what season it’s in.”

As an example, Midoriya slowly turned the topmost dial on the remote, and the sky changed in response.

Sunlight broke on the horizon in the east to reveal a short sunrise, and the black sky and bright stars and moon gave way to its orange glow and a blue sky. The sun rose much faster than it did in real-life to peak at the center of the sky before lowering itself to the horizon in the west, casting the sky in a pink and orange sunset as the light blue disappeared. Once the sunlight had fully vanished, the stars and moon revealed themselves once more. Hawks could only stare as the cycle of an entire day passed in only a few moments.

Midoriya turned the dial backwards so the sun rose in the west and settled it back in the center of the sky. With the area brightened, Hawks was treated to the sight of a light green meadow spotted with
the various colors of wild flowers that grew throughout the tall grass at random. The trees enclosing
the meadow were all bursting with dark green leaves, and Hawks could now spot a small opening in
the forest for a stone and dirt pathway that followed the small brook he had heard. The stream flowed
out of another area of the forest to circle around one side of the meadow, leading into the path.

The sounds of insects gave way to the sounds of chirps, and Hawks caught sight of a nest of tiny
bluebird chicks up in one of the branches with an adult bluebird resting next to it. Another bluebird
flew high into the air above the meadow to pass into a different section of the forest. The fireflies had
been replaced by delicate and colorful butterflies, as well as a couple of buzzing dragonflies, and a
honey bee landed on a nearby bright red poppy.

Hawks blinked at the scene. “Okay… under my authority as the Number Three hero, I officially
declare that you have the coolest shit Midoriya. Like seriously.”

Midoriya smiled and glanced away bashfully. “It is pretty cool, huh? There are even more parts of
the garden you can’t see from here.”

“How did you even make something like this?” Hawks leaned back on his palms to gaze around at
the life in the meadow and the sky.

“I didn’t make it, someone else did— along with everything else in the Crystal World. Maybe you’ll
get to meet them sometime before I leave.”

Hawks turned over the slightly ominous statement in his head and added it to the long list of weird
things concerning Midoriya Izuku that he was mentally compiling.

It’s not like he extended an offer to the kid because he wanted to puzzle him out— Both the bird thing
and the League of Villain thing that he told both his trainees about were honest parts of his
reasoning, and for Midoriya the rest of the 30% of his reason was because he figured that out of all
the students, he was the only one that would definitely be able to keep up due to the advantage his
flying robots gave him, and because Hawks had been impressed with the confidence and composure
that the boy had held throughout most of the festival— especially during his speech. If the Todoroki
boy hadn’t had the foresight to use his fire and go all-in right off the bat, Midoriya probably
would’ve won that fight, and maybe won the whole thing.

All of that combined with his mysterious but fantastical power told Hawks that this boy had the
potential to reach the highest peaks of the hero industry. He wanted to see for himself what one of
the best of the upcoming future generation had to offer.
Which was why Hawks had been totally confused when the Midoriya who appeared at his agency had been an anxious and soft-spoken boy, though he hadn’t shown it. The kid was as sharp as a whip and wasn’t shy exactly, but he felt completely different from the image he had projected on national TV.

Hawks did note, though, that his classmate Tokoyami seemed to have a rather impressive view of him if that “Prince of Hearts and Madness” thing was anything to go by, and that Midoriya had apparently had a more involved role in the villain attack. So after Hawks had gotten the details of the USJ incident out of Tokoyami once they were away from Midoriya, he asked what the boy had been referring to when he mentioned these two things.

Tokoyami narrowed his eyes in distaste at Hawks but answered nonetheless, “There was a point during the attack when he and a couple of our other classmates saw both the leader of the villains and our injured teacher up close, and the extent of his injuries had been a ghastly sight. Midoriya said that Aizawa-sensei looked like he was dead, and the villains mocked them for it. It made such an impression that one of them actually dropped out of the heroics course into general education. So, don’t ask him about it.”

Hawks held up his hands in surrender. “I already said I wouldn’t, don’t worry. I’ll even turn him down if he tries to tell me anything himself!” Even if he says that, he has the feeling that last part will turn into a lie if Midoriya actually does come forward with something…

Tokoyami nodded in approval, then continued with, “As for the title I bestowed upon him– I simply did so because it suits him. Not only is his hero costume prince-themed, but the outfit that he wears in his pocket dimension is even more so, and the pocket dimension itself was clearly made to emulate a fairytale wonderland. Both Midoriya and his world are seeped in madness and absurdity, and he thrives in it.”

Hawks reviewed the image of the somewhat timid boy in his mind. “He really doesn’t give off that sort of feeling outside of, you know, the random robots and penguin…”

Tokoyami nodded sagely. “Midoriya is a normal human being, and at the same time he is not– that is the impression that I got from him as both his classmate and teammate.”

“This is further supported by his mastery of human emotions. It is like he can see the state of one’s heart, and his kind nature leads to him attempting to fix the wounds that he sees upon them. Even just earlier today, Midoriya helped me through a wound that I had carried for a long time in my own heart.” The bird boy glanced down at his shadow on the floor.
“He is truly the personification of a prince who saves the hearts of those he comes across as he invites them to take part in his magical tale.”

Hawks scratched at the side of his head as he tried to combine the image of the normal Midoriya with the Midoriya that Tokoyami had just described. He honestly couldn’t tell how much of it was an accurate reflection of Tokoyami’s thoughts on the boy and how much of it was simply exaggeration born of the unique way Tokoyami spoke.

“Huh… sounds like a fun guy to hang out with!”

“Quite,” Tokoyami smirked at him and ended the conversation on that note.

After seeing Midoriya in his “Prince of the Crystal” uniform –as the boy had referred to it– and the confident way he spirited the villain away to his world and captured him with what looked like a magic spell, Hawks started thinking that perhaps most of that description hadn’t been exaggeration.

He pushed the boy’s hero image into something that more accurately reflected his prince image even when Midoriya had tried to be humble about it because come on having a castle made of crystal totally qualifies you for being an actual prince just be proud of it kid. And when Midoriya had tried to contest it he pushed the boy into trying to aim for a higher image of himself. He had so much potential that it would be an absolute waste if the boy didn’t follow through on it.

–Just like it would’ve been an absolute waste if Hawks hadn’t been pushed into being a hero–

And wasn’t Midoriya the one that said, “Even if a person is born with a “good” quirk, in the end that doesn’t matter if they fail to follow through on their potential”? He should practice what he preached.

“May those who defy their fate be granted glory” –What did that even mean? Hawks hadn’t defied his so called “fate” and he has more glory than he’s ever wanted. He wondered if Midoriya would just tell him straight up if he asked or if the kid could only speak in riddles when it came to “fate”.

And now, after waking up to find that he had been spirited away to a place that was literally referred to as the Garden of Eden and fully lived up to the name, Hawks started to think that perhaps none of that description had been exaggeration.
He really should get back to reality, but he couldn’t help but continue gazing into the deep blue of the sky. Another bird flew by, this time what looked to be a dove.

“How high does this sky go? It looks like the real thing, but if it was artificially created surely it can’t go on forever like the actual sky,” Hawks found himself asking.

Midoriya looked up at the sky as well. “I don’t know… I don’t think it goes on forever either, but I’ve never tried to reach the end of it.”

Still next to Hawks, Teddydrum Black raised his arm like a kid volunteering for a class assignment.

Midoriya’s eyes scrunched as he laughed, “Haha! There’s no need for that, Teddydrum Black. Maybe I’ll try to reach the end of it one day, but for now, I think just admiring it is fine.”

At that, Hawks side-eyed him with a frown. “Really? But if you can do something now, isn’t it better to just do it as soon as possible?”

Midoriya hummed a bit in thought, cupping his chin with his hand, before he made a sound of realization when he found the words he was looking for.

“In some cases, yeah. But in this case, wouldn’t reaching the end of the sky kind of ruin the beauty of it? Part of the reason people like to look at the sky is because it looks like it goes on forever—so knowing for certain that it does have an end would destroy that illusion, and therefore you would lose a part of the beauty you highly treasured forever…”

...That was a metaphor for something, right? That definitely sounded like a metaphor. And here Hawks thought his high school literature classes would never be applicable to his real life. He should’ve paid more attention in class.

He felt stupid admitting his mental defeat to a teenager, but he had to know, “…Was that a metaphor?”

“Technically, I think it was an allegory. This entire conversation has been an allegory, but thanks for noticing.” Midoriya smiled at him teasingly, and made no mention as to what his so called allegory
was supposed to mean.

Hawks glared at him half-heartedly and let himself fall back into the blanket nest with a grunt, partially spreading his wings out under him. “Dammit. No one fucking told me I would need to be able to interpret literary concepts just to have conservations with children!”

Midoriya let himself fall into the blankets and out right laughed at him, “Haha! I’m only like seven years younger than you, you know? And I’m pretty sure that kind of knowledge is only needed to have a conversation with me, specifically.”

Hawks raised an eyebrow at him. “But it is needed?”

Midoriya nodded at him seriously. “That’s right.”

_Honestly, what the hell is this kid?!_

Huffing, Hawks looked back at the sky. A yellow butterfly passed his field of vision this time.

“I can already see your future as a hero now–“ He spread out his hands above him as though he was presenting the image in front of him.

“Interviewers are going to ask you regular questions, and you’re going to answer them solely using riddles and metaphors, and they’re going to have open an entirely new field of hero analytics just to try and figure out what you’re talking about! But by the time they’ve cracked one interview, you’ve already had another one, and the entire field of study will absolutely hate you!”

Midoriya blinked at him in surprise, then looked up in thought. “That’s not the kind of thing that I would do on purpose usually… but there’s a good chance I’d end up doing it anyway.”

“Pfft–”

Laughter burst out of Hawks uncontrollably. One hand pounded at the grassy ground in a fist while the other hand grasped at his heaving chest as he had trouble breathing. He squished his eyes closed and felt a couple of tears gather at their edges from the force of his laugh. He was pretty sure he was
so loud that he was scaring the wildlife away.

“It– It’s not that funny, is it!!”

That statement renewed his laughter for a few more moments.

Eventually, he calmed down and his laughs died off. It was conveniently just in time for a penguin wearing glasses to waddle through the grass over to them. It was holding a mirror in its flipper.

Hawks blinked at it. “You’ve got more than one penguin…? Where do these things come from?”

“From the Penguin Exhibit,” Midoriya responded plainly, as though every teenager these days had their own personal penguin exhibit.

You know what? From now on, Hawks is just going to assume that Tokoyami-kun meant for his whole description of Midoriya to be taken completely seriously. He wonders when he’ll get to see the kid literally look into someone’s heart. That should be fun…

Midoriya looked at his reflection with furrowed brows and a frown. “ …Icarus? Is that– Is that really all you could come up with? That’s so obvious, I’m sort of disappointed in you. I thought your standard of creativity was higher than that…”

“I know! I know,” the Midoriya in the mirror looked pained as they defended themselves, “But fate is obviously setting him up to be an Icarus allegory, so there’s no point in trying to call him something else, okay!”

Hawks was so lost now that he’d have a better idea of where he was if someone just dropped him
into the middle of the ocean, any ocean, than he would have for what was going on in this entire situation.

There was one thing that he could understand though, “Am I supposed to be Icarus? Why?!?”

“Yes. And this is Momoka-san, Hawks-san,” Midoriya answered, as though that answered anything at all. He ignored Hawks’s facial ques indicating that he required more information on what the hell they were even talking about to continue speaking to his reflection, “In general terms, what did you read?”

“Shigaraki is in the middle of making some kind of move that involves him working against society” and a “Black Knight”,” Momoka responded incomprehensively.

Hawks shot up at that to narrow his eyes at the reflection. “Shigaraki is the leader of the League of Villains. What are they doing specifically and how did you get this information?”

Momoka just stared at him with a neutral expression. “It didn’t say what they were doing specifically, just that his ultimate goal is to bring about a “revolution”, and I got this information from my storybook.”

God, can these people get any vaguer?

Midoriya sat himself up and patted him on the shoulder. “Listen Hawks-san, Momoka has a book that basically tells her vague prophecies. Just go with it okay? Do you have anymore information on the Black Knight at least, Momoka-san?”

“It said that the Black Knight is also trying to bring about “revolution”, but one that aims to improve society and heroes.”

That brought to mind one specific piece of information Hawks had collected. He cursed and searched through the makeshift bed to find his removed hero gear to start putting them on.

“Ingenuity reported that during the Hero Killer Stain’s assault on him, the guy was preaching about how he was attacking him for the sake of purging corrupt heroes out of society. Is that who you’re talking about?”
Midoriya stopped breathing and scrambled up onto his feet.

“The storybook doesn’t say who it’s talking about but if it is him then– we have to leave. *Now. We have to find out what’s going on,*” the boy muttered under his breath with panic tensing his voice.

Having finished putting on his visor and ear protectors, Hawks roughly stuck his feet into his boots. “I hear you loud and clear, kid. Ready to go when you are.”

*“Survival Strategy Complete”*

They reappeared on the roof of Hawks’s agency and rushed down the stairs. Hawks led Midoriya to the floor involved with keeping track of hero news and information, and was met with the sight of a worried Horus.

“We were just about to send this little guy back to get you, boss.” He pointed to the penguin wearing a crown—*Izu-pingu, he remembered the name from the Sports Festival*—that waddled up to Midoriya when he saw the boy come in. Midoriya crouched down to let the penguin hop into his arms and hugged him to his chest like a child searching for comfort with their stuffed animal.

On a medium-sized TV, the majority of Hawks’s sidekicks who weren’t slated for patrol were watching an overview shot of a city spotted with explosions and fire.

“The news just broke that something major is going down in Hosu City right now, but no reporters have been able to get any info on what’s actually happening. It looks like the heroes are all still too busy with controlling the situation.”

“He’s not– *He’s not picking up. Why isn’t he picking up?*”

Hawks turned back to see a shaky Midoriya staring at his phone in wide-eyed dread. His right hand grasped the kid’s shoulder to usher him to the side as he swallowed down the heavy tension that settled in his chest.

Hawks kept his arm wrapped around the kid and leaned his head down towards him. Keeping his wits and professionalism about him, he quietly questioned Midoriya with a steady but serious tone,
“Who are you trying to contact, and when have you gotten prophecies like this before? Are they always true?”

Midoriya didn’t look up at Hawks, instead he continued staring at the phone clenched in his hand. His voice trembled, “My– my friend Iida, Ingenium’s brother, he– he’s supposed to be in Hosu right now, the H-Hero Killer attacked his brother there so– I think he went there to look for him.”

Then Midoriya bore into Hawks with intense green eyes. “We’ve only gotten one other prophecy before, the day before the USJ incident. It described that the League of Villains was after All Might.”

Shit

Hawks stuck his head out towards his sidekicks. “Someone get into contact with the heroes stationed in Hosu and tell them they need to be on the lookout for the League of Villains and the Hero Killer! And to be on the lookout for a stray UA student!”

“Understood!” They didn’t question where Hawks got the info, they were good like that.

Tightening his grip on Midoriya’s shoulder, Hawks leaned his head into his space again to whisper, “If he’s stuck dealing with the situation in Hosu, he wouldn’t be able to answer anyway, so he might just be busy. We’ll just have to pass on the information that we have– that’s all we can do from here.”

Midoriya nodded his head, but he crushed Izu-pingu to his chest like the physical sensation was the only thing holding him together. His green eyes fluttered back and forth between staring blankly into the air and examining Hawks.

“If there’s anything else you need to get off your chest kid, now’s the time to do it.” Please don’t let it be something even worse than what he’s already told Hawks…

Midoriya visibly swallowed before croaking out, “It’s not really… any new information about what’s going on– it’s just a worry that I have…”

Hawks tried to casually shrug. “Well, it’s not like I’m doing anything else right now– lay it on me.”
There was a long moment were Midoriya just stared at Hawks to the point where he felt like his soul was being evaluated. But eventually, Midoriya turned his sight back onto the empty air as he nodded.

“Tokoyami doesn’t know this, most of my class doesn’t know this but— ” Midoriya confessed in a hoarse whisper, “During the USJ, the villains actually killed Aizawa-sensei. He’s only alive because I brought him back with my quirk. But I’m not there if something happens this time…”

*Oh– this is much worse.*

Hawks didn’t question this impossible piece of information, despite the total shock and confusion that was wrecking through his mind —he feels like he had just been told that a basic, inherent law of the universe actually has a convenient on-and-off switch— but he’s finally realized that the best way to handle Midoriya is to just accept everything the boy throws out as it comes without questioning whether any of it should actually be possible.

So instead, he pushed Midoriya’s body into his own to help support his weight, moving one of his wings to wrap around the boy.

Hawks didn’t know the first thing about comforting people —*how could he when Takahiro had never received any*— but this kid was under his care for the time being, and just a few moments ago he had let Hawks feel so at peace, and made Hawks laugh harder than he had in a very long time; He has to try his best for this.

“Sometimes when you’re a hero, you just have to trust that other heroes will be able to take care of things. I’m not really good at doing that when it comes to delegating within my own agency, but for cases like this, that’s all you can do. So let’s trust the heroes on the scene together, okay?”

“But is it really up to them?” Midoriya interjected, his words heavy with pessimism, “Or is it up to *fate*? Because I may trust heroes, but *I don’t trust fate.*”

Hawks didn’t know how to respond to that. He doesn’t believe in fate, but if it did exist— then he wouldn’t trust it either.
“I’ll kill you for what you did!”

“Save him first. Forget about yourself for a second and try saving others. Don’t wield your power for your own sake.”

This wasn’t how it was supposed to go. This wasn’t how it was supposed to be.

Tenya knew the gravity of situation he was getting himself into. He knew when he hurt his kind friend Midoriya with cutting words on what was right and what was wrong that Tenya was the one who was doing the most wrong. There was a world of difference between breaking a friends’ boundaries out of concern and breaking the law for revenge.

That’s why he hadn’t felt upset with Midoriya even when it became clear that Midoriya had told the teachers of his suspicions when Aizawa-sensei pulled him over to say Manual would watch Tenya for this kind of behavior while in Hosu. His friend had just been doing the right thing.

But he ignored it all anyway to sate the burning anger and despair he felt reside in his chest.

He acted like a hypocrite anyway because he had already decided on this path, and he hadn’t trusted himself to be strong enough to continue committing to it in the face of Midoriya’s words. If both Bakugou and Todoroki faltered in their own convictions due to those words, Tenya didn’t think he would fare any better—so he refused to listen to them in the first place.

“But even if you don’t want my help, Iida, you should still get help from someone. You might hurt yourself, you’re probably even hurting yourself now! And you might even end up hurting other people!”

“I’m not hurting myself, and I don’t need anyone’s help!”

The dull throb from the Hero Killer pushing his head down into the concrete was nothing compared to the burning pain from the sword impaled in his arm, pinning him to the ground.
“Because getting trapped by your own hate and acting out of pure self-interest makes you the furthest thing from a hero. That’s why… you have to die.”

The Hero Killer painfully tore his sword out of Tenya’s arm to lick the blood off the blade, and suddenly Tenya’s body felt paralyzed. He couldn’t move at all. Angry tears started to well in his eyes.

“Consider yourself a humble offering to the betterment of society– !”

The Hero Killer was hit by a blur coming from out of Tenya’s view of sight. The pro hero that had been in the alleyway was deposited behind Tenya and a figure in a fighting stance stood strong in front of him, acting as a barrier between Tenya and the killer.

He spoke into his communicator, “Gran Torino sir! I’ve successfully located the Hero Killer and Midoriya’s friend, please track my location and send back up!”

“You’re Iida right? It’s a good thing I researched the Hero Killer’s MO when Midoriya-kun told me about his troubles with you– I may not have known to look through this area if I hadn’t.”

Tenya barely recognized him in his hero costume, he’d only seen the boy once. “You’re Midoriya’s third year friend, Togata! What are you doing here?! ”

Togata only slightly turned his face towards Tenya to give him a reassuring grin, he had to keep the majority of his focus on his opponent. “What kind of upperclassman would I be if I didn’t look after my dear underclassman’s troubles when he isn’t able to do so himself? Midoriya said that you were probably headed towards the Hero Killer, so when I came across a pro hero looking for you and saw that you were missing, I searched for you!”

Togata tapped his communicator. “And you might not have heard it, but there was recently an alert from the Number Three hero Hawks to look for the Hero Killer and “a stray UA student”. Since Midoriya’s at his agency, that must’ve been from him, right?”

Tenya clenched his teeth together as he felt his tears release themselves to run down his face.

Even now, even at this very moment when he’s not here himself– Midoriya was still trying to save him
But even so, Tenya still yelled out, “This… This doesn’t have anything to do with you!”

“Doesn’t matter!” Togata instantly shot down his dissent, “As a hero, it’s my duty to save you even if you try to say that you don’t want to be saved!”

“You… You seem familiar. What’s your name? Do you not realize that this boy has been corrupted by the evil of vengeance, why do you wish to save him?” the Hero Killer interrupted, eyeing Togata cautiously.

“Lemillion!” Togata proudly declared, “Outside of the obvious that killing is wrong– people deserve the chance to grow and learn from their mistakes. Just killing them off ends that possibility forever, so I will save him from you, and I will help save his heart from himself! I believe that is how people can build a better society!”

The Hero Killer hummed in appreciation, “I remember you now. You’re a regular intern of Sir Nighteye – All Might’s former sidekick– are you not? Because he is a hero who was chosen by All Might himself, I make sure to keep an eye on the heroes Sir Nighteye chooses for his own agency.”

He gave a mean grin and brandished his sword towards Togata. “It seems that you have the potential to become a true hero– but I will not allow you to stand in my way!”

Togata disappeared for a moment, only to blur out of nowhere to engage the Hero Killer in combat. The fight moved almost too fast for Tenya to see, let alone keep track of. Their speed was on a level that Tenya had never witnessed before.

There were multiple times when it looked like one of the Hero Killer’s multiple blades should have sliced through Togata’s body, but instead they seemed to pass right through him harmlessly. But while Togata was obviously skilled in hand to hand combat, the Hero Killer could skillfully dodge his blows and grabs. The killer had easily adjusted to his opponent’s strange quirk.

The killer then tried to turn the tide of the battle by throwing one of his swords up into the air. He glanced at it, and Togata let his eyes follow the que. Then, the Hero Killer stuck his knife into Togata’s face.

It passed through as harmlessly as the rest had.
“Don’t take me to be some greenhorn! I can already tell you’re much too skilled to give away a real attack like that!” Togata’s grin was audible in his voice.

The Hero Killer returned it with a distorted grin. “Is that so…”

The hero disappeared once again, and the Hero Killer whirled around with his sword cutting through the air to look behind him just a moment before Lemillion appeared there for his attack. The sword passed through the hero at the same time that Lemillion’s fingers shot towards the Hero Killer’s eyes, only to phase through them.

“Blinding Touch: Eye Poke!”

The Hero Killer drew his head back, but preemptively stuck his knife into Lemillion’s fist that was headed towards his stomach. This time, the knife sliced true, glancing in a line down Lemillion’s forearm as the fist delivered a strong blow to the Hero Killer.

The Hero Killer’s breath was forced out of him, but he responded with a desperate attack from one of his swords. It passed through once more. Lemillion gritted through the pain of his wound to disappear again. This time, he was able to catch the killer off guard by shooting out of the wall of the alleyway to slam the side of the Hero Killer’s head into the wall at the exact same moment that the killer licked the blood off of his knife.

“Phantom Menace– !”

Both Togata and the Hero Killer hit the ground hard. It seemed that Togata was unable to move, but the Hero Killer wasn’t moving either.

“Togata-senpai!” Iida cried out in concern.

Togata groaned a bit, but his voice still managed to sound reassuring, “I’m okay, Iida-kun! My arm’s not bleeding too badly…”

“Iida!” Todoroki’s voice echoed down the alleyway. Tenya could just barely turn his head to see his classmate arrive along with an elderly hero he wasn’t familiar with and some sidekicks from
“T-Todoroki-kun!” Todoroki moved to his side to crouch down beside him.

“Lemillion, what’s wrong?!?” the old man jetted to Togata’s side.

“Gran Torino sir, looks like the Hero Killer’s quirk is able to paralyze people after ingesting their blood. Other than the cut on my arm I’m fine.”

One of Endeavor’s sidekicks cautiously checked the Hero Killer. “Seems like he’s out cold for now. Someone bring the capture gear!”

“Iida…” Todoroki’s voice was quiet, trying not to be overheard, “did you go after him?”

Tenya clenched his fist, and suddenly found he could move again. He gently sat himself up and looked at Todoroki. It probably wasn’t his intention, but his intense boring stare seemed accusing to Tenya. “Yes… and in the end– I couldn’t do anything at all!” he clenched his jaw around those last words. His tears were renewed from his frustration.

“Well… this might be harsh to say, but that’s only to be expected.” Todoroki focused his eyes an image that wasn’t there. “Only following your anger without listening to reason… that kind of thing doesn’t lead to anything good. That’s how you forget the kind of person you want to become.”

“You might hurt yourself, you’re probably even hurting yourself now! And you might even end up hurting other people!”

Tenya glared at the sight of one of the sidekicks bandaging the paralyzed Togata’s arm. Shame and guilt broiled in his gut.

His mistakes tore out of his throat, “I should have listened to him… I should have listened to Midoriya. He wanted to help me, but I just pushed him away– and it was all for nothing! He was right! I did hurt myself! I did get others hurt! He was about to confide a secret concerning his quirk to me, and I shot him down calling him a nuisance!”
Todoroki seemed like he didn’t know what to do with himself, but he continued to sit beside Tenya in comfort.

Frowning at Tenya, Todoroki explained in a monotone voice that was edged with displeasure, “From what I know, part of what you told him was something that he did need to hear, but you also hurt him. He was constantly bothered by what you said all the way up to the start of workplace training, and he was constantly worried about you, but he had to pretend like he wasn’t because you were trying so hard to pretend like nothing was wrong.”

Tenya sniffed, it was becoming harder to see passed the tears in his eyes. “I’m sorry… I shouldn’t have done that, I shouldn’t have done this… I’m not worthy to succeed my brother’s name!” he sobbed out. He couldn’t move his injured left arm, so only his right hand was able to come up and hold his face.

A hand gently placed itself on Tenya’s shoulder. “It’s not too late to be a hero that is, though. You just have to make sure you live up to that image. Save your apologies for the person that you need to say them to.”

In just a few minutes, everyone was ready to go and headed down the road. The Hero Killer had been secured and disarmed. Both the pro hero who had first been targeted by Stain, Native, and Tenya could move, but Togata was still under the effect of the quirk. They were hoping it would pass soon, since it had only lasted a few minutes on Native and Tenya.

Then out of nowhere, a winged monster similar to the creatures that had attacked the USJ and had been attacking Hosu swooped down to pluck Togata out of the grip of the sidekick that had been carrying him.

Once he had realized what happened, Togata was already fairly high in the air, but he phased himself out of the creature’s claws anyway to fall uncontrollable through the sky. Just a second later, the creature faltered as its limbs froze, and it started losing altitude. The Hero Killer Stain blurred forward to catch Togata before he hit the ground head first, then put down the monster with a vicious knife to its brain.

Tenya had been so focused on Togata being taken, he hadn’t seen the Hero Killer free himself and lick the blood of the creature off a sidekick’s face.

“Both this sham-filled society and the criminals who wield their power for petty mischief are the targets of my purge.”
Stain placed the still unmoving Togata on the ground, and Iida could see Togata look up at the man in confusion. The hero could only get out half of his question, “Why would you…”

The Hero Killer stood tall in front of the group of heroes that was facing him.

“To become a true hero, there are two things required; the integrity of character to be a hero for the sake of saving people and nothing else, and the power to back up your promise to save people! That is why All Might is the true hero! With your character which was chosen by All Might’s only sidekick and proven just now, and your power which beats even that of many pro heroes-- it seems to me that you have the potential to truly succeed him!”

Togata gaped at the Hero Killer, as did Iida, but he could hear the pro heroes around him prepare themselves for a fight.

“There should have been one headed your way-- ! Is that the Hero Killer?!’”

Iida turned to follow the voice, and found Endeavor preparing to make an attack on the Hero Killer, not noticing the form of Togata right next to him.

“Todoroki, wait!” Gran Torino yelled.

“You fake…”

The Hero Killer’s words were filled with intense malice, killing intent filled the air around them-- stopping everyone –even the Number Two hero– in their tracks. Tenya thought the pressure alone might be enough to kill him.

The bandana around his face had fallen to reveal the killer’s mutilated nose. Only the bone of it was left to stretch his skin– it made his face resemble that of a skull’s.

“I must make things right… Someone must be stained in blood…”
The Hero Killer took a single step forward, Tenya jolted as a shiver shot down his spine from the increase in pressure.

“The world is corrupt— Society is corrupt! Heroes are corrupt! It’s all about winning and losing, who is ranked above and below you, the profitable and unprofitable, the accepted and unaccepted, the chosen and unchosen. They never try to give, all they care about is taking!”

The Hero Killer took another step, Tenya could feel Todoroki lightly tremble next to him.

“I must take back what it means to be a hero!”

The Hero Killer took another step, Tenya could hear some of the pro heroes next to him choking on air. Stain’s terrifying form seemed to be dyed in a glow of bright red, as though at that very moment he was covered in blood, that match the red glare of his eyes. He was a predator waiting in the dark.

“Come! Try and get me, you fakes! The only one allowed to kill me… is the true hero All Might!”

Because of Stain’s intense presence, which didn’t allow for anyone’s attention to stray from his form, none of them noticed the black spot that had formed behind the killer. They only realized it was there when two hands shot out of it to pull the Hero Killer into the darkness. Stain made a sound of surprise as he was pulled through.

Tenya stuttered out a shout, “That’s– the League of Villains’ warp gate!”

But it was already too late. The warp gate shut, and the street was empty except for Togata, who was still lying on the ground watching the place where Stain had once stood in shock.

*The Hero Killer had escaped.*

Chapter End Notes

References from this chapter:

The name Takahiro is from the character from Horikoshi’s other work Oumagadoki Zoo that Hawks was originally supposed to be based off of.
“This boy is blessed with incredible talent. He simply must become a hero. From now on, I will provide support for him and his entire family” and most of Stain’s dialogue is from the bnha anime/manga.

The endeavor doll Hawks owned being discounted was from info about the canon that I first saw here: https://deafmic.tumblr.com/post/180722658804/in-universe-there-was-a-top-hero-line-of

“The world is corrupt. It’s all about winning and losing, who is ranked above and below you, the profitable and unprofitable, the accepted and unaccepted, the chosen and unchosen. They never try to give, all they care about is taking!” is a quote from Mawaru Penguindrum.
Tomura scratched at his neck furiously. “Unbelievable! All the sheep are convinced that we’re working with the Hero Killer, but the Hero Killer is still the one getting the spotlight! It’s like the League of Villains and the Nomu are just an afterthought!”

“Well,” Sensei intoned from the video feed, “It seems like you were beaten in this battle, Shigaraki Tomura, but perhaps you will fair better in the next one. Our move has yet to be completed– that is why you are here, Akaguro Chizome.”

Tomura let himself enjoy the sight of the battered – but not too battered, they needed him in fighting condition at least– Hero Killer on the floor next to his teacher, scowling up at him. The high-voltage shock collar looked uncomfortably tight on his neck.

_He may have been all high-and-mighty when he got the upper hand on Tomura and Kurogiri last time, but Sensei was easily able to put that trash in his place._

Stain growled out, “What do you want with me, All for One…”

“You see, Akaguro, my aim for the time being is to let Tomura here handle matters on his own, but I’ve decided to give him some extra help for the rest of this move due to my personal interest in it.”

Sensei took a page out of a file and presented it to the Hero Killer.

“We are interested in collecting this UA student. I’ve been using my various contacts and followers to keep track of the boy ever since UA outsourced their heroics students for the week. Now would be an appropriate time to try and take him while he is away from the protective custody of UA, but unfortunately it seems that he is sticking close to the Number Three hero. Combined with that, his quirk seems like it will make kidnapping him particularly challenging.”

All for One grinned at the Hero Killer. “Therefore… we must approach this creatively. We have more lower-level Nomu similar to the ones used in Hosu, but I would prefer not to use all of them. So the method we’ve decided on would work best with utilizing an extra set of hands that are also disposable in the case that the plan fails. You are simply a more advantageous choice for this, because your infamy will become associated with Tomura’s league with this.”
Stain scowled at him even more. “You expect me to agree to kidnapping a child? I don’t commit evils which fail to contribute to improving society!”

“Oh, I don’t expect you to agree– I expect you to submit.”

Tomura enjoyed the sight of the Hero Killer gritting his teeth as a painful electric stock tore through his neck and body. When Stain untensed his body at the end of his punishment, Sensei spread his arms out in a grandiose manner.

“If the egg’s shell does not break, the chick will die without being born. We are the chick; the egg is the world. If the world’s shell does not break, we will die without being born. Therefore, we will break the world’s shell for the sake of revolutionizing the world! Is that not a cause you can understand? Your “revolution” may be different, but are you not also trying to break this world’s shell?”

“But your “revolution” is one that ends with not a better world, but a world that only you wish to see, is that not correct?” Stain continued to defy All for One, and was punished with a shock once again.

“That is not the point– ” Sensei dismissed the matter, “the point is that either way, some things must be broken to achieve the miracle of granting one’s wishes. And I could not care less if you become one of those broken things or not.”

All for One ghosted his fingers against the side of Stains face, and the killer backed away from the touch in disgust.

“You need not worried about being forced into indefinite servitude –I prefer to only use willing minions for such things to avoid betrayal in the long run– all you need to do is earn your freedom by completing this one task.”

–Tomura ignored the suggestion that he was one of the “willing minions” complacent with “indefinite servitude”. Obviously, Sensei considered him an exception to that, because Tomura was special to him–

“And in this case, do you not think this boy is likely to become one of the fake heroes you despise? I’ve heard that people have referred to him as a “Prince”, and equating one’s image as a hero with royalty surely suggests that said hero will be egotistical, does it not?”
The Hero Killer continued to glare at All for One, but All for One’s mean grin never faltered.

After hours of worrying, getting a text from Shouto saying that Iida was okay – *Shouto-kun was there too? Oh God if Izuku had known that previously he really would have devolved into a panic attack* – and getting forced into bed through the combined efforts of Hawks, Tokoyami, and Dark Shadow, Izuku woke up only to see the news that “a hero-in-training from UA holding a provisional license, Lemillion, had rescued another UA student” and that the Hero Killer escaped. And then was told *this bullshit* by Momoka.

“So you’re telling me,” Izuku repeated with a carefully monotone voice, “that the Red String of Fate is a *two-way thing* and that this entire time, I could have used Shouto’s to leave the Crystal World and reappear *where Shouto was*– As in, *be there to help in Hosu!*”

“Hey– I didn’t know Cinderella was where Hermes was, alright! And it sounded like Cinderella only showed up at the scene after the fight was over anyway,” Momoka defended herself with her hands raised in surrender.

Hawks patted Izuku on the shoulder. “Just let it go kid. Everything turned out alright –*mostly*– and in a way, this could be considered a learning experience in *leaving things to other heroes when you can’t do shit yourself*.”

Izuku just groaned, then looked up at Hawks with his best, watery puppy-dog eyes. “Can I at least go visit them in the hospital, Hawks-san?”

With narrowed eyes, Hawks responded, “Don’t think I can’t tell you’re doing that on purpose! You’re lucky that I want to use your weird version of teleportation to head over there to question the authorities about the situation –and that you’re still adorable even when it’s obviously on purpose!”

“You think I’m *adorable*, Hawks-san?” Izuku felt his cheeks redden, but this time was glad for it. It probably helped increase his image of adorable innocence.
“You’re such a little shit—your default anxious and soft-spoken boy personality must be a scam, I swear.”

“It’s not a scam, Icarus, little Izuku is just like that.” Momoka gracefully placed a hand on the chest of Izuku’s reflection and gave a mischievous grin. “I’m proud to say that all of his personality outside of anxious and soft-spoken boy was influenced by my tender love and care!”

Hawks side-eyed her. “I can tell…”

And so, Hawks allowed Izuku to drag a confused Horus into the Crystal World to stick a Red String of Fate bracelet on the man so that they could return to Kyushu with ease, and then came along with Izuku to visit Hosu City. Izuku had asked Tokoyami if he wanted to come, but he had declined saying that he didn’t want to intrude on Izuku “working his mastery of hearts” with Iida.

The sensation of using Survival Strategy Complete with the bracelet felt like Izuku internally searching for and following the string that was tying Shouto to his world. Izuku had warned Shouto through text that they were coming, so the inhabitants of the room hadn’t been surprised to see him.

From his place standing next to Iida’s bed, Togata smiled at them and bowed. “Nice to meet you Hawks sir! I know Midoriya-kun must’ve been really worried about his friends, so thanks for letting him come!”

Shouto, who was standing beside Togata, bowed awkwardly towards Hawks. “Thank you for allowing Izuku to come…”

“Yes, thank you for your kindness, Hawks-san,” Iida tensely echoed Shouto and mirrored his bow. He was the only one wearing patient clothing and was sitting in a plain-looking hospital bed.

Hawks waved them off with an uncaring expression on his face. “No need for that. I’m here for business too.”

“If you want to speak with the police about this whole situation, the Hosu Chief of Police just left,” an elderly hero explained pointing at the door of the room. Then, he promptly turned to glare at Togata and yell, “Why didn’t you mention the Number Three hero and Midoriya were coming over?!”
Togata laughed nervously while rubbing the back of his head, “Ha! Sorry about that, but I figured that Midoriya was the one who asked Hawks to make that alert he gave, so I thought it would be for the best if they came over anyway…”

“Right you are, kid– I’ll come back after I talk to the police, Midoriya-kun, so don’t leave until I’m here.” Hawks casually waved goodbye without looking at Izuku as he walked out the door.

Gran Torino followed him out. “Hey! I want to hear what you have to say about that alert you gave too, so I’m coming!”

“Todoroki-kun! Let’s get something from the vending machine!” Togata ushered Shouto out of the room in what must’ve been the most obvious attempt to leave two people alone ever, but it suited Izuku’s needs just fine. Iida clearly wanted to talk to him.

The door clicked closed loudly, but Iida stared at his bedsheets instead of Izuku. Izuku just sat himself down on the bed beside Iida and waited.

Iida breathed out, “I got my diagnosis before you came, Midoriya-kun. They said my left hand could have permanent damage– the Hero Killer pinned my arm to the ground with his sword at one point, and that severed an important nerve apparently.”

Izuku’s eyes widened and his stomach dropped. He couldn’t keep himself from holding on to Iida by his unbandaged arm, his Fruit of Fate was back to being perfectly gold. He gasped, “Iida-kun… I’m so—”

“Don’t say “you’re sorry” Midoriya!” Iida suddenly shouted to interrupt him.

“You did everything right– You tried to talk to me, but I wouldn’t listen. You told the teachers, but I wouldn’t listen to them either. You somehow divined that the heroes in Hosu needed to be watchful for the League of Villains, the Hero Killer, and me, and so you had a respected hero pass on the message. Togata-senpai wouldn’t even have known to look for me in the first place if you hadn’t confided your worries about me to him, and he was the one who saved me! So don’t apologize when you haven’t done anything wrong, Midoriya. I’m the one who was in the wrong…”

Izuku’s words caught in his throat. “Iida…”
Iida removed his glasses to hold his uninjured hand over his eyes. His voice wobbled as he spoke, “I’m sorry, Midoriya… I’m sorry I went after the Hero Killer, I’m sorry I turned you away— ” his voice hitched, and he started crying, “I’m sorry I spoke so cruelly to you, told you were in the wrong when I knew what I was planning was worse— ”

Izuku wrapped his arms around Iida’s shaking form to hug him gently. “It’s okay… I forgive you, Iida. And you were right that I wasn’t taking people’s will into consideration enough…”

Carding his hand through Iida’s hair, Izuku softly asked, “Can I call you Tenya? You can call me Izuku.”

Tenya sniffed as his tears started to subside, then nodded slightly.

“Tenya… recently, Hitoshi told me that just doing the best that you can will be enough for you to still amount to good… It’s okay for you to make mistakes and be wrong, just do the best you can— alright? That’s all you can do. That’s part of what it means to be human.”

Removing his hand from his eyes, Tenya returned his hug with a one-armed squeeze.

“Thank you, Izuku…”

The Red String of Fate bracelet disappears once it’s been used, so after Izuku made another one for Shouto and made one for Tenya out of paranoia, he dropped Hawks back off in Kyushu using up Horus’s bracelet. It seemed that the hero could tell Izuku was still working through something internally, so he told Izuku to rest for a while and that they would head out for a night patrol later.

In the library of the Crystal Palace, Izuku draped himself over one of the comfortable black sofas.
“What’s on your mind, my dear Prince?” Izuku’s voice intoned from Momoka’s Mirror.

Resting his arm over his eyes, Izuku admitted, “…I don’t understand. Everyone said that this was the right way to do things, but in the end, I couldn’t save Tenya using the “right” way. If I had ignored his feelings and wishes, if I had forced him to face the reality of his thoughts right from the start, then maybe he wouldn’t have had to go through that physical pain as well as emotional pain– Maybe he wouldn’t be stuck with permanent nerve damage now, if I had forced him down a different path…”

Izuku turned to glance at the mirror as much as he could from his position on the couch. “Does that mean… that this was actually the wrong way? How could it be the right way if it led to a worse end? What if… I try using the right way to reach Hawks, and I fail him too, because of that?”

“There’s no way to know whether you would have actually been able to force your friend down a different path. When it comes to things like this, people can’t truly be forced to change their hearts and minds. All you can do is guide them, and hope that they make that change themselves.”

Momoka procured a burgundy flower –Izuku recognized it as a dahlia– from somewhere on her side of the mirror, which she brought to her nose, closing her eyes as she breathed in its scent. “As for the core of your question… that is something that people contest quite heavily over. Some say the ends justify the means. Some say they do not. If you want my opinion– I say that it’s something that can only be decided on a case by case basis, and that the line between what is right and what is wrong is often unclear in the first place…”

Momoka opened her pink eyes and held out the dahlia, as though she was presenting it to Izuku.

“Believe in miracles, and they will know your feelings. Believe in the miracle of your strong bond with your friends, believe in the miracle of your budding bond with Takahiro, and they will know your feelings. But you must remember…”

The dahlia was discarded from Momoka’s hand to fall onto the wood floor shown in the mirror.

“All miracles in this world –whether it is the miracle of love, or the miracle of granting one’s wishes, or any other kind of miracle– are built atop someone’s sacrifice. That’s why the people who receive miracles are those who either give sacrifice themselves, force the burden of sacrifice on others, or are ignorant to the fact that others are sacrificing for them. Don’t forget this as you go forward to the destination of your fate, wherever it may be, Prince of the Crystal…”
Izuku’s sight involuntarily sought out his father’s portrait. *In that case, what happened was both a miracle and a tragedy…*

“*Takahiro,* huh… It’s unusual for you to show preference to adults. You seem to focus on children that need protection, and on children who are *forgotten and unwanted.* That’s why you favor Hitoshi-kun and Shouto-kun, right?”

“Sometimes children grow to be people who are still in need of the type of love one gives to a child, or rather— *everyone* is in need of that type of love, but not everyone receives it. So, Takahiro is still Icarus, but because he’s *Takahiro* I want to call him Takahiro as well.”

“I see…” Izuku closed his eyes.

“Momoka… you were a child that used to be in need of that type of love and protection, were you not? Did you ever grow to be older than the age you are in your portrait?”

Silence rang through the room. It had the same feeling to it that one would get from hearing a funeral bell ringing to lay a child to rest.

*Momoka never responded to him, but Izuku could hear the answer in her silence*

They were in the middle of patrol with Hawks and Izuku having sped off to take care of the first case they came across—a bank robbery, *villains need to start getting more original*—and the sky was beginning to darken, bathing the outside of the bank in the dim glow of twilight. The was just like all the other times Izuku had gone on patrol with the hero.

Then Izuku felt the heavy chill of fate on the back of his neck. A deformed creature in black crashed itself into a nearby skyscraper.
“What the hell is the League of Villains doing here? Prince Deku— be on the look-out for others and direct people away from the site! There’s also people in the building we need to watch out for,” Hawks groaned in frustration as he sent out countless of his red feathers to collect bystanders standing on the ground under where the debris was falling down as well as those in the portion of the building that had collapsed in.

The Nomu then crashed onto the ground, and Hawks flew on his significantly decreased wings to engage it, brandishing a long, sharp feather like a sword, and Izuku lost sight of him as the Nomu swiftly crawled away into the bottom floor of the building it crashed into. Using the communicator, Hawks ordered, “We have one of those freaky Nomu on the loose, I want everyone mobilized!”

Izuku directed Teddydrum Black to pick up people from inside the building and examined their surroundings from his perch on Teddydrum White while knocking on its metal chest to alert Izu-pingu he’d be needed soon. Seeing that there were no other figures in black, he explained to Hawks through the communicator frequency using his headphones, “I don’t see anymore Nomu around. They might send more later, but if this is the only one we can just take it to the Crystal World to avoid excess damage and casualties.”

A flurry of feathers carrying people passed by Izuku in the air, and Teddydrum Black passed by in a similar manner, carrying a family of four away in its arms.

“Its speed quirk is only moderate—nothing that can get it away from me— but it looks like one of its quirks is to toughen its skin and while another opens up holes in its body to avoid attacks, so my feathers aren’t piercing it well. And most of my feathers are still evacuating the people in the building…” Hawks took a single second to think before deciding, “I don’t want to put you too close to it— so send Izu-pingu over here and start setting up a line to keep the people trying to watch out of the way.”

“Understood,” Izuku confirmed. He directed Teddydrum White lowered him to the ground just outside a darkened alleyway by the building so he could quickly disembark, then sent it off into the building with Izu-pingu still in its chest. “Teddydrum Black is still handling people, so I’ll have to wait before I can go get the Champion—”

Suddenly, Teddydrum White stopped in its tracks a few meters into the building, then started to turn back towards him in a rush.

From behind him, a hand slapped over his mouth and fear poured into his chest as he felt the point of a knife stick through his clothing on his abdomen as he was roughly pulled into someone who started to slowly back away with Izuku.
“Back off or I’m disemboweling your master!” Teddydrum White halted instantly.

The voice was a recognizable and easy to remember. Izuku had heard it quite clearly on the viral Hero Killer info video that had been going around.

Upon realizing this, the fear in his chest turned into anticipation. And the reason for that was–

Two strange squawking sounds reverberated through Teddydrum White’s body just as Izuku caught sight of Tokoyami and Dark Shadow approaching the scene. “Mido–!” his classmate’s voice was cut off when Izuku, along with the Hero Killer and Teddydrum White were transported to the Dueling Arena.

But as the Champion of the Rose Bride rushed at Stain, he plunged his knife into Izuku’s stomach. Izuku’s breath forcefully rushed out of his lungs in a scream.

Stain painfully tore the knife back out and released Izuku to block the Champion’s sword with his own and lick the blade of the knife. Izuku gasped as he fell to the ground, he couldn’t even move his hand to press into his heavily bleeding stomach. The pain was so intense, he wondered if the knife hit an organ.

“Why…?” Izuku groaned through his clenched jaw. Izu-tingu scrambled over and pressed his entire body against the wound in an attempt to slow the bleeding – *Teddydrum White must have released him.*

The sword fight between the Hero Killer and the Champion was brutally fast, but apparently the man had the decency to inform Izuku *why he decided to try to murder him.* “The operation’s done for now that we’re here – *and I didn’t even want to do it in the first place*– ” The killer cut himself off to dodge one of the Teddydrum’s laserbeams. “But I’m betting I can at least get out of here if you die. You were going to become a fake hero anyway, Prince Deku.”

*He knew the prince thing would lead to something like this, but it was too late for that now.*

Izuku decided it was time to stop letting himself bleed out onto the dirt floor of his arena and giggled deliriously as a smile twisted his face, “You think something like this is enough to kill me in my world?”
He forced eyes to look away from the Hero Killer and down to his wound, and Izu-pingu removed himself from Izuku’s body to reveal a bloody, dark red mess.

“Behold the Gift from God” Izuku intoned. From within the blood, a multitude of white flowers bloomed out of the inside of his body in a painful bursting sensation. But once they settled, a light green glow indicating they were working their magic.

Izu looked back at Stain with Conductor active to see that his Fruit of Fate featured a violent storm of fire covering his thoroughly rotted Fruit. It was only slightly less rotten than Shigaraki’s, with holes of gold peeking through the black. Izuku turned off Conductor after getting a glimpse.

The Hero Killer didn’t even have time to look at what Izuku was doing, he was being bombarded by both Teddydrums and the Champion, and Izuku figured the Teddydrums could handle distracting him on their own for a minute.

He could probably leave it to them entirely, apparently the man had a quirk that worked based on ingesting his opponent’s blood so he was at a major disadvantage against those three, even getting Penguin Yagi and Toshi-pingu to fight him was a valid alternative. But—

“They said my left hand could have permanent damage– the Hero Killer pinned my arm to the ground with his sword”

–He would rather do it this way

“Come to me, my Champion of the Rose Bride!”

The Champion flitted over to him. Already knowing what he wanted, it lifted his body up into the air and supported the entirety of his body weight so he was on his feet.

“Rose of the noble castle…”

A sphere of white light burst into existence from his chest.

“Power of Dios that sleeps within me– heed your master and come forth!”
Izuku closed his eyes as the Champion of the Rose Bride gently bent his upper body over its right arm, and even with the healing flowers still in place, his abdomen screamed in agony at it. His cloak bellowed out along with his short curls and the long, flowing hair of the Champion. He could feel the Sword of Dios emerge from his chest out of the light, and the Champion grabbed onto it with its left hand.

He gritted his teeth through the pain to announce, “Grant me the power to bring the world revolution!”

The sword was pulled out of his chest. Unlike the pain of Stain’s knife being pulled out of his gut, the sword caused no pain—only the sensation of its power welling itself into his body.

Izuku opened his eyes to see the Champion of the Rose Bride hold the black blade up into the air like a general leading a charge as the light from his chest dissipated. Then, the handle of the Sword of Dios was presented to him. Its single green gem shined out from the matte black.

“I can’t move at all right now…” Understanding his order, the Champion took Izuku’s black gloved right hand and placed the handle of the sword into it, wrapping his fingers around it loosely, and Izuku felt the power bestowed upon him spike.

With the ritual over, the Champion carefully pulled his torso up out of its bend and leaned him against its body. It made sure that the Sword of Dios stayed in his hand. Izuku looked down at Izu-pingu, who was staring up at Izuku in worry. “Take Teddydrum Black and check up on Hawks.”

Izu-pingu hesitated for a moment, but Teddydrum Black had heard his order and flew over. It allowed Izu-pingu to jump into its arms and with three squawks they were gone.

“What are you up to… What is this power to bring the world revolution?” Stain glared at him with suspicion as he kept track of Teddydrum White hovering between them from where he had been cornered against the edge of the arena. He didn’t move towards Izuku, knowing the robot would impede him.

“It’s the power that I will use to defeat you,” Izuku voice was carefully monotone, not reflecting the rage he felt towards the villain before him who had harmed his friend. He felt an unsettling smile crawl onto his face. “When I heard you were trying to bring about revolution, I should have known that this was meant to be. Just like how Tenya finding you was meant to be… Sword of Dios: grant me 40 swords of justice.”
All at once, 40 individual white swords of the same make as the one in his hand were willed into the air around the Hero Killer in a circle. All of them were pointed towards him. The Hero Killer grimaced and braced himself, holding one sword in each hand.

–It would be wrong to kill him, but pinning him in place is necessary, so this should be fine–

Movement wasn’t needed to control the summoned swords, all Izuku had to do was will them forward. A dozen separated from the pack to shoot towards the killer, and when his attempt to flee the circle was met with Teddydrum White’s cannon and another set of swords coming down like guillotines to gate him in. He had to deflect them with his two swords, impressively managing to knock all ten away. But the Hero Killer grunted in pain as another one shot forward during this to spear into meat of his left leg.

Surprisingly, he was able to continue standing through the pain– but that ended when a second sword impaled the same leg to pin it to the ground. The Hero Killer buckled forward onto his knee

Then, his right arm was weakened by a sword to the upper portion of the arm, and another sword speared the forearm into the ground –Izuku had to be careful to avoid bone with that one– and one of Stain’s swords was forced out of hands. Blood was beginning to puddle around him.

This was all Izuku meant to do, but as he progressed with systematically pinning The Hero Killer’s limbs to the ground like he was a bug Izuku was setting up for display– Tenya’s words rang through his head, Tenya’s pain and tears rang through his head, the fate of Tenya’s brother rang through his head…

What was once a seed that had sprouted with time– his malice budded into a still closed flower that awaits its bloom

A sword impaled the Hero Killer’s right leg to the ground, but then Stain screamed as another impaled his lower back. The white blade sticking out of the front of his abdomen was dyed in the dark red burgundy of his blood and sin.

“Shit– ” He hadn’t meant to do that.

–Yes he had, deep on the inside. He doesn’t want to kill him, but he does want to hurt him. That’s why it happened; the sword simply responded to his will–
Izuku immediately dispelled the sword with a flurry of light and focused his sight on the wound.
“Behold the Gift from God”

White flowers bloomed out of the wound from both the front and back side of the Hero Killer’s middle at the same time that one last sword speared into his left forearm. Stain released his second sword from his hand.

The Hero Killer hissed through his pain, “I suppose that between the two of us, I am the weaker one who is meant to be culled…”

Izuku’s face was a cold neutral to match his voice as replied, “You don’t have to worry about dying, I’ll be able to fix you up fine. Will of the Crystal Princess!”

Crystal enclosed the Hero Killer’s body that was leaning over the ground, but avoided the spots on all four of his limbs where swords stuck out. A voice from behind him muttered, “Well I sure hope you can fix him kid…”

Izuku still couldn’t move his body, but the Champion turned so that he could see Hawks glide up to him with an expression that didn’t betray the hero’s thoughts. Teddydrum Black and Izu-pingu also moved to be next to Izuku. Izuku glanced his eyes back towards the sight of the Hero Killer impaled in place like a mouse set up for dissection with his blood coating his body and the ground around him. And his stomach dropped as he realized the gravity of what he’d done.

*This is not fine. This looks so bad— how had Izuku not realized that earlier?*

The dark of night had settled in from the twilight and Hawks was finishing up evacuating the people who were inside of the building that he was fighting the Nomu in—though it was less like fighting, and more like stalling until either he got more of his feathers back or Midoriya’s penguin showed up— when Horus screamed into the comm-line, “Prince Deku was taken hostage by the Hero Killer, then disappeared with him and his robots, and now Tsukuyomi’s Dark Shadow is starting to go
Hawks clenched his jaw and ignored the hitch of dread inside of him, mentally directing his feathers to drop off all the civilians they were still holding and return to him. He barked into his communicator, “Tsukuyomi said that if this happened to expose Dark Shadow to light so guide him into the building, the lights are still on here! What was the Hero Killer trying to do with taking Prince Deku hostage?!”

“It looked like there was a warp gate in the alleyway behind him that he was dragging him into.”

*Midoriya was the goal

*Why does the League want him?*

Hawks didn’t have time to think about that question. Midoriya was alone with a serial killer and he needs to *finish this now, he’s wasted too much time, got himself too distracted handling everything at once*–

Countless red feathers swarmed in a hurricane surrounding the Nomu.

–If the thing can make holes where ever Hawks tries to cut him, Hawks will just have to cut through it more times that the thing can make holes for–

All the feathers, big and small, speared into the flesh of the Nomu, much too many for its two quirks to effectively counter. The creature was skewered a hundred times over with everything from its limbs to its torso to its brain turning into a pincushion filled with the red of both feathers and blood. It shrieked as it fell in a boneless heap to the floor.

Right on time, Hawks saw Horus herding Tokoyami to the center of the building. It looked the bright fluorescent lights helped the kid get his quirk under control, but as Hawks flew over and began the process of retrieving his feathers, he could hear neither of them were calm.

*“Fumikage, Midoriya– we need to get Midoriya–”*
“I know Dark Shadow, I know, but we can’t do anything—”

“He was right there Fumikage—they were taking him away, they had a knife on him—”

“I know! I saw, but that doesn’t change anything—”

It was times like this when Hawks wondered if the hero industry had any business in slating high school kids for this job

–It was times like this when Takahiro wondered if society had any business in slating an elementary school child for this job–

He rested a heavy hand on Tokoyami’s shoulder. “Everything will be alright, Tokoyami–”

“How can you know that?!” Tokoyami turned on him with a trembling body and trembling words, Hawks had never heard him raise his voice this loud, “There’s no way to know that, because we don’t have a way to follow him! For all we know he could be bleeding out right this very second!”

Hawks knew that, but what else was he supposed to say in a situation like this to a panicking kid?

Their saving grace came in the form of a teddy bear robot carrying a penguin into the building. Hawks had a full half-second to feel relief before he saw that the black-and-white penguin was completely coated in the dark red of fresh blood. It looked like it had just crawled out of a horror movie.

Tokoyami didn’t miss that eyesore either. “Izu-pingu, what happened to Midoriya?!”

“Is Midoriya okay?!”

Izu-pingu actually had to take a moment to think about it before he horizontally raised a blood-covered flipper to wobble it in a so-so manner.
“Horus, watch Tsukuyomi and watch that thing!” – he jerked his finger back to point at the bleeding Nomu that may or may not be dead Hawks couldn’t care less at this point– “Izu-pingu, take me to Midoriya!”

Izu-pingu’s beady black eyes blinked at him, then awkwardly looked away.

Hawks crouched down in front of the flightless bird to grasp its feathered face with both hands and furrow his brows at it, he only vaguely noted that blood was getting onto his gloves. “I don’t know why you’re reluctant to let me see Midoriya, but I have to help him– I have to make sure he’s okay! Can’t you understand that?” Hawks insisted feeling like he was at his wit’s end. If the penguin didn’t take him there’d be no way for him to reach Midoriya–

A pair of flippers rested themselves over Hawks’s hands, spreading more blood over his gloves, and Izu-pingu squawked twice.

Hawks, Izu-pingu, and Teddydrum Black were all instantly transported to the same arena tower Hawks had visited previously just as the Hero Killer’s scream sounded through the air.

Hawks blinked at the sight of a skewered-looking serial killer literally pinned to the ground with one arm and one leg impaled with two swords each, while his second leg had one sword impaled into it. He just caught sight of a long white sword stained with red lancing through the Hero Killer’s abdomen before Midoriya cursed and presumably caused it to disappear. He then said some nonsense that caused white flowers to bloom all over the injury while at the same time spearing the Hero Killer’s final limb to the ground. Hawks was forcibly reminded of the way he just pincushioned the Nomu.

He wasn’t sure what he had been expecting to see when he got here– but it sure wasn’t this. Definitely a better sight than he had been anticipating, the kid clearly had it handled, but it was still unexpected…

Even while he was acting as a living human pincushion, Stain apparently still had to speak solely through dramatic speeches – talking about being culled or something, if Midoriya hadn’t already done the deed Hawks would warn the guy about accidently cutting himself with that edge– And Midoriya answered with, “You don’t have to worry about dying, I’ll be able to fix you up fine.” Then secured the prisoner with that crystal spell thing he does.
Hawks couldn’t help but unthoughtfully retort, “Well I sure hope you can fix him kid…”

Then as the mannequin thing started turning the kid back towards him, Hawks saw that his middle was drenched in dark red blood and flowers containing petals swirling with red and white surrounded by a light green glow.

*Shit. Don’t get distracted, Midoriya’s not okay.*

Hawks flapped his wings to carry him over to Midoriya, who looked at him, then looked back to Stain, and then paled by an impressive amount for someone that had already been pale due to blood loss. Hawks ignored it and gently took Midoriya from the mannequin to lean the boy onto his body.

Hawks hid his worry with steady words, “How much pain are you in right now? I see you got some weird magic shit going on but is that really enough? We should get you to the hospital…”

Midoriya blinked at him with slightly unfocused eyes —*damn how much blood has he lost?*— then replied with apprehension, “Uh… taking me right now might end up being worse for me, actually. The flowers from *Behold the Gift from God* should be able to heal it entirely, though it’ll leave a scar…” Midoriya glanced down at the flowers emerging from his body before looking back up at Hawks. “Once they’re completely red that means they’re done. The pain is getting better as they get further along.”

Midoriya turned his head to look at the Hero Killer, who was still bleeding onto the ground. “Oh! I can move now.” He then tried to take his weight off of Hawks, so Hawks clamped his right arm around the kid to force him to stay. Midoriya looked back to him in confusion.

Hawks stared at Midoriya with exasperation that was reflected in his voice, “Just because you can move doesn’t mean you should. Stay still until the hole in your stomach is gone at least!” *Honestly this kid was terrible for Hawks’s heart, a man his age should not be having heart problems…*

“Ah… right…” Midoriya awkwardly accepted Hawks’s logic, then turned his head back towards Stain. The rest of the swords disintegrated into sparks of white light.

*“Behold the Gift from God.”* White flowers bloomed out of all the bloody stab wounds on the Hero Killer. Checking the flowers that already covered Stain’s middle, Hawks saw they were already tinged with red.
“The flowers stop the bleeding too, so you should be fine…” Midoriya explained to Stain.

Stain glared at the kid. “Save your platitudes. I recognize that your intent was to *bring pain*—you do not wish to truly heal me.”

Hawks winced at that, but the kid took it surprisingly well, narrowing his eyes at the killer instead of faltering from the truth of his words. “That’s true… I wanted to hurt you because of what you did to my friend yesterday, and what you did to his brother before that, but as a hero I can’t let you *stay* hurt—I *shouldn’t have gone that far in the first place*—so I will fix you even if I feel like you don’t deserve to be fixed.”

“If you don’t wish to save me you shouldn’t bother in the first place!” Stain yelled in anger, “Only *true heroes* empty of the sins that plague today’s heroes such as fame, corruption, and greed should be heroes! *Only heroes like All Might should exist in this world!* A hero like you who has power that is easily swayed by corruption *isn’t needed!*”

*Is this guy trying to convince a high schooler to let him bleed to death? Hawks can never understand the thought process of these extremist thinkers…*

“You don’t happen to have anything that can shut this guy up do you, Prince Deku? There has to be *something.*”

Midoriya continued to stare at the Hero Killer as he called out to the still-bloody penguin, “Izu-pingu, go collect a basket of poppies so we can put him to sleep.”

The penguin saluted before blurring away—*Hawks hadn’t seen that trick yet…* 

“You see? Even your hero name—*Prince Deku*—begets your impurity as a hero. That is why I attempted to purge you—”

Hawks’s throat tightened like he was being choked. He wanted to explain the situation—*that he was the one at fault for that*—but the uncomfortable feeling in his throat caused him to hesitate.

“—and your choice to associate with the Number Three hero, the hero that has the tightest leash connecting him to the government which acts as the core of society’s and heroes’ corruption, is also telling. He is nothing but a *pet songbird* that sings at the whim of those in power, but you still
somehow found him worthy to follow.”

Upon hearing that, Hawks became physically incapable of speaking. The nail of that point hammered painfully into his chest.

Suddenly, Midoriya went unnaturally still. Hawks was concerned that the boy might have finally passed out due to blood loss, but looking down at his face pressed against Hawks’s jacket showed him to be aware. His expression was only made up of minuscule details—a twitching eyebrow, a creased forehead, a pinched mouth—but his green eyes were intense with fury.

“Hawks, can you please bring me closer to him,” Midoriya’s words were polite, but they were not a request.

Oh shit is he actually going to kill the serial killer now? Why did he get so angry— “Uh… I don’t think that’s— ”

“I’m not going to do anything to him. I just want to talk.”

Are you sure about that? Hawks wanted to ask, but instead he decided to trust that the kid wouldn’t turn into a crazed murderer and brought him forward, stopping a couple of meters in front of the grounded Hero Killer.

The Prince looked down at the Hero Killer.

“Let me just clarify; changing these issues—as in ceasing monetary reward for heroes, getting rid of heroes who are not moral paragons like All Might, reducing government involvement with hero affairs to reduce using them for political agendas, and etc—is the revolution that you want to bring to this world, is it not?”

Stain narrowed his eyes at Midoriya in suspicion, he was smart enough to see that this was leading to something bad thing for him. “That is correct…”

“I see… Truthfully, the way I’m feeling now about you and your platform after hearing it straight from the source is the exact same way I had felt when I first heard it…” Midoriya tilted his head to the side in an unsettling gesture. His eyes never left Stain, and Stain’s eyes never left him.
“Even though you try to reveal the “reality” of heroes and this world, I just can’t help but feel that you are actually incredibly naïve.”

Hawks felt his jaw drop and his eyes widen involuntarily.

Did he just– did this teenager just call the Hero Killer, the guy that was named after his goal to purge “fake heroes” out of society to bring attention to the corruption that inhabits the hero industry, naïve? Straight to his face?

Said Hero Killer was staring at Midoriya with a similar level of incomprehension, Hawks wondered if anyone else had ever called him naïve…

The Prince gave Stain a hollow smile. “Let me explain to you in detail the exact reasons why your entire ideology is misguided and false.” –Was this really happening?

“First of all; hypocrite much? I know you’re of the belief that “someone must be stained in blood” to bring about your revolution, but the culmination of your entire being, life, and fate is in worse shape than Endeavor’s –who I am assuming is around the top of your “fake hero” list because you’d be the fake if he wasn’t– How can you go around preaching this when your soul is more corrupt than the people you are accusing of corruption? It completely undermines your position.”

–Hawks didn’t know if he should feel more concerned over the fact that Tokoyami was absolutely correct about the “seeing hearts” thing or that his childhood hero’s soul was apparently significantly corrupted–

“Secondly; your insistence that heroes need to go without pay will only lead to more so-called fake heroes. I shouldn’t need to explain this to you, but in order to live in society people have to have money, which they earn through using up their time at jobs. If pro heroes didn’t get paid, many of the honestly altruistic heroes would be unable to do hero work outside of their free time because they would need to commit the majority of their life to having a separate job to survive. Additionally, they would be lacking the resources that they can use freely now because of the lack of financial support– so they would be less capable in actually saving people.

“Therefore, the only fulltime heroes would be the people who are already extremely wealthy and can thus devote more time and money into their hero work, and the people who are fully scouted and sponsored by the government to do so –as in they would be getting paid for this work anyway– I am assuming that you would see both these types of people as being corrupt. That means that your push
to demonetize hero work would directly lead to *fake heroes* monopolizing the industry.”

—How does this kid even come up with this shit? Hawks thought he only needed to be able to interpret literary concepts to have a conversation with Midoriya, but apparently he also needs a fucking degree in socio-economics or some other shit like that too—

“Thirdly; for all that you seem to idolize All Might, you’re actually taking him and his quality of character for granted. Exactly how many people in this world do you think are even capable of matching up to that standard of moral integrity? Compare that amount to the number of people who are capable of committing crimes and becoming villains. No matter how you look at it, the first group of people will be extremely outnumbered by the second, there’s simply be no practical way for them to handle all the hero work on their own— which would lead to countless people dying because of something as stupid as *understaffing*.

“Frankly speaking, it either sounds like you’re putting too much faith in the idea that humanity naturally leans more towards having moral people, or that you just haven’t thought this through enough. *The second point I mentioned seems to suggest the latter.*”

—*How many times can a person be murdered through words alone? Hawks literally feels like he needs to report this as an actual murder to the police, that’s how brutal this is—*

“And lastly—” *Oh God he’s not even finished yet, there’s more?* “—everything you mentioned in that clip of you; about winning and losing, about the profitable and unprofitable, about the *chosen* and *unchosen*, I think that in a way, *all of that is true*. But it’s true not just for society— it’s also true for you. The only thing you care about is choosing which people deserve to be in this world, how is that any different from what everyone else is doing? You’ve convinced yourself that you can bring about a miracle to revolutionize this world, that the suffering you build your miracle atop of— suffering from both you sacrificing your morality and you sacrificing *other people’s lives*— is justified because you will create a better end, *but do you truly have the power to bring the world revolution?*

“You’re underestimating the cost that it takes to change this sort of fate, to create that kind of miracle. You could probably butcher people for your entire life and not change a single thing about this world— *because it just wouldn’t be enough*. And if that were to come to fruition, all you would have is a giant collection of sin and sacrifice that you enacted for no justifiable reason whatsoever, because all of your efforts will become completely *worthless* when you fail to achieve your miracle. *All you would have on your hands is a tragedy.*”

When Midoriya stopped talking, there was only silence left.
Hawks was in shock. The Hero Killer was in shock. Hawks wasn’t even sure if the Hero Killer was breathing. Stain just stared at the Prince as though he had taken apart Stain’s world piece by piece, and then it put together in a strange new way that he could barely comprehend.

Hawks opened and closed his mouth a couple of times, trying to find something to say but failing to come up with any follow up to what the hell that was.

The stillness was broken by Izu-pingu, who seemed to have washed the blood off, blurring back with a basket of red poppies held with both flippers. He presented it to Hawks, and Hawks obligingly accepted the offering.

“Just have him smell them, the concentrated scent of the poppies should knock him out since they were made to induce sleeping.”

The mannequin held out its hand towards the basket offering its services. Hawks gave the basket away to watch as it was stuffed in front of the still-in-shock Hero Killer’s face. When the villain fell unconscious, Hawks couldn’t help but think of it as a mercy at this point…

His attention was forced back to Midoriya upon him grasping at Hawks’s body. The boy’s attitude had done a total 180, he looked down right nervous now.

“I– I’m sorry about this… Am I– ” Midoriya stuttered through his words, unconsciously glancing away from Hawk’s eyes, “Am I going to get in trouble…?”

Hawks looked at the significantly redder flowers on the Hero Killer’s body and the blood covering him, then looked back to the timid, injured, young boy he was still holding to his chest and his mostly red flowers and bloodied stomach. If Hawks had to guess, he was probably thinking of some worst-case scenario like him ending up in jail or something for unauthorized quirk use or extreme use of force.

Really, it wouldn’t be that bad. Hawks hadn’t specifically authorized him to fight the Hero Killer and he doesn’t have a provisional license, but Hawks had been directing him to assist with the emergency situation as a whole, and that emergency situation included Midoriya’s attempted kidnapping. Purely based on the context of the situation, this was self-defense while he was on-duty for hero work.

But there are limits to how far people are allowed to go for self-defense. Against someone like the
Hero Killer, the authorities wouldn’t question the need for a trainee to go all out just to take him on. What Hawks was really worried about was if they asked Midoriya if there had been a less extreme way he could’ve handled the serial killer, and Midoriya said yes.

The kid wouldn’t end up in jail for it— but it would be very not good, and he would certainly get in trouble.

Hawks remembered how the boy brought him to his garden to sleep, and how he helped Hawks feel lighter for that moment, and how just now he got angry when Stain had criticized Hawks for his servitude towards the head of their society. And personally, Hawks just didn’t care that the kid had skewered the serial killer. He much preferred it to the alternative of the serial killer skewering the kid—which he actually did do if Midoriya’s the wound to the gut is anything to go by.

So Hawks brought his right wing around to enclose the boy, shielding him from the world.

“No. All of this happened because I wasn’t watching you properly, so I’ll take care of it. Don’t worry…”

Chapter End Notes

References this chapter:
"If the egg's shell does not break... the chick will die without being born. We are the chick; the egg is the world. If the world's shell does not break, we will die without being born. Break the world's shell! For the sake of revolutionizing the world!” and "Believe in miracles, and they will know your feelings." are both quotes from Revolutionary Girl Utena. Momoka's speech about miracles is also loosely derived from another Utena quote "She's a fool, because she doesn't realize that her miracle is standing atop someone else's sacrifice. But that's the sort of person who receives miracles." And the Sword of Dios ritual is also based on Utena. Basically, the alternative title for this chapter is "Revolutionary Prince Deku".
“What– What the hell happened?! I thought the kid needed to say some shit to use his quirk?! How did he get away with Stain’s hand over his mouth?!”

“If I had to guess, I would say that the penguin who also uses his quirk was probably around somewhere to use it for him.”

“The watchers said they never saw that fucking penguin the whole week! Where the fuck was it hiding?! It’s a penguin! How could they miss it?!”

A hand grabbed Tomura by the wrist.

“Stop scratching so hard, you’ll hurt yourself. There’s no point in worrying about those things now. We have to go before the Number Three hero catches sight of us– ”

“How could I not be worried when Sensei wants that quirk? This operation wasn’t for me like the others– it was for him. You can’t tell me you’re looking forward to telling him we failed.”

Kurogiri sighed in response, “I know… but All for One understands that failure is something that occurs sometimes, that’s why we used the Hero Killer for this in the first place. He’ll be… upset, but he won’t cast you out for it.”

Tomura scoffed, “I wasn’t worried that he’d do something like casting me out– I’m his chosen successor. I know he wouldn’t do something like that…”

–But is that truly the reality of this situation?–

Kurogiri brought them both back to their base instead of voicing his thoughts.
“…During the attack by the League of Villains in Kyushu last night, the Hero Killer attempted to kidnap UA High School student Midoriya Izuku, who had been present at the scene working under the Number Three hero Hawks. Fortunately, said student was able to defend himself from the kidnapping attempt until Hawks finished apprehending the villain attacking the building, at which point Hawks apprehended the Hero Killer–”

Toshinori was busy staring at the news channel wondering what kind of rotten luck and fate UA must have for two of their students to end up involved with the Hero Killer two days in a row—not to mention the League of Villains using Nomus in two separate attacks in two separate cities two days in a row—when Gran Tornio called.

Toshinori knew why he was calling. He answered and got right to the point, “Were you able to successfully use the same method young Midoriya and Hawks had used to transport themselves to Hosu?”

“Yes. Luckily Endeavor’s kid was okay with using the bracelet Midoriya had given him to take me with him—I helped him out by convincing Endeavor to let him go for hero work purposes.”

“Were you actually able to get information about the situation there?”

“Yes, in exchange for keeping Hawks updated on the League of Villains case. It was easy to get him official access to that because of the previous report he made when he visited Hosu concerning Midoriya’s “prophecy”. It seems like he has a vested interest in keeping track of the League of Villains’ development, though I can’t tell why.”

Toshinori settled back in his seat. “So was there anything notable that you learned? Maybe Midoriya having another prophecy about this or new information on the League?”

“Unfortunately, there wasn’t much they could learn about the League itself— but based on how things happened they’re pretty sure that kidnapping the kid was the main goal of this attack. The Nomu and location was specifically chosen to distract Hawks for a longer time than the ten seconds he usually needs to put down villains so that the Hero Killer would have enough time to drag Midoriya into a warp gate. This was confirmed by the Hero Killer’s testimony. It’s a good thing they hadn’t realized
the kid’s penguin was out and at ready.”

Fear coursed through Toshinori’s nerves.

Clasping a hand on his head in frustration, he hissed, “Why would they try to attain young Midoriya? There were plenty of better choices if they just wanted a UA student to make a statement– they wanted him to the point where they were willing to work around the Number Three hero. That’s not normal!”

“There’s no way to say for certain, but…” Gran Torino’s words carried a heavy weight to them, “if I had to guess, I’d say the most likely answer is that–assuming All for One is alive as we discussed previously– he wants to take Midoriya’s quirk. Though hopefully he only knows about the “pocket dimension quirk” Midoriya’s demonstrated and not the kid’s actual quirk.”

“Shit…” Toshinori could help but curse at the situation. “The school needs to discuss what we can do to mitigate another kidnapping attempt on Midoriya, they’ll most likely try again once they’ve gathered more resources.”

Closing his eyes in an attempt to relieve some of his stress, Toshinori sighed, “Anything else I should know?”

“Oh, you haven’t even heard the half of it Toshinori. Firstly, the kid looked at the Nomu using his quirk and saw that it had “multiple cores from different Fruit of Fate, but no whole Fruit of Fate” in it– so they’re definitely being made by putting multiple quirks together. It’s almost certain that All for One is alive knowing that.”

Toshinori revisited his dread upon thinking the man he had worked so hard to end was alive, but then finished turning the information over in his mind. “…If All for One works by manipulating the core of peoples Fruit of Fate, that would make him a Child of Fate as well, wouldn’t it?”

“I didn’t give him the details on All for One, but the kid is confident that whoever created the Nomu is a Child of Fate, yes. I think you should inform him about all of this– maybe having an expert on this Children of Fate thing would help the investigation. At the very least, he already knows something’s not right.”

“…I will inform him when he comes back.”
“Next thing you need to know, the only prophecy the kid had was the one I told you before about the League of Villains and Hero Killer having opposing revolutions or whatever. Notably, it only said that Shigaraki had started his move while the Hosu incident was going on, so presumably that move only ended after he failed to take Midoriya the next day. The League and Hero Killer apposing each other matches with the Hero Killer’s testimony that he was taken by the League against his will, which is supported by the shock collar they found on him.”

A hand slapped itself over Toshinori’s eyes and he groaned, “It’s always in the details with stuff like this…”

Gran Torino ignored his complaining to continue, “And finally, Hawks taking down the Hero Killer is a cover. Midoriya didn’t just “defend himself”, he essentially completed the capture on his own before Hawks was able to use his penguin to get into his pocket dimension. Usually in that sort of circumstance that would be fine, but apparently the kid used “excessive force”, so Hawks convinced them to avoid legal action being taken against Midoriya and to use the cover story. Without it, the public might try to look harder into the details and find exactly how the kid took him down.”

Toshinori blinked at that. “Come to think of it… they did say that the Hero Killer had been “heavily injured during the course of the capture”. What kind of excessive force did Midoriya use?”

“Basically, he stabbed the guy seven times to physically pin him to the ground using swords. A little over the top, but the Hero Killer did stab him first. It might have passed if the kid hadn’t also stabbed him in the gut…”

Blood hacked out of Toshinori’s lungs. He coughed out his words with his hand covering his mouth, “S-Seven times?! Stabbed him in the gut, with swords?! And Midoriya was stabbed?! Is he alright?!”

“Yeah, Midoriya had another spell or whatever that can heal extremely well that he also used on the Hero Killer. Only thing is that it leaves scars in the shape of flowers—honestly the stuff this kid can do is so weird Toshinori. Also, you should really read this transcript Hawks wrote up for what Midoriya said the Hero Killer after the fight! I wouldn’t be surprised if the guy was in the middle of having an existential crisis right this very moment…”

Toshinori wiped away the blood running down his chin using a tissue while sighing to himself, “That last part was the least surprising thing you’ve told me this entire conversation. Looks like we have a lot to talk about when he gets back…”

“–Just yesterday Midoriya Izuku had helped Hawks resolve an incident involving a villain
attempting to take two men, one mother, and her 5-year-old child hostage. The young girl that was rescued answered reporters at the scene, talking about her abundant admiration for “Prince Deku”, and she and her mother state that they anticipate the day Prince Deku officially enters the hero industry—”

“…A lot to talk about.”

Katsuki had chosen the Number Four hero Best Jeanist for his workplace training, and throughout the first half of it, he had thought he had picked horribly, horribly wrong.

Admittedly, he had been interested in what Best Jeanist had to show him at first. “Heroes and villains are two sides of the same coin. I’ll show those glaring eyes of yours what makes someone a hero” –that had sounded like something Deku would say, and he had shown Katsuki plenty. But after the hero had forcibly put him in jeans and styled his hair, Katsuki had written off his “correction” of Katsuki’s behavior as the narrowminded, unhelpful garbage that it was.

It was sometime on the third day of Katsuki’s workplace training, after Best Jeanist had sighed at the sight of Katsuki absolutely failing to present an approachable image to a couple of kids and scared them off during a casual patrol, that Katsuki broke and told this to Best Jeanist’s face.

Katsuki snarled at him, “Oh, don’t give me that shit! You talked all big when I first got here about how you were going to show me “what makes a hero”, but so far I think I’d learn about that more just by following my 15-year-old classmate around for a week!”

Instead of getting offended like Katsuki had assumed the man would, Best Jeanist slightly tilted his head to the side in interest. “Oh? You sound like you’re referring to a specific person. Which classmate of yours is this?” his usually stoic tone had a tint of curiosity to it.

Katsuki narrowed his eyes at Best Jeanist in suspicion. “…Midoriya Izuku, the guy that gave the speech at the Sports Festival. But why do you care about something like that?”
“I care because I had thought you were the type of person to only consider doing things your way, but if there’s a classmate that you admire as being someone that can show you “what makes someone a hero”, then it seems like I was mistaken.”

Katsuki’s first instinct is denial, “I don’t admire him or any crap like that! Shitty Izuku’s just– smart about that kind of shit! At the very least, I know he’d do a better job at that then you are right now!”

Best Jeanist continued to stay composed while faced with Katsuki’s barbs, calmly inquiring, “And what do you think that he would do differently than me?”

He had to actually pause and think about that for a moment. How is he supposed to know what a guy that acts like fucking Prince Charming half the time would do? But Katsuki himself was curious about the answer to that question, so he let himself think it over. Best Jeanist patiently waited for his response.

“Don’t worry about how long it takes to change yourself, Katsuki. You’ve already made a lot of progress– your Fruit is already looking better. Just keep doing your best to grow, alright?”

“If you only love yourself when you’re amazing and when you win, is that really loving yourself?”

“…I think that he’d say that forcefully trying to change who I am to fit the mold of a “good hero” isn’t really loving myself–and that’s not from me, that’s literally how he’d say it, alright?– And that I should just do the best I can whatever way I can.”

“Is that so… Midoriya Izuku did seem like quite an interesting child.” Best Jeanist’s eyes gleamed from behind his combed hair. His index finger tapped on the jean collar covering his cheek and looked away in thought.

“To improve your image as a hero without losing what you love about yourself… That is the ideal for how to craft yourself as a hero, but perhaps I focused so much on how you were lacking in terms of “what makes a hero” that I forgot to take into account what you already have that makes you a hero.” Best Jeanist looked back at Katsuki.

“Why do you want to be a hero, Champion?”

Katsuki straightened up a bit at the sound of his new hero name. “I want to be a hero that will win in
the end no matter how many times I’m defeated, because I want to be a hero like All Might!”

“Not exactly the thing that people first think of when they look at the image of All Might,” Best Jeanist hummed, “but I suppose that an inherent part of All Might’s reliability is that he “wins in the end” … That type of heroic image – a hero that will continuously fight against adversity to succeed – is one that will give peace of mind to those in need of saving, so how can you reflect that into your appearance and behavior? Are you sure you do not wish to try being an “elegant” hero to achieve this?”

Katsuki raised his eyebrow and questioned incredulously, “When you think of an elegant hero, is “a hero that will continuously fight against adversity to succeed” really the first thing that comes to mind?!”

“… I suppose not. In that case, let us try finding you a different sort of image that will convey this.”

From that point on, Best Jeanist adjusted his strategy for Katsuki, focusing on teaching Katsuki how to reign in his cursing and contempt to at least be somewhat sociable – saying Katsuki should try to project the image of a hero who is confident but in control. It was much easier than trying to rewrite his personality with fake-ass smiles and platitudes, but was still surprisingly difficult. Katsuki hadn’t realized how much of his attitude was based in instinctual behavior that he had indulged himself with while growing up – along with what he got from his mom.

He had known theoretically that he would have to adjust his behavior once he entered UA. He had been self-aware enough of what he was doing to know that a lot of the shit that his pansy middle school and elementary school teachers allowed him due to quirk bias wouldn’t pass at a school like UA. But he had only bothered toning it down enough that he wouldn’t end up expelled like some reject failure, actively trying to control it was a different matter entirely.

*But if he didn’t want his fucking fate to burn to a crisp like the Number Two hero’s, he better work his ass off trying to do this. If he couldn’t even restrain himself from cursing at 5-year-olds then that was probably a bad fucking sign.*

The process led to Katsuki reflecting more on his past behavior, which reached its pinnacle on the last day of his workplace training.

Best Jeanist had noticed that he hadn’t been disturbed by the involvement of his classmates in the Hosu incident with Stain, so he probably assumed Katsuki would react the same way to the news that broke the very next day. *But that wasn’t the case at all.*
“…The UA student targeted, Midoriya Izuku, was able to defend himself until Hawks arrived at the scene, but suffered a knife wound. Authorities report that throughout the process of taking the boy hostage, the Hero Killer had changed his goal to killing the boy instead. It was fortunate that—”

Katsuki stopped listening to the TV and stopped drinking from the water bottle in his hand at that point. He couldn’t even process that idea, the idea that a boy he had spent almost his whole life with could one day be gone, just like that. That just yesterday he could’ve died without Katsuki even knowing what had happened.

“Are you alright, Kacchan? Can you stand okay?”

Katsuki couldn’t imagine a reality where Izuku wasn’t there. The boy was like the scenery of a familiar childhood park, a constant that had forever been present at the edges of his vision in the background. Katsuki couldn’t imagine living a life where Izuku was gone–

“If you want to be a hero so badly, there’s a quick way to do it. Believe that you’ll be born with a quirk in your next life and take a swan dive off the roof!”

The water bottle fell from Katsuki’s hand to land on the floor, spilling water into a puddle around his feet. He could feel his body trembling.

–Because how did it take him this long to realize the meaning of those words he had cruelly spat at the boy who used to be his friend? How did it take him this long to actually think about what he said, and what would’ve happened if Izuku had taken them to heart? How did it take him this long to realize just how wrong he had been?–

“Eh– Bakugou-kun?! Best Jeanist sir, there’s something wrong with Bakugou-kun!”

“Bakugou, what… Someone turn off the TV! What happened to his classmate has obviously upset him.” A pair of hands on his shoulders directed him away from the main room and into one of the smaller break rooms that were in the agency. Katsuki was gently guided to sit down in a chair.

“I should have realized you would take what happened to your friend badly. Why don’t you sit down for a moment…”
That brought Katsuki out of his stupor. He was finally able to take in his surroundings to see Best Jeanist sitting in a chair next to him.

“We aren’t…” Katsuki’s words failed him as he tried to work around the mental revelation of his fucked up behavior. He had to look away from Best Jeanist’s eyes, they felt too judging. “We– used to be friends… but then I fucked everything up.”

There was a moment of silence before Best Jeanist replied, “I see… Well, I won’t pry into your private affairs and I don’t know the extent of your mistakes, but perhaps you should consider trying to make up for them?”

When Katsuki looked back to Best Jeanist, the hero was staring into empty air. “The hero business is one that is fraught with danger– leaving regrets to lie for too long can end with them becoming permanent.”

Katsuki thought about those words, as well as the words he had said to Deku, throughout the rest of the day. And when shitty hair texted him later asking him how he was doing—he didn’t mention anything about what happened to Deku, but that was definitely why he was asking– instead of wondering why Kirishima kept trying to bother Katsuki, Katsuki wondered why Kirishima bothered trying to be friends with him at all.

“I was so scared Midoriya-chan! And Fumikage won’t admit it but he was really scared too! I can’t believe that you were stabbed, I’m so angry! But I’m so glad you’re okay!”

Midoriya gently pet the crying Dark Shadow, who was crushing his head against Izuku’s chest with his arms wrapped around Izuku’s torso, while Tokoyami stood to the side looking awkwardly embarrassed.

Endeavor’s kid—who Hawks is 75% convinced is Midoriya’s boyfriend even though he hadn’t been introduced as such—had just left with Gran Torino after the elderly hero had used him for a ride to Midoriya’s Crystal World. While Tokoyami and Dark Shadow had already had their chance to fret
over Midoriya yesterday at the hospital and throughout the night, Dark Shadow apparently still had some emotions to work through.

However, Midoriya caught sight of his lurking, and knew he had to unfortunately stop the cuddle session. “Thank you for worrying about me Dark Shadow, Tokoyami-kun, but you don’t need to worry anymore– I’m just fine now! I have to go do something for Hawks now because of… what happened, though…”

Dark Shadow released his hold on Izuku, sniffling a bit as his crying began to end –how did Hawks end up with two trainees with sentient birds as part of their quirk? Guess this is what he gets for taking bird-aesthetics into account as part of his deliberation process…

Midoriya excused himself to walk up to Hawks, and he wordlessly guided the boy to his office. It was a standard looking office, with nice modern furniture, walls lined with windows and framed picture, and a well-used sofa that saw more use as Hawks’s makeshift bed than it got as a place for visitors to sit. The door was shut with a click to give them privacy.

“So…” Hawks casually began, “I probably should’ve asked about this earlier, but can I just make sure I heard you right when you suggested that you can bring the dead back to life? And that you can see people’s souls or hearts or whatever you want to call it?”

A small, amused grin lit Midoriya’s face. “Oh, you asked Tokoyami-kun about me didn’t you? Well– you should know that he hadn’t actually meant that literally, but he sort of made a hole-in-one with that choice of figurative speech.”

Hawks raised an eyebrow at him and drawled, “Stop taking enjoyment in my confusion and explain some shit to me. My life was never this complicated before you showed up, so it’s the least you could do…”

Midoriya chuckled softly for a bit before his smile devolved into a small frown. A serious expression overcame his face as he took Hawks’s hand. “There are some things you should be made aware of anyway… Survival Strategy”

And so Hawks was pulled back into the Garden of Eden, in the same meadow he had been in before, so Midoriya could explain the crazy shit behind his powers. Less than halfway through the conversation Hawks had already become completely lost– the Prince tried to explain a reality that was made up by fate, the chosen few that could change it, the manifestation of this fate that took the form of a fucking fruit, and how Midoriya’s quirk and the power of the Crystal World that he advertised to be his quirk were completely different things. How Midoriya could look into the depths
of a person’s fate and being, into their heart and soul.

To Hawks, this reality sounded more like a fairytale than anything else, but the half-frozen golden apple Midoriya held up to him seemed to suggest that this was a case where the truth was stranger than fiction.

“Do you have any idea why your Fruit would be frozen, Takahiro-san?”

That snapped Hawks out of his fast-moving thoughts quicker than anything else could. It had been so long since anyone had called him that, he almost thought he had misheard the kid.

“…How do you know that name?”

The fingers of Midoriya’s left hand ghosted over the ice on Hawks’s Fruit of Fate as his right hand held it firmly up for them to view. “When I hold a person’s Fruit, I feel… more connected to them. It gives me the tendency to refer to them with the name that they personally refer to themselves as, but in your case… I can tell you think of yourself as Hawks, but you want someone to think of you as Takahiro. So I referred to you as Takahiro.”

Midoriya looked up at him with intense green eyes. “Do you not want me to?”

_He doesn’t know the answer to that question. He’s never asked himself whether he wanted someone to think of him as Takahiro once more, because he felt it would be pointless since no one wanted Takahiro over Hawks._

_Or at least, there used to be no one who wanted Takahiro over Hawks_

Hawks decided to avoid the question, “You can refer to me however you like, just don’t call me that on the field or anything like that. And as for your other question…” _He knows the answer to that, but he doesn’t want to admit it. Doesn’t want to admit that his cage is so encompassing that it’s taken hold of his very fate and soul._

Midoriya’s eyes never strayed from his. “…Can I look into your Fruit, Takahiro-san? I want to see how I can help you.”
There’s nothing you could do to help with something like this, Hawks wanted to say, but for some reason—that seemed like a cruel thing to do. He doesn’t think the kid looking into his Fruit will accomplish anything, and he doesn’t want to let some random teenager he’s known for less than a week look into his metaphysical soul of all things, but…

Would he still call Hawks “Takahiro”, after seeing everything there was to him? Is it possible that this person could look into his soul, his fate, his being, look into everything that made Hawks “Hawks” and Takahiro “Takahiro” and decide that Takahiro was worth something?

He’s referring to Hawks as “Takahiro” now— but that’s meaningless. There’d only be meaning in Hawks being called Takahiro if both “Hawks” and “Takahiro” are judged, and someone decides that Takahiro—even without Hawks, even without his quirk— is wanted and worth something.

Would someone choose Takahiro? Does that kind of miracle truly exist?

This seemed like the perfect time to find out the answer to that question—

“Knock yourself out kid,” Hawks’s flippant response didn’t reflect the gravity that he felt for this situation. His half-lidded eyes glanced away from the Prince in front of him.

Midoriya looked at him questioningly—obviously smart enough to tell that his casual attitude was bullshit— but seemed to take his answer at face-value as he closed his eyes to focus on Hawks’s Fruit of Fate.

As Hawks continued to look away from Midoriya, sweat started to form on the back of his neck behind his high-collared jacket—was this comparable to getting his soul judged by God when he dies to decide whether he’s going to heaven or hell? It sure feels like it at least…

A sniffle caught his attention, and Hawks looked back at the kid to see that he was crying. He gazed at Hawks’s Fruit with watery green eyes and tears dripping down his face.

Hawks immediately panicked. His hands moved around trying to accomplish something without knowing what he wanted them to do. Why was the kid crying how do you turn it off—

“Oh God it was that bad?! I must be more of a shit person than I thought— ”
“It’s not you that’s wrong Takahiro! It’s everyone else!” Midoriya yelled out with anguish in his voice, his left black-gloved hand came up to wipe at his tears, “You’re worth more than just your quirk! Takahiro… Takahiro shouldn’t need to be Hawks just to be loved… Just being Takahiro is okay…”

His mind blanked as shock rang through him. This… This was the answer he wanted, but he didn’t think that he’d actually receive it. Midoriya was still crying, but all Hawks could do was stare at him with wide eyes– he didn’t know what to do with himself. He couldn’t even process what was just said.

The Fruit of Fate in Midoriya’s right hand floated up, and as he flicked his fingers it split in half with a crack. The top half of the insides and core was frozen– but purple guck was spread out through the entirety of it. Hawks vaguely remembered that Midoriya had described that condition as poisoning.

Midoriya trailed his fingers along the purple inside of the Fruit as he whispered, “How could they have done this to you… You work so hard for them –live your life for them– and society has convinced you that it’s not even okay for you to be Takahiro…”

The Prince’s whisper gained a bitter tone, “If everything is caused by fate, then God must be incredibly unfair and cruel…”

Hawks didn’t know what to say to that. “I think you’re taking this a bit too hard, kid, I’m fine– ”

“You’re not fine!” Midoriya insisted, pulling him down by the collar of his jacket so that he was forced to lean forward and look at him. “This is the opposite of fine! And I can’t give you what you need the most!” his voice hitched at the end as his sobbing strained his voice. He let go of Hawks’s collar to go back to wiping at his eyes.

Hawks blinked at him. “What do you think I need the most?”

“Freedom!”

“Oh…” –that makes sense…
As Midoriya continued to wipe at his tears, Hawks felt guilt rise up in him at the sight.

“Are you—are you crying because you can’t do anything about that? Izuku, I already knew that. Hell—I can’t even do anything about that unless I want to let countless people down, and literally let some people die. You’re not doing anything wrong just by being unable to change where I am in my life—that’s not your job.”

Doing his best to mimic what his borrowed teddy bear heater would do, he pulled Izuku into him to let the kid cry on his shoulder and wrapped his arms and wings around him. As one hand softly carded through green curls, Hawks vaguely noted that he was just barely taller than the teenager.

He smiled at Izuku sadly while murmuring, “It’s like I said before—sometimes there’s nothing you can do, and that’s okay. It’s not your fault that I’m just too good at my job.”

Izuku started calming down with the physical contact. He sniffled, “I think it would be better for you if you just found a way to quit… but I know you won’t consider that.”

Hawks hummed, “That’s right. I may not like that I didn’t get a choice, but I’m not going to drop it or do less than my best when I know I’m doing good, and when I can work towards something better like my hero. It’s okay that I’m Hawks.”

“But is that really true?”

—Hawks didn’t know the answer to that question—

As Izuku’s crying subsided, Hawks turned through his mind to think of how he could make the kid feel better. The memory of a whim he had while gazing at a starry sky popped into his head.

“Listen, just by calling me Takahiro and what you’ve said… Well— it doesn’t physically change anything about my circumstances, but it helps. So don’t feel like you haven’t done anything for me. And there’s one favor you could do for me if you want…”

Izuku lifted his head off Hawks’s shoulder to glance at him and asked with a hoarse voice, “What is it?”
Hawks point up at the sky above them, letting an excited smile fill his face. “Why don’t you let me try flying in this garden of yours, and I’ll teach you a thing or two about flying!”

Hawks let his Might Wings gently glide him through the cloudless, blue sky as he watched Izuku ride on the back of Teddydrum Black. For being an artificial sky, flying through it sure felt like the real thing. The sensation of the wind catching his wings and the air moving around him was exactly the same, though it wasn’t as cold as it should be and if anything, that was an improvement. This was the first time he could have an extended flight lacking his coat without freezing. His sleeveless, high-collar undershirt that left his back open for his wings looked good on him, it was a shame he didn’t get to show it off more.

“Lean into your turns more, it will help your Teddydrums adjust your combined weight when they’re moving! Yeah just like that! Try directing how you want it to move solely using body movements for a bit!”

As Izuku and Teddydrum Black tried some maneuvers, Hawks let himself be distracted by the gorgeous scenery. The Garden of Eden featured countless green trees and a long, winding stream that led to a large pond with lily pads and water-based flowers. By the pond were rows upon rows of different types of flowers next to a couple of greenhouses that ended at a large hedge maze with a white gazebo between the two of them. About half of the place was dedicated to the wild forest area that was spotted with different meadows, fields, and waterfalls throughout, while the other half was for the more organized flower gardens. Hawks couldn’t actually tell where the edges of the Garden of Eden ended, it seemed like it went on forever.

The most noticeable thing about the whole area was the huge tree that sat in the middle between the flower gardens and the forest, which bore normal sized bright red apples. It towered over the trees surrounding it. Izuku had told him that was the Tree of Knowledge, and that much like its namesake he should not eat the fruit. Apparently the rest of the food from this place was edible, though. Hawks wondered what it’d be like to forage through the forest like an actual bird.

*But hawks were supposed to be carnivores, right? He doesn’t know how Izuku would feel about him trying to hunt the wildlife just for bird aesthetic…*
Hawks let his eyes fall closed as he focused on the sensation of his wings cutting through the air.

*He absolutely loved flying, and he loved that his quirk let him fly. He didn’t get to just fly around for leisure often, though. Not only due to time constraint, but also due to annoying red tape for regulations about “shared air space” and “private air space” and such. What, did they think he was going to crash into a helicopter while flying drunk or something? Him? The Number Three hero who was also the Winged Hero: Hawks? Come on…*

The humming sound of Teddydrum Black’s rocket engine alerted him that Izuku was coming up close, and he opened his eyes to watch as they settled beside him.

Izuku smiled at him—*thank God he wasn’t crying anymore*—and held the remote for the Garden of Eden out. “Do you want me to change the sky for you? If you’re going to fly in the Garden of Eden, you might as well get the full experience!” he called out over the wind.

“I’d rather *not* try flying through the rain or anything like that, I already have to do enough of that in the real world,” Hawks joked. But as he performed a lazy barrel roll just for the fun of it, he already knew what kind of sky he wanted to fly through—“Can you make it nighttime like how it was when I first woke up here? The night sky in the city is completely different from how it is here.”

“Of course!” Izuku beamed at him, cheerfully affirming his request, “Do you want me to lower the stars for you too?”

Hawks stared at him in confusion. “What do you mean by *lower the stars*?”

“Momoka-san said that she used to like flying in here on the Teddydrums, and that her favorite setting to use was *this*—” Izuku fiddled with the dial that changed the time of day, causing the sun to set and the world around them to darken. The same shining white moon and stars appeared in the sky above them.

Then Izuku flipped a switch and suddenly, lights of various sizes blinked into existence around them. Hawks flew through a yellow light the size of his torso before he stopped himself to hover in place and gaze at them. All around him were mini-suns of yellow, orange, red, blue, and white that shined their color onto his pale skin and red wings. In the space between them was inhabited by shimmering sparkles of stardust— it was like he was right in the middle of a *galaxy*.

A bright grin lit up on his face as his eyes shined at the sight. “Like I said before Izuku-kun; *Coolest.*
He flapped his Mighty Wings to twirl through the stars; twisting around them, diving straight through them, reaching out his fingers to touch them and let the fingertips glide through the illusion. He flew lower to see that the stars reached all the way to the ground, bathing the forest and fields in gentle colored light. Then, he flew up.

He flew high into the sky, and when he passed by Izuku he told him, “I’m going to try reaching the end!”

He didn’t wait to hear the kid’s response. Instead, his wings took him higher through the shining stars. Unlike how the actual sky worked, it seemed that no matter how high he went, the air pressure stayed the same and he could breath just fine. And he took full advantage of the lack of limits usually enforced by nature to bring himself even higher.

Higher, higher, and even higher he flew up—going so fast that the light of the stars blurred into streaks around him, but even then he couldn’t see the end of the sky. He wondered if maybe it did go on forever. His exhilaration was so strong, he hardly noticed how labored his breathing was becoming from the exertion of it.

Finally he saw a change; what used to look like a boundless void of stars gained depth and flattened. He slowed his flight and the stars emerged from their streaks. As he got closer and closer, the lights of the stars at the very top which had seemed unreachable came closer as well.

He arrived at the very top of the Garden of Eden to find a black ceiling dotted with lights. He stopped just below it to raise his right hand and glide it across—the sensation of crystal stone chilled his palm and fingers. He let himself hover there to rest his burning wings and lungs.

“Wouldn’t reaching the end of the sky kind of ruin the beauty of it? Part of the reason people like to look at the sky is because it looks like it goes on forever—so knowing for certain that it does have an end would destroy that illusion, and therefore you would lose a part of the beauty you highly treasured forever…”

Hawks looked up at the ceiling of the fake sky, then looked down for the first time since he had begun his upward rise—only to lose his breath at the sight.

He knew that he hadn’t flown far enough to reach space, but below him was the view of a blue
planet that looked suspiciously like Earth surrounded by the lights of countless stars.

“If people weren’t meant to reach the top, then why would the creator of this place make a view like this here?” Hawks chuckled to himself.

But the kid did have a point— both the sight of the ceiling above and the sight of the planet below made it clear that this sky was only an illusion, not to mention how Hawks was able to fly into the stars themselves. There was no real sky here, and there were no real stars here; only an illusion made of colors and lights.

But isn’t it because it was an illusion that it could be so spectacular? Hawks wouldn’t have been able to reach the top of the real sky or fly through the real stars like he could here. It was because they were an illusion, it was because this wasn’t reality, that Hawks could enjoy their beauty in a way that was impossible for the real sky.

Isn’t it okay that it’s an illusion? A lie can be just as valuable as the truth, can’t it?

–Hawks didn’t know the answer to that question–

Hawks retracted his hand from the ceiling, and released the tension and strain laced throughout his body and wings with a large exhale. He let himself fall back to Earth.

He fell head first, wings tight against his body, and watched the stars blur back into streaks. The imitation of gravity pulled him down faster and faster, and unlike the trip up he didn’t have to put in any effort. He was free to just let himself enjoy the lights passing by him and the breathtaking sensation of his drop and the air streaming around him.

It was like an incompatible mix between the adrenaline rush of a sky dive, and the relaxation of just letting himself be without needing to worry about anything else in the world. It was just him, the sky, the stars, and his fall.

This must be what freedom feels like…

–Wouldn’t it be nice if he could just stay in this garden and sky forever? –
He fell closer and closer to the Earth, and the Earth turned into a land, which turned into a view of the Garden of Eden.

His wings unfolded to stretch out wide behind him. They caught the air to pull him out of his head dive, and gradually, his fall slowed. He gracefully descended through the stars into the imitation of the gift from God, and into the meadow he had slept in.

Izuku and Teddydrum Black joined his descent. “Takahiro-san, why were you falling like that?! You really scared me for a moment there! I thought something might have happened to you…” Izuku fretted with worry reflected on his face.

Hawk’s boots touched the grass at the same time that Izuku disembarked from his robot, and as the boy moved up to him, his arm wrapped around Izuku’s shoulder while his hand ruffled the messy green curls—his own blond hair must look like a bird’s nest right now.

“Don’t worry kid, I was just enjoying myself! You’re sure lucky you get to come here whenever you want, you know…” Hawks sighed. He gazed at the chirping bluebirds in the trees next to the meadow.

“You Will be Our Red String of Fate”

The unexpected words caught his attention. Hawks turned his sight back to the Prince he had his arm around to see him kiss a familiar bracelet made of red string—same as the ones they had used for their little short cuts to and from Hosu. He held it between the fingers of his right hand while the bracelet glowed a bright gold for a single instant before the light dissipated.

Izuku held out the red bracelet to him.

“Doing “less than your best” isn’t the same as overworking yourself. So whenever you need to take a break— you can come back here whenever you want to, Takahiro…”

Hawks stared at the bracelet for a moment, then took it from Izuku. It fit perfectly when he put it on the wrist of his right hand.

Chapter End Notes
Quotes from this chapter:
“Heroes and villains are two sides of the same coin. I’ll show those glaring eyes of yours what makes someone a hero.” and “If you want to be a hero so badly, there’s a quick way to do it. Believe that you’ll be born with a quirk in your next life and take a swan dive off the roof!” are both from bnha.

On another note, there were some commenters who mentioned wanting to actually read what would happen in a Teddydrum White vs Endeavor fight, and that inspired me to a crack comedy version of that fight, which is mostly absurd character antics and very little of said fight. It's the first chapter of the Children of Absurdity fic that is now part of a series with this story. So if you want to see anything else of that nature, like Shouto as a princess and Izuku taking down villains solely by giving the villains existential crises which I plan on also writing chapters for, that is the fic to go to. You can also make requests of things I can write for it, otherwise I'm just going to write out whatever crack scenario that comes to mind with these characters.
The Playing Field has been Set by Fate

Chapter Notes

I got some fan art by the user MusicallyActive of that scene where Izuku made Aizawa do a spit-take by calling him Shouta-sensei for the first time! Have a look at it here: https://www.instagram.com/p/BrlTebsBW_v/?utm_source=ig_share_sheet&igshid=jsopxzjykcc

<3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Oh Izuku my baby I was so worried—”

His mother ambushed him at the train station with hugs and wet kisses before Izuku had even separated from Tokoyami. It was embarrassing to have this kind of overwhelming affection thrust on him in front of his classmate, but he understood that Mom must’ve been beside herself when she heard of his attempted kidnapping and stabbing. So he let her get it out of her system.

After they had arrived home together, Izuku stared at the family portrait that now held only the two of them.

He admitted a worry that he had been keeping from her, “Mom… my punishment says it’s In Progress now. And I— I think it has something to do with my morality but— I did something bad yesterday, and it’s not even finished. It checked it again and it still says it’s In Progress. When is it going to happen?”

Izuku felt the warm arms of his mother surround him. “Izuku sweetie… I’m so sorry. You’ll make it out okay, do you hear me? Even if you do something you think is wrong again—even if things change, even if you change— I will always love you.”

His mom’s right hand cradled his face, gently turning it away from the portrait and towards her face. She gave him a watery smile.

“I don’t care if you hurt the person that hurt you, I only care that you got away from him and are back here in my arms. I won’t care if you have to hurt people in the future as a hero, as long as it helps bring you back to me. That may be a self-centered perspective— but that is also part of what it means to love, I think. If it’s not unconditional, there’s no meaning to it.”
Izuku pushed his face into his mother’s shoulder as tears welled behind his closed eyes. The two remaining members of the Midoriya family held onto each other with all their strength.

“I love you, Mom.”

“I love you too, Izuku.”

After the UA students had left, Hawks got an entirely unexpected call.

“Why, if it isn’t the Flame Hero: Endeavor! What have I done to deserve the honor of receiving your call?” he said the words sarcastically, but he was actually only half-sarcastic about it. Even after reaching a top 10 ranking and reaching the Number Three rank just below the man, his hero had never tried to initiate contact with him or even a casual conversation.

–Hawks had been quite disappointed about that actually, but he told himself that it didn’t matter. People have been letting him down his whole life, he shouldn’t have expected anything different–

Endeavor’s gruff voice responded through the land-line phone of his office, “I’m calling to investigate how you obtained the information that both the League of Villains and the Hero Killer were present during the Hosu incident despite literally being five hours away from what was going on.”

Hawks fiddled with a small stray feather to give his free hand something to do. “Did the Chief of Police not let you in on that? I would have thought that you’d have the clearance for it but if you don’t– ”

“No. The Chief of Police told me what you told him, it’s just that what you told him makes no sense!”
“Ah, I see… I was caught off-guard by the prophecy stuff too, but you sort of just have to take it as it is. It’s not like future-telling quirks haven’t shown up before.”

“But combined with a pocket dimension quirk? What are the chances of that kind of thing happening?!”

Hawks sighed as he released his feather into the air to lean his head onto the palm of his hand, “I don’t know what else to tell you, Endeavor. There’s no secret conspiracy to how I got the info— the kid literally just told me a vague, totally unhelpful prophecy. There’s nothing else to it.” – If you discount the Fruit of Fate and Penguindrum stuff...

Endeavor was silent for a long moment before he asked, “…Do you truly believe that child can see fate? That something as nonsensical as fate even exists?”

Hawks lifted his head off of his hand at that. Okay, the kid definitely told him something—

Frowning at his phone with narrowed eyes, concern grew inside of him. “I don’t know what Izuku told you Endeavor-san, but whatever it was— you should take it seriously. His words aren’t the kind you should take lightly.”

“…I don’t have time to talk anymore;” with that said, the man hung up.

Hawks didn’t take the rudeness personally. Whatever the kid had told Endeavor was surely nothing good…

“The culmination of your entire being, life, and fate is in worse shape than Endeavor’s—who I am assuming is around the top of your “fake hero” list because you’d be the fake if he wasn’t— How can you go around preaching this when your soul is more corrupt than the people you are accusing of corruption?”

Once it was the dead of night and Hawks was off-duty, he walked out of his office and up the stairs of his building to the apartment he stayed in during his work hours. Sequestered on the dresser next to his bed was the old, ratty Endeavor plushie he had bought all those years ago.
He picked it up to stare at it intently, trying to push down his worry.

“You’ll make it out of whatever happens alright, won’t you Endeavor-san? You still haven’t even made it to Number One yet…”

“You didn’t tell Takahiro anything about the Evil Queen.”

Izuku glared at his reflection in Momoka’s Mirror from his spot a bit farther away from the Mirror than usual. He was against the wall sitting in a chair facing the mirror with a dark wooden desk in front of him. Momoka was in the same spot in her mirror but was in the middle of setting up a chain of white dominos on the desk.

“Would you tell him about Endeavor?” he retorted indignantly.

“Oh God no! That man’s image is the foundation behind how he’s somewhat accepted his place in life now– if that Sun was destroyed, Icarus would fall into great despair indeed. But you may not have a choice in that. Truth is a lonesome little thing; If you move away from it, it will give chase. And the Evil Queen has already been set up to fall, that alone might be enough to cause Icarus’s fall.”

The clack of the third domino being placed down from Momoka’s Mirror rang throughout the room. “Sometimes, things must get worse before they get better.”

Izuku sighed down at the empty desk in front of him, “I know! But– there must be someway things can go that doesn’t end with the complete breakdown of Takahiro-san’s emotional stability, it’s already bad enough as it is…”

“Well, if the revelation could be made bittersweet instead of just bitter, that might help. For example– if the Evil Queen were to realize the nature of his evil, and then resolve himself to become a good ruler, then that may help Icarus retain some of his hope.”
“Is it even possible for Endeavor to actually change at this point? He seems hopeless to me.”

“It’s possible. But it will require him to notice that he is wrong, and for him to become fully dedicated to revolutionizing himself. It is not something that you can force upon him.”

His crown clinked on the desk as he let his head fall against it, it magically stayed on his head. Izuku groaned, “I do not want to put my hopes on the unlikely chance that Endeavor of all people will change himself, but…”

He lifted his eyes from the surface of the desk to look at the mirror. “You’ve realized it as well, haven’t you? The workings of fate at play here…”

“But of course.” The clack of the last domino rang from the mirror, and Momoka spread her hands to present a set of ten white dominos set up in a row.

She pointed to the first on the left– “The Number One hero, who is the Symbol of peace, is the current main pillar holding up society’s order. But he is on his last legs with his belief in himself running out.”

She pointed to the second on the left– “The Number Two hero, a fake hero who is burning his own fate to ashes, will be the one to take up that rank if the first falls. But he is already on his way to falling himself due to his own fire.”

She pointed to the third on the left– “And the Number Three hero, a child who doesn’t even know if he wants the fate that was forced upon him, will be the one to take up that rank if the second falls. But that very same fall and the truth behind that man may lead to his own fall.”

“If it were to just so happen that all three of these knights fell one after the other…”

Momoka pushed on the first domino, causing it to fall into the second, which fell into the third, which fell into the fourth, until all ten dominos had fallen onto the top of the desk with a clatter.

“The rest behind them may be unable to support that weight. Fate does not set up events like this for no reason. When the old order has fallen, a new one will have to replace it– that is what
“But whose revolution will it be? What kind of ending will it bring about?” Izuku asked these questions that could not be answered while running a hand down the side of his face, “A rapid destabilization like that will lead to panic and increased crime—*How can we stop this?*”

Momoka eyed him with Izuku’s irises turned pink.

“Is preventing revolution *truly* what you want? The state of these three heroes suggests to you that society *must* be changed. You are not content with the toll it has taken upon the first and third, and you are not content that the second was allowed to flourish under its rule. For this kind of miracle to occur—*sacrifice is required.*”

The chair fell to the floor with a clatter as Izuku shot out of his seat. He yelled at his reflection in rage, “We cannot treat the sacrifice of the innocent who will get caught up in this lightly! We cannot treat the *sacrifice* of Toshinori and Takahiro lightly! If they are sacrificed for this revolution, *then it holds no meaning to me! I cannot accept it!*”

“Then don’t accept it, *defy it!*” Momoka proclaimed with Izuku’s voice, “One person alone changing the fate of society in its entirety is a fool’s errand, but surely the Prince of the Crystal can change the fate of two people. Perhaps you have already set things in motion to change their fate.”

Leaning on the desk, his hands clenched into fists.

“*You know it’s not that easy…*”

“But of course.” Momoka plucked the fallen forms of the first and third dominos to cradle them in the hands of Izuku’s image.

“That’s why I wonder how you will insert yourself into this tale, my dear Prince of the Crystal…”
Coming back to school after the mess that was the workplace training week was an eventful affair. Apparently, UA students making the news two times in succession bolstered the greed of the journalists, because when Izuku went back to school they were once again crowding around the gate.

Things weren’t exactly the same as last time though— for one thing, Izuku was being discreetly watched by heroes on the look out for another kidnapping attempt on him. There were also some heroes watching over his mother and the house. UA refused to let the League get another shot at Izuku now that they knew he was a target.

His mother had a String of Fate bracelet that she could use for a quick escape just in case as well. And the physical version of the Penguindrum was inside of the most secure safe that the school could provide, which was hidden under the floorboards— Apparently the Principal had the foresight to prevent someone from trying to steal it now that Izuku’s house was a possible target of villain interest. The League probably has no idea of the value behind it and might just over look it as a regular book, but there was no guarantee that was the case.

But the most notable difference was that he was now the main target of the journalists. As soon as he was within sight of the prowlers, the majority of them gave up trying to harass answers out of the other students to power-walk towards Izuku like a crowd of extremely focused zombies.

A figure came rushing out of the UA gate to intercept them. When it placed itself in front of Izuku, he was able to see it was Hizashi-sensei. He had one palm out towards the journalists, signaling them to stop.

“Mass media, cease and desist! UA will remove you from the property!” his voice sounded from the speakers of his gear.

Like a beggar in the cold of winter, one of the closer reporters cried out, “Please Present Mic-san, Midoriya-san, just one statement! Answer one question, that’s all we ask!”

“What part of cease and desist do you not understand?!”

Izuku doesn’t even know how he would answer any questions concerning what’s happened—
Suddenly, an image of the Winged Hero laying on a pile of blankets in Takahiro’s meadow popped up in Izuku’s head.

–Actually, he knows exactly how he would answer them.

“Mic-sensei,” Izuku got Hizashi’s attention, “I would be okay with answering one question, as long as it’s only one.”

Hizashi’s eyebrows formed a crease on his forehead. “Are you sure about that little listener? You’re not obligated in anyway to respond to them.”

“Yeah, I’m sure. Don’t worry.” Izuku flashed him a smile and tried to feel the confidence that came so easily when he was acting as the Prince of the Crystal. Hizashi accepted his decision, moving to stand beside him instead of in front of him.

The reporters were ecstatic, Izuku could see greed at the prospect of a scoop shine in their eyes. The journalist who had spoken out before became the unofficial spokesperson of the group. They asked their question, sticking out a microphone towards him –One of the ones with a news channel camera then, excellent– but all of them were listening in, “After coming into contact with Hero Killer Stain, how do you feel about the man’s proposed ideology concerning heroes and the buzz that it’s causing with the public?”

A completely insensitive question to ask someone who Stain tried to kidnap and murder that cashes in on the most profitable controversy of the time. It’s also exactly the question that Izuku wanted them to ask –he can always count on the uncaring nature of hero mass media.

Izuku carefully directed his polite smile towards the reporter and not at any of the cameras surrounding him.

He answered in a neutral tone, “Well, I can understand how people have been swept up by his attempt at revolution, when he spouted such pretty words. But they were only words. When one thinks carefully on the meaning behind them, one will find that there is no meaning. They were crafted purely based on emotion. There was no thought given to the practicality of society enacting that sort of revolution. That is why even if people believe in his words, they will not be capable of achieving the better end that the Black Knight foresaw– because even the best of intentions can pave the way to Hell. That is what I think.”
The reporter stared at him stupidly, so his words must have been as vague as he had hoped. Then, the reporter stuttered out, “Uh... can you—explain what you mean by that?”

“Sorry,” Izuku lied. “I only consented to one question.”

Right on que, Hizashi guided him away from the crowd of journalists. “You heard him! You had your question—Now scram!”

As they passed through the metal gate, Izuku could hear his teacher snickering. The mean grin on Izuku’s face matched it.

Just a bit later in classroom 1-A during his classmate’s casual chatter about their training experiences—and Izuku's friends fretting over his run in with a serial killer—the topic of conversation shifted to the Hero Killer.

“Hold on. Sure, he’s scary—but did you see that video, Ojiro? You can really see his tenacity, his one-track mind. It’s kind of cool, don’t you think?”

“No,” Izuku interrupted Kaminari’s conversation with a deadpan voice.

Kaminari glanced at Izuku, then Tenya, then paled as he looked back to Izuku. “Oh—uh, sorry you guys...”

“No, it’s fine,” Tenya responded in a collected manner, “He’s certainly a man of conviction, so I can understand why people would think that of him. But his convictions lead him to believe that society requires a purge, and no matter what one’s motives are, that’s just wrong.”

Tenya knifed his hand through the air and strongly announced, “So that no others like myself emerge and suffer my fate, I will correct my course and walk the path of a true hero!”

—Izuku wondered how Tenya would feel if he knew what a huge hypocrite Izuku had ended up being on that matter. He had heard from Tenya that Shouta-sensei had visited him in the hospital to tell him that the next time he did something like that against the teachers’ orders, Tenya would be expelled. Izuku wondered if Shouta-sensei would tell him that too if he knew what had happened—
Hoping to kill any sense of admiration Kaminari held for the man, Izuku stated, “Regardless of his “conviction”, the Hero Killer was misguided about how to get the change that he wanted out of society in the first place. Personally, I just find him to be naïve, so I don’t really understand how people can find him cool to be honest…”

“Naïve?! You really think the Hero Killer is naïve?!” Kaminari exclaimed with eyes wide in shock. Many of Izuku’s other classmates stared at him with incomprehension as well.

Izuku gave a light smile to Kaminari. “Yes. I told him that myself after he was captured.”

“You told a serial killer who tried to kill you he was naïve?! Straight to his face?!”

“I think it’s time to get in our seats now–”

“You can’t just leave the conversation at that Midoriya!”

Unfortunately for Kaminari, the conversation was left at that.

Izuku went through his day as normally as he could. Shouta-sensei eyed him with his single eye when he came in and wordlessly placed a form on Izuku’s desk. Reading it over showed it to be a form to officially change his hero name– After having “Prince Deku” spread around so much Izuku guessed it would be simpler to just keep it. He was bothered by it at first, but as Takahiro said before– it’s a change that suits him. And he also likes that it’s a name Takahiro helped him make, so Prince Deku it is.

His lunch group increased by 50% when Tokoyami joined them and brought his usual group consisting of Shouji and Kouda. Izuku embarrassed Hitoshi-kun with his overreaction to the news that he was training under Shouta-sensei, as well as the news that he would also be taking the practical exam with them. He shared discreet looks with Shouto-kun suggesting they would speak with their teacher about Endeavor at the end of the day. And in the middle of lunch Takahiro sent him a text solely consisting of a laughing emoticon and a link to a news website featuring Izuku’s impromptu interview. The media sure works fast…

But while changing into his hero costume for Basic Hero Training, Izuku was forcibly reminded of the events with the Hero Killer once more.
“Woah, Midoriya! Is that a tattoo or something? It looks cool!”

Izuku followed Kirishima’s line of sight to the large image of a flesh colored rose that was placed right in the middle of his stomach, it was about the size of his closed fist.

“Oh, uh– this is actually a scar…”

Their conversation got the attention of the other boys in the locker room and Satou asked incredulously, “How on Earth do you get a scar that looks like that?!"

“Not that it doesn’t suit you!” Sero cut in, as though trying to prevent Izuku from feeling self-conscious, “It’s very… elegant looking– more like a piece of art than a scar, you know?”

“Oui! It only adds to your beauty~☆!”

“Midoriya’s scars are none of your business.”

Everyone turned to see Tokoyami glaring at the people questioning Izuku from where he was standing next to Shouji, who placed one of his many hands on Tokoyami’s shoulder in a calming gesture. Tokoyami also knew exactly how Izuku had gotten that scar.

“I-It’s okay Tokoyami-kun! This might be a good thing to explain in advance anyway…” Izuku looked at his observers. “I have an ability I can do in my pocket dimension that heals while leaving a flower shaped scar like this one. I had to use it on myself after the Hero Killer hurt me.”

“Oh… sorry for bringing it up man,” Kirishima apologized with a worried look while scratching at his cheek. Satou echoed him, “Yeah, we shouldn’t have pried like that…”

“You don’t need to apologize, it’s fine.”

While in the middle of putting on his gloves, Izuku caught Shouto staring at his bare left hand– where his palm had a jagged scar of faint pink from their fight during the Sports Festival.
Izuku used that same hand to brush the red side of Shouto’s bangs out of his face, ghosting against the boy’s own scar. He gave Shouto a gentle smile that matched his words, “You don’t need to apologize either, Shouto-kun. I actually like looking at this scar more than the one, because it’s a reminder of our bond. In my mind– it’s even more beautiful than a rose.”

Shouto’s face flushed as he glanced away from Izuku’s face. “…Why are you so good at saying that kind of stuff?”

Sero stuck his head back into Izuku’s conversation. “Did you just call a burn scar that you got in a fight with Todoroki “more beautiful than a rose”?! Who says something like that?! What is going on with you two?!”

Having finished changing, Izuku took Shouto’s hand to guide him out of the locker room towards Ground Gamma, not even looking at Sero as he shot back, “Come on, Sero-kun. At this point if you can’t figure it out, then really that’s on you…” Both he and Shouto ignored the other boy sputtering in response.

Shouto blinked at him as they walked. “Are we… dating now?”

“Not necessarily. We can start dating whenever you want to Shouto-kun.”

“…Why don’t we just say we’re dating but wait until we finish getting certain things settled to start actually going on dates, I think that might be less confusing.”

Izuku beamed at him and asked excitedly, “Does that mean I can call you my boyfriend now?”

“Yes, absolutely.”

“What’s this about boyfriends?” Ochako inserted herself into the conversation, apparently they had gotten close enough to their group of friends to be overheard.

“Shouto-kun and I are boyfriends now!” Izuku happily proclaimed, holding up Shouto’s hand as though to prove his point. Shouto just looked at him with amusement.
Both Ochako and Tsuyu gained relieved expressions on their faces. “Oh finally! Ever since the Sports Festival it’s been like you were dating, even though you officially weren’t, and I’ve been just dying watching you two!”

“Same, kero…”

“What are you two talking about?! I never noticed anything romantic between Izuku-kun and Todoroki-kun! And congratulations by the way…”

Ochako and Tsuyu stared at Tenya as Tsuyu questioned, “You really didn’t notice? They were being very obvious about it.”

Tenya moved his hand as though to push up his glasses, but failed to complete his movement because of his hero costume. It was left to awkwardly hang in the air. “…Admittedly, I was rather self-absorbed during that time.”

Ochako smiled at Tenya gently. “Well, I’m just glad you’re okay again, Iida-kun.”

“I think we’re all glad about that,” Izuku echoed her thought.

Tenya looked away from them, making Izuku think he might be blushing under his helmet.

The exercise All Might had them do today turned out to be perfectly suited for the Teddydrums. Tenya, Ojiro, Ashido, and Sero were all agile in their own way –with Sero having a particular advantage in the cluttered structures of the fake city– but Izuku was easily able to beat out his competition flying on Teddydrum Black. When the race was finished, Ashido hugged the Teddydrum’s leg, who eagerly returned the affection. “Don’t think I’ve forgotten about getting a chance on flying on your robots, Midoriya!”

*Of course, Izuku would never think he’d be so lucky…*

Then, during his congratulations, All Might whispered that they needed to talk after class about One for All.
Izuku was frustrated at the timing of that, but when he quietly explained to Shouto he wouldn’t be able to join him in talking to Shouta-sensei today, Shouto had simply waved it off saying they could do it tomorrow instead. He still had his bracelet so Izuku could feel secure in knowing he’d be safe at least, and it was probably going to take a while to remove Shouto from Endeavor’s custody anyway, but he was still left feeling uneasy.

The sun was beginning to set as they situated themselves in the chairs of their chosen conference room, basking Toshinori’s now frail form in a soft glow. The man examined Izuku with a serious look in his sunken eyes that made Izuku feel even more uneasy.

“Before I get into why I called you here… can I ask you about what happened with the Hero Killer? I already heard from Gran Torino how you were the one to defeat him, but you couldn’t take credit because it was… “excessive”,” Toshinori’s tone wasn’t judging, it sounded like he was simply concerned.

But Izuku still gulped before answering, “Well… basically I was so angry at him for what happened with Tenya-kun that I wanted to hurt him in the same way Tenya had been hurt when I was given the chance. But there’s also a bit more to it…”

Staring at the clenched hands in his lap instead of the hero in front of him, Izuku confessed, “I’ve been… changing since the Sports Festival. I care less about hurting people who hurt others, the level of violence I used against Stain was something that I would’ve previously found somewhat disturbing –even if it was against a villain– but in that moment, it didn’t bother me in the slightest. I think it has to do with my punishment, since around the same time I first noticed this, it had changed from Pending to In Progress…”

Izuku heard Toshinori take a sharp breath in.

“That– That’s what you were referring to then,” Toshinori realized, “when you asked me if you could still become a hero even if you were less good.”

Izuku nodded in confirmation, he still couldn’t bring himself to look up. A large hand on his shoulder unconsciously brought his eyes back to his hero though.

Toshinori continued to look at him with serious eyes. “Then let me tell you now, my boy– yes. You can still become a hero. Even if you change, I believe you can continue to be a good person and a good hero. I may not know anything of “fate”, or how your punishment will come to be, but I have faith in you that this will be the case.”
Toshinori’s lips quirked into a tiny smile. “So you should have faith in yourself as well.”

The dread he had been feeling at the thought of his impending punishment seemed to lighten ten-fold at the words of his hero. Izuku gave a watery smile back.

“Thank you, Toshinori-san. I– I needed to hear that…”

“I’m glad I could help you with your burden, my boy.” Toshinori then cleared his throat to get back to what he originally wanted to talk about, “Gran Torino also mentioned that you got a look at the Nomu that attacked in Hawks’s area, and saw it had multiple Fruit of Fate cores.”

His expression set into a serious stare at that. “Yes. Frankly speaking, Toshinori-san, there’s no way for that to occur unless a Child of Fate caused it. Do you know anything more about this?”

“Yes…” Now it was Toshinori’s turn to stare into his hands. “Our current theory is that the villain who injured me so heavily in the past is actually alive…”

As so, Toshinori told a story about two brothers, and how the elder one had the power to take and give quirks—All for One. While the younger one had an unnoticeable quirk that could pass down quirks. That quirk combined with a stock-piling quirk that was forced upon him by his brother to form One for All. Toshinori ended the story on his fated battle from years ago, where he had thought he killed All for One.

“With the Nomus, it’s almost certain that that man is alive, but even so— I would like to confirm it…”

Izuku instantly caught on. “You want to check his status in the Penguindrum since he’s probably a Child of Fate.”

“Exactly.” Toshinori nodded.

With that, Izuku transported them to the library in the Crystal Palace. As Izuku willed out the Crystal World’s copy of the Penguindrum and flipped through the pages, Izuku stated, “All for One is the Witch from your storybook right, Momoka-san…”
“That is correct,” Momoka confirmed. She observed them with a neutral expression and half-lidded eyes.

Toshinori jolted at that and exclaimed, “You— You know of All for One? And you knew All for One was the Witch?! Why didn’t you mention anything before?!”

“You know of All for One? And you knew All for One was the Witch?!”

“‘If you told Izuku about it earlier, I would have mentioned it earlier,’” was Momoka’s listless response, “‘I’m not like the two of you, you know. I’m not dead, but I’m not alive either, and things that are not living are not meant to interfere or add anything new to stories. For that kind of miracle to occur, sacrifice is required.’”

She gave a sardonic grin as she gestured to herself in Izuku’s reflection. “Think of me as your Magic Mirror, I can only reflect what’s already here. I can’t tell you any answers you wouldn’t be able to see for yourself.”

“Is that so…”

Izuku interrupted, “Well, it looks like All for One really does think of himself as All for One…” And Toshinori read the page in front of them at his prompting.

All for One:

Child of Fate

Punishment – Incapable of breathing without life support and loss of eyes

Next to him, Toshinori sighed, “I know blindness isn’t technically something to take lightly but— it honestly feels like he got off lightly in terms of punishment if you consider everything he’s done with that quirk…”

Izuku snorted, “It’d be nice if fate took that kind of thing into consideration.”
Toshinori sighed a second time, but then seemed to think to himself for a moment.

He turned towards Izuku to ask, “This is mostly for curiosity’s sake but… can you look up Shimura Nana? She was my predecessor.”

“Of course.” His fingers flicked in the air to reset the Penguindrum’s pages without much thought.

However, when the pages stopped to reveal the black-inked words of Shimura Nana’s fate, Izuku lost his breath. Beside him, Toshinori paled dramatically. The Number One hero brought a trembling hand up to his mouth in wordless shock.

Shimura Nana:

Child of Fate

Status – Deceased

Punishment – Grandson, Shimura Tenko, becomes Shigaraki Tomura at the hands of All for One

Chapter End Notes

References from this chapter:
"Truth is a lonesome little thing. If you move away from it, it will give chase" is a quote from Princess Tutu.
Kaminari and Iida’s parts in the conversation about Stain were mostly taken from the bnha manga.
For the Children of Absurdity series, someone mentioned wanting to see secret santa featuring the villains. I couldn’t think of a way for have both the heroes and the villains do a secret santa together, so I wrote this up instead along with some other ideas for the holiday season! There are three shorts on the League of Villains’ Secret Santa, Izuku decorating a Christmas tree with his mom, Todoroki, Shinsou, and Hawks, and finally the Nutcracker featuring Shinsou and some shindeku (because that fic isn’t canon to the story so I can write whatever I want...) This time it’s a mix of crack and serious, with some serious feels. I wanted to give you a little bit of everything for the holidays ;)

The title “Nostalgia of Diversion” is the translation of “Nagusami no Kyoushuu”, the title of an OST from Revolutionary Girl Utena that fits the mood of this chapter. Here’s a link if you want to listen to it: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07VXuyr75bQ  
The melody of the song is the same as another song on the sound track called “Hikari Sasu Niwa” that translates to Sunlit Garden, which I associate with the Garden of Eden for this fic. The link to that one is here if you want to hear it:  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQzaHyVqHag  

The next day, Toshinori took the day off to visit a site he never went to often. The graveyard was tinged in the colors of regret and mourning, and Toshinori knew that his teacher would’ve preferred that he celebrate the joys of her life rather than despair the tragedy of her death, so he avoided visiting her grave.

But how could he not despair the tragedy of her death –at the fate of her family– after learning what he had?

So here he was, laying a bouquet of orange-yellow marigolds in front of Shimura Nana’s tombstone. He plopped himself down on the ground to sit cross-legged, not having the energy necessary to stand the entire time he planned on being there.

He stared at the name on the tombstone for a long while.

When he finally found the words he wanted to say, Toshinori sighed out, “ …Shimura-sensei, I wonder– are you watching everything that’s been happening from wherever you are? Have you seen… what’s happened to me, and what’s happened to Shimura Tenko? What would you say if you had know this would be your grandson’s fate…”
Toshinori averted his eyes from Shimura Nana’s name to gaze listlessly at the marigolds.

“I… I hope that you haven’t seen all of this. I hope that you’re up in Heaven, believing that I completed my duty just as I should’ve years ago, that the son you gave up for your duty is living happily with his own son. If you knew what happened to Shimura Tenko, I’m sure you would blame yourself for him being punished for your so-called “sin”. That you would think you had unknowingly passed a curse down upon your family.”

“Young Midoriya, ” the sight of the flowers started to blur from tears in his eyes as he whispered in a hoarse voice, “he said that there was nothing I could’ve done again, that what happened to Shimura Tenko –to Shigaraki Tomura– was fate, but even still… I feel like I have failed him. That I have failed you.”

His hand pressed hard against his strained eyes. He could feel himself shaking like he had when he first read those words.

He whimpered through gritted teeth, “It’s too unfair! How can I call myself the true “Number One” hero if I couldn’t even change the world to be a place where children aren’t punished for the sins of their elders?! How can I call myself your successor when I couldn’t even save your family?! The further down this path I tread, the more I feel like I am failing instead of progressing…”

“I’m sorry that I’m not enough, Shimura-sensei…”

The words that Midoriya had told him after the USJ incident rang through his mind…

“So many options, so many paths– But none of them happened. They were all just meaningless regrets and wishes for what “could have been”, in the end. Everything turned out like this instead. And that… That’s precisely what fate is. That’s precisely what fate means… Don’t forget this as you go forward to the destination of your fate, wherever it may be, All Might…”

As the breeze cooled the skin of his face where his tears had left their mark, Toshinori thought he could feel the poison of his self-hatred turning in his chest.
When Shouta dismissed the students of 1-A early because of All Might’s absence, he was hoping to take advantage of the opportunity to also go home early seeing that it wasn’t one of the days he had a training session with Shinsou. That hope was quickly crushed as soon as he noticed that Midoriya and Todoroki were purposely lingering in the classroom, waiting for everyone else to leave.

Then, after Todoroki started talking about why they stayed, Shouta suddenly had a lot more worries than just being unable to go home early—

“–He’s stopped training me like that, but I don’t like being home when he’s there. He doesn’t like that I’ve made friends and he doesn’t let me do anything “unproductive”, so I feel uneasy about visiting mom or going out with friends in case he comes back and sees I’m not there…” Todoroki was staring at Midoriya’s hands holding his in support instead of at Shouta as he explained, “and… I’m scared to be near him when he’s mad, I’m afraid that he’ll take it out on me even though he’s only hit me for training or when I’m not doing what he wants…”

It took all of Shouta’s will to keep his rage contained –he can't let it out now, his student will think he’s angry at him, and the last thing he needs is to deal with another angry authority figure.

“You shouldn’t have to feel afraid about him hitting you at all… It doesn’t matter if the abuse isn’t consistent at this point– it’s abuse. And past abuse would be enough grounds for UA to get you removed from his custody anyway,” Shouta stated in a carefully steady tone.

This was huge– the Number Two hero engaged in domestic violence against at least one of his children and his spouse. Because of the Endeavor’s image and power, this had the potential to backfire badly on Todoroki had he gone to the wrong person for help. And yet here he was, confessing the sins of his father to Shouta.

But he knew exactly why Todoroki had taken that chance on him– Out of the corner of his working eye, Shouta could see Midoriya staring at him.

He has to make sure he doesn’t betray the trust that was placed in him…

Shouta reoriented himself so that he was crouched by the chair where Todoroki sat instead of standing tall in front of him, hoping to make himself seem less intimidating. He didn’t try to physically comfort the boy though. Not only was Midoriya doing a good job with that, but physical
contact with an adult male might just increase Todoroki’s discomfort.

“First of all, thank you for coming to me with this. There will be a bit of a process to collect the testimony needed to present a case against your father, which has to be air tight to make sure he can’t do anything about it. Do you know if your older siblings or mother would be willing to submit their own testimony?”

Todoroki finally focused his mis-matched eyes on Shouta. “…I don’t know if Mother would be able to, that man is the one paying for her care at the mental hospital. He might stop if she gets involved. Fuyumi… she’s staying at the house with me because she doesn’t want me to be alone with him, but she’s very non-confrontational. I don’t know how she would react to this… I don’t really know that much about my siblings in the first place.”

Todoroki’s hands fidgeted with Midoriya’s as he continued, “But from what I remember of Natsuo’s attitude towards our father, he would definitely agree to testify against him. My last sibling, Touya, is… missing.”

Alarm shot through his chest upon hearing that, though he made sure it didn’t show on his face or his voice when he asked, “What do you mean by missing?”

Todoroki stiffened slightly, but a gentle squeeze by Midoriya’s hands seemed to comfort him enough to answer, “I– don’t really know the details of what happened, to be honest. Touya was always the one that got on the worst with our father, and he had a powerful fire quirk that he couldn’t use because he inherited the constitution of his skin from Mother so if he used it, it would hurt him.” He looked away from Shouta to gaze into the air in remembrance.

“Around five years ago, Endeavor accidentally injured me in training to the point that I had to go to the hospital. When I got back, I heard that Touya had gotten so mad at our father that he tried to fight him. Of course, he couldn’t do much against the Number Two hero even if the man wasn’t using his quirk, and at some point Touya… used his quirk.”

Todoroki clenched his hands together as his brows furrowed in grief. “By the time I was back home, Touya was already at a different hospital getting treatment for his burns. I heard the wounds were extensive, so it was slated to be a long process. But around the end of it, Touya just– vanished. He left a note saying that he wasn’t coming back…”

“Did Endeavor try to look for him?”
“I think so, but he was trying very hard to keep it from going public too, so…” Todoroki’s voice was edged with anger that burned in his eyes, “There was probably more he could’ve done if he hadn’t been concerned about that.”

“I see…” Shouta closed his eye for a moment as he pinched the bridge of his nose — *what a mess this was*. He reopened his eye to focus on his student again. “Would either of your siblings be able to take custody of you?”

Todoroki blinked at that, like he hadn’t considered that possibility before. “Natsuo is staying in a dorm at college now, so probably not for him. Fuyumi… she could probably get her own place, but she works as a teacher and I know they don’t get paid much.” His student reverted his gaze to his hands again.

“I… don’t want to be a burden to either of them. It’s not like they ever really got to know me anyway…”

“We’ll let your sister decide for herself if she can financially support you. And if not, UA has given aid to students with financial difficulties in the past,” Shouta tried to reassure him.

For the first time since prompting Todoroki to speak, Midoriya cut in, “My mom is willing to take custody of Shouto-kun if he can’t stay with his siblings.”

Both Shouta and Todoroki turned to look at the freckled boy in surprise.

Midoriya blushed a faint pink before explaining, “I– I asked her about it previously, just in case. She works in accounting, so she wouldn’t have a problem financially supporting two children.”

Todoroki stared at Midoriya, then one end of his mouth quirked up in an almost smile. “Don’t you think we should date for a bit longer before you invite me to move in with you?”

Midoriya’s pink face turned bright red as he waved his hands frantically through the air in denial. “*That— That wasn’t my intention!* It wouldn’t mean something like *that!* I just– wanted to make sure you had a place to go and that you would be okay—”

“I know. I’m just teasing you,” Todoroki stated in his usual monotone voice.
“Please don’t flirt in front of me…” Shouta pleaded in exasperation, moving his hand to cover the eye that wasn’t already covered by his eyepatch. *He had seen these two’s out-of-nowhere romantic development—it was like both of them were actual princes from straight out of a fairytale—but that didn’t mean he had to see this much of it.*

*However, he was glad that Todoroki still had enough good humor in him to be able to flirt at a time like this— it was much better than the emotionally dead boy he had received at the beginning of the year.*

*And really, Todoroki’s earlier demeanor should’ve been a giveaway that something was wrong. Shouta had known that his mother was in a mental hospital, so he had just assumed it had to do with that. He shouldn’t have made that kind of assumption—*

Midoriya’s bow was so intense that it slammed his head on the desk by Todoroki with a bang. “*I’m sorry Shouta-sensei!*”

Todoroki’s apology was much more subdued, “*Sorry Aizawa-sensei.*” He then gently pushed Midoriya’s forehead back up and told him, “Don’t apologize when I was the one instigating things.”

*Shouta really lucked out when Midoriya decided to romance Todoroki specifically, that boy is a much-needed emotional equalizer for him.*

Their explosive fight during the Sports Festival flashed through his mind.

*At least most of the time…*

“Let’s just get back on topic,” Shouta sighed as he steepled his hands by his mouth. He then gained a serious expression as he looked at Todoroki. “I’m not sure what you want out of this other than being separated from your father, but there are some things we need to take into consideration…”

“My number one priority is you and your well-being. Because of his actions, Endeavor should really be facing criminal charges for this— but that might not be the best for you. If he’s charged for it, this will become a public matter, which means both he and you would be under scrutiny and criticism. It would follow you for the rest of your life, and some people may even try to harass you or claim that you’re lying. Not only that, but he will probably try much harder to defend against a public criminal case than a private civil case, so it may make it harder to remove you from him.”
At this point, he started alternating the focus of his vision between both Todoroki and Midoriya. “Because of this, I believe we should direct our lawyers to barter with him, dropping the criminal charges against him in exchange for him acquiescing to our civil case to remove you from his custody. He has a lot to lose if those charges are pressed, so hopefully that will be enough to pressure him into backing off.”

Todoroki glanced down in thought for a few seconds before he looked at Midoriya. “I think that would be fine… but what do you think, Izuku?”

Midoriya’s mouth formed a tight line of displeasure. “I think that he deserves to rot in jail, and to have a sword run through him.”  –Run a sword through him? There’s no way Shouta misheard that but what?– “But Shouta-sensei is right that this way would be a lot easier. And also…” Midoriya glanced away from both of them as he considered something Shouta wasn’t privy to.

“…I don’t want you to worry about this, but it may be better if we get as much time as possible out of Endeavor standing as the Number Two hero.”

That… sounded like nothing good— “Explain Midoriya.”

Midoriya fidgeted with his fingers as he looked at Shouta in nervousness. “I can’t tell you everything, and it’s not like I got a prophecy or anything, but— Endeavor’s fate is already set up for him to fall from grace at some point. And also— I know fate very well, so based on some things I’ve learned, I can tell that it’s setting up for something…”

“And that something is…?”

“…Probably the fall of the top three heroes, which could lead to the fall of the current social order concerning the hero industry.”

Shouta gave up on containing his composure, holding his face with both of his hands. He groaned loudly in frustration.

*He swears that his life was never this complicated before he got involved with this Number One problem child…*
The days flew by for Izuku as the time for final exams approached. Shouto had been right that his brother Natsuo would be eager to give his own testimony against Endeavor, and his sister had also agreed to it—stating that although she had been hoping their family could be repaired, she wanted to support Shouto’s efforts. She also agreed to accept custody over him.

The Principal was aiding them with the legal process, and had also been informed about Izuku’s prediction for the hero industry. Toshinori, on the other hand, hadn’t been told. They were waiting until he had fully worked through his feelings on the fate that had befallen his mentor’s grandson. Placing heavier pressure on retaining his Number One rank through his ill heath could wait until after he had a stronger mental foundation to handle it.

In the meantime, Izuku studied for his finals, spent time conversing with his friends, and went to his second counseling session that he had set up before the Sports Festival. He had been offered an additional session, but at this point the majority of his worries were based on other people’s worries. He felt too uneasy about disclosing other people’s problems, so he declined having another session. He also took Hatsume to the Workshop in the Crystal World and had a very hard time getting her to leave at the end. *He could only pray that she didn’t start making teddy bear robots and bombs as well…*

He also kept in contact with Takahiro, though it seemed like the man hadn’t gone back to the Garden of Eden for a break yet. He also kept in contact with Togata, who meet up with him once just to fret over him about his run-in with a serial killer. People seemed to be doing that a lot now.

Izuku had been so focused on the development of Shouto’s case and everything else that it had taken him a while to notice that Kacchan was acting… *strange.* It almost seemed like he was outright *avoiding* Izuku, and Kacchan never avoids anything. If you looked up the word “confrontation” in a dictionary, his picture would probably be featured.

A week before the exams, the back of Izuku’s head was hit by a stray elbow, and he turned around to be reminded of another *confrontational* person.

“Sorry! My tray just couldn’t get around that big head of yours, *Prince Deku,*” Monoma drawled at him with a fake smile.
Izuku was actually rather impressed that Monoma had the boldness to start something in front of his extensive lunch group, which included Hagakure today as well. That made a total of 10 versus Monoma’s 1. Izuku knew that a physical fight wouldn’t be taking place, but…

“How rude! As a student of UA, you should be more conscientious of your surroundings!”

“Do you think we are unable to see through your deceit? What a black-hearted person you are for a heroics student…”

“Kero, how unpleasant…”

Hitoshi stared at his fellow Potential Child of Fate with half-lidded, baggy eyes and sighed, “Monoma, did you want anything, or…?”

Monoma never dropped his fake smile. “I heard that some of 1-A ran into the Hero Killer, the golden boy here in particular–”

Izuku’s eyes changed from staring at Monoma with vague amusement, to staring at him with piercing intensity.

“I’m just going to stop you right there,” Izuku interrupted in a neutral tone, “to let you know that the Hero Killer stabbed me in the gut, and that didn’t stop me from completely destroying the foundation of his ideology with words alone. I advise you to choose your next words wisely.”

“…Did you really?”

“Yes.”

“I see…” Monoma began his retreat, averting his eyes to look across the lunch room. Izuku guessed that he wasn’t pretending that he was smart at least. “Oh, what’s this? I think Tokage is calling for me. Sorry I can’t stick around any longer to enforce the greatness of class 1-B!”
As Monoma started power-walking away, his classmate Kendou took his place. “Huh? Tokage isn’t calling for him, what is he on about now…” She watched him leave in confusion before turning back to Izuku’s group to say, “Seems like he was about to trouble you guys, sorry about that. That guy’s heart is just kind of, you know…”

No, Izuku doesn’t know, because nothing is wrong with his Fruit of Fate on the outside. Maybe the inside of it is burning or something…

“Anyway, if you’re wondering about the practical portion of the final exam, I heard from some upperclassmen that we’ll be fighting robots again!”

Izuku blinked and muttered to himself, “Why… did I not think to ask Togata-senpai? That’s such an obvious thing to do– ”

“Thanks for the tip, Kendou-kun!” Ochako cut off his mumbling.

“Yeah! It’s super helpful!” Hagakure added on cheerfully.

At the end of the day, they spread word of this to the rest of their class. Ashido and Kaminari were relieved by the news, confidence spiking with the knowledge that at least the practical exam they would be able to pass. But while the rest of Izuku’s classmates became lively, Kacchan just scoffed, “Humans or robots, I’ll just blast them all. What’s the big deal, morons?!”

Kaminari cried out in offense, but Kacchan ignored it to pass through the door of the classroom. His eyes never looked over at Izuku.

He made the snap decision to go after him. “Ah– Wait Kacchan! I want to talk about something!”

Rushing out the door, Izuku ran up to Kacchan. He must have heard him because he stopped in the middle of the hallway, but he didn’t turn his head to watch Izuku approach.

Izuku called out to the back of Kacchan’s head, “Kacchan… is something wrong? Why are you avoiding me?”
“…I guess I need to stop being a damn coward. But we can’t talk about this in the open.”

With that, a rough hand grabbed on to Izuku’s forearm to pull him down a side hallway and into a deserted dead end. It seemed like he was trying to find an empty room but he still won’t look at Izuku—

His arm pulled itself out of Kacchan’s grip so that his hand could hold the side of Kacchan’s face, it forced him to face Izuku. Red eyes examined Izuku carefully, as though Kacchan was trying to find something in him. The Fruit of Fate in his chest had changed— only half of it was burning now.

“What is this about, Katsuki?” Izuku intoned with an unyielding voice.

Katsuki’s stare intensified as his mouth screwed itself into a tight frown. Then, the last thing Izuku would’ve ever expected rang out to fill the empty silence between them.

“When I told you to kill yourself, did you actually consider it?”

Izuku’s mind blanked. His hand involuntarily released Katsuki.

“…What?”

Katsuki repeated himself in a low voice, “When I told you to jump off the roof and hope that you were reborn with a quirk in middle school. Did you think about actually killing yourself?”

“…No.”

“Why did you hesitate before responding?! Are you lying?!”

Katsuki made a move with his hand as though he was going to slam Izuku into a wall as he often used to do. Izuku unconsciously flinched at the sight of it, and Katsuki instantly froze. He dropped his hand into a clenched fist.

“I…” Izuku didn’t know how to answer this question in a way that didn’t sound bad. “I never really
considered doing it— but I thought it would be nice if *something like that happened*, you know? If I could actually just close my eyes and then open them to find that I had the life and fate that I wanted. I didn’t really care about what it would take to get there. But I knew that wouldn’t give me that, so I didn’t consider it…”

Katsuki went unnaturally still at his answer, and Izuku barked out a bitter laugh as a thought came to him. “Now that I think about it, though— it *did* give me what I wanted. *And I hated it.***

“What– What are you talking about?” Katsuki’s voice wavered, staring at Izuku with wide eyes.

“I *really did die that day*, though it wasn’t intentional on my part— a villain killed me on my way home. And then when I opened my eyes again, *I had my father’s quirk.*” His right hand came up to grasp at his chest. “You don’t remember me having a dad, right Katsuki? That’s because he gave up his existence to bring me back– *that’s* how I got my quirk and my power.”

The boy in front of him staggered into the wall behind him.

“What the fuck. *Why is everything so fucked up? What the hell is this shit–*”

“Katsuki,” Izuku interrupted, “Why are you asking about this?”

“Because *I was fucked up!*” Katsuki’s voice finally raised itself into a familiar scream, “And I didn’t even think about how fucked up I was until I heard that you *almost died! And now I know that you already died!*”

Katsuki clawed at his face in anger as he once again averted his eyes from Izuku’s form.

He growled, “How did you describe it— *“You took joy in my pain and failure to manifest a quirk, because the lower people are compared to you the better you must be”*? What a fucking understatement! *I made your life hell!* You can’t tell me you wouldn’t have “thought it would be nice if something like that happened” if I hadn’t made living quirkless awful for you!”

“…You played a major part in that, yes. But it’s not like you were the only one looking down on me for being quirkless, Katsuki. All of society was looking down on me— had thrown away the possibility of me amounting to anything. You were the one who demonstrated it with violence, *but none of our teachers or classmates bothered to do anything about it.* My troubles were a group
effort. *Everyone* failed me.”

“*Don’t make excuses for me!* I wasn’t fucking five anymore; I knew what I was doing was wrong —*that using my quirk on you to hurt you was illegal*— I just didn’t give a crap until now!”

Katsuki’s eyes seemed like they were trying to bore holes into the palms of his hands —*the hands that Izuku had used to anticipate pain from*.

The other boy’s voice quieted down into a whisper, “I just— *I don’t understand*. Why would you bother having anything to do with me, after that? Why would you want to help me? Why didn’t you report what I did to UA? It doesn’t make sense— *you should hate me.*”

Izuku finally moved over to Katsuki’s side of the hallway to take his face into his hand once more. His green eyes forced their stare into Katsuki’s red.

“But I don’t hate you. And I do want to help you. Maybe it was unhealthy of me to think this way, but… I had always kept the hope that we could be friends again, Katsuki. *And I still want to be friends*. Even as you got worse and worse, even as the *pain* got worse and worse. I… still admired you, and your strength. I wanted to prove myself to you. I thought— *How wonderful would it be if I was blessed by the wheel of fortune and fate like Kacchan is, that was*…”

Izuku had a realization as his mind flashed to Takahiro and Takahiro’s *hero*.

“*That was the Sun I was striving for*. It was blinding and painful and it *burnt*, but I reached for it anyway…”

“If something is *blinding and painful and burns*…” Katsuki closed his eyes, his voice seemed almost pained now, “*then obviously you shouldn’t reach for it, Izuku!*”

“Maybe, but I’m the only one that can make that decision.”

He finally let go of Kacchan to start walking away.

“I hope this talk helps you become the kind of person you want to be, Katsuki…”
“Sometimes, things must get worse before they get better”

As Midoriya headed down the hallway, there was a scramble as three people hidden around the bend rushed to find hiding places.

*How did this happen? Hitoshi certainly didn’t know.*

All he knew is that he had happened to catch sight of Midoriya being pulled away by that aggressive classmate of his, and had followed the two out of worry that Bakugou was going to start something. He hadn’t even realized that his hero and Midoriya’s boyfriend were also tailing him until they all awkwardly stared at one another lined up against the wall out of view, and by that time they had quickly been distracted by the question that had come out of Bakugou Katsuki’s mouth.

“When I told you to kill yourself, did you actually consider it?”

“I never really considered doing it– but I thought it would be nice if something like that happened”

A shiver crawled down Hitoshi’s spine along with his dread.

*Hitoshi certainly hadn’t known what he was getting himself involved in.*
When Hizashi saw that the first thing his husband had done upon coming home was get drunk, he knew that something must be very wrong.

He wished he had waited longer before taking off his hero gear to make the conversation easier for Shouta—and he was about to get out the light-duty version of his gear just for that— but then Shouta sighed from his seat at the countertop bar of their kitchen, “It’s okay, Hizashi. Just come sit by me.”

Following Shouta’s wishes, Hizashi sat in the empty chair to the right of his husband—the side that Shouta would be able to see him from. Then he signed, Did something happen with Todoroki’s case?

“No…” Shouta anxiously rubbed at the eye covered by his eyepatch. “Everything concerning that project has been progressing well, we’re just trying to make a financial aid plan for Todoroki and his mother in the case that we aren’t able to get Endeavor to concede with continuing his payments for her medical expenses—which he really should be paying for considering he was the one who caused her mental health problems…” he grumbled that last part.

Then what’s wrong? Hizashi asked.

Shouta grimaced, then took another shot of vodka.

Hizashi almost hesitantly signed, That bad?

Shouta continued to stare at Hizashi so that he could see what he was signing, but he really looked like he would much rather stare at his empty shot glass.

“I overheard a private conversation between Midoriya and Bakugou, and frankly speaking… there’s a lot to process concerning it. But for now, I’m just considering two things; whether I should change the setup for the final exam so that Midoriya and Bakugou aren’t paired together, and whether I should expel Bakugou from the heroics course on the grounds of past behavior and actions.”

Hizashi eyes shot wide open at that. What?! What did Bakugou do that makes you want to expel him?!
"I learned today that I am apparently horrible at judging when my students have extreme concerns with their private life," Shouta’s eyes hardened with anger as he explained, "because I not only failed to notice Todoroki’s situation, but I also failed to realize that Bakugou’s past behavior and relationship with Midoriya was so toxic, that he used to hurt the kid with his quirk and once told him to jump off a roof."

It felt like the air was punched out of his lungs by the horror that burst into his chest. His hands moved frantically, He– Bakugou did something like that to Izuku?

"Yes. And apparently he only recently realized that he shouldn’t have," Shouta growled as continued to press against his injured eye.

"He obviously has potential, but if that’s what his true character is like I’m not sure if it’s even worth it to keep him on. It seems like he’s regretful and wants to change, but will he really commit to it? His attitude towards his other classmates is still bad, and he still acts out in anger, and now we know that he’s guilty of suicide baiting and illegal quirk usage where one of our other students was his victim. At the very least, there needs to be some action on our part…"

Hizashi clenched his jaw as a crease formed between his furrowed brows. Do you know what Izuku thinks about Bakugou? Why didn’t Izuku report him?

Shouta snorted bitterly, "He said that none of his teachers had done anything about it before, that everyone had failed him. He also said that he wants to be friends with Bakugou, that he admired him.” Then, a somber expression overcame Shouta’s face.

“…Bakugou told him to kill himself and “hope he was reborn with a quirk”. Izuku said that he used to be quirkless, and that he got Conductor when he died and his father traded his life for Izuku’s. He said that he never considered doing it, but thought it would be nice if something like that happened.”

As the pain in Hizashi’s chest increased, his husband cradled his face in his hands.

“How could people have failed him so badly?! Now we’ve got this, and Endeavor abusing another one of our students, and the fate of the fucking hero industry hanging over our heads– Everything’s a mess, Hizashi…”

Shouta didn’t have the level of concentration needed to watch and interpret signs now, so all Hizashi could do was gently move his husband’s head to his chest and kiss the crown of his head. He held
Shouta for quite a long while.
The next morning, Shouto was only just able to confess that he, Aizawa-sensei, and Shinsou had eavesdropped on Izuku’s conversation with Bakugou before their teacher called Izuku to the Principal’s office. Izuku paled at the order, tightly clutching Shouto’s hands. He ended up following him to the office as moral support—much like the role Izuku had played for him before.

Aizawa took one look at them together, and wordless opened the door to let both of them in.

Principal Nedzu had them move to a set of sofas in the corner of his office, then sat himself across from them with Aizawa next to him. Izuku eyed both of them uneasily.

Nedzu started the discussion, “Thank you for coming, Midoriya. It seems like you already know what this meeting is about, so I’ll get right to it—UA fully plans on committing to disciplinary action against Bakugou Katsuki.”

Izuku stood up with a jolt, then cried out, “No! That’s— you don’t need to do that! I don’t want to file any report against him! And he’s already improved himself so much— ”

“Regardless of whether he’s “improved himself” Midoriya, using your quirk to injure someone is illegal, and he’s never received punishment for it,” Aizawa interrupted with a piercing tone and one-eyed stare, “We have an obligation to enforce disciplinary action against him to make sure he fully understands that what he did was not acceptable.”

Izuku’s face fell into devastation. Shouto gently pulled him back down into his seat and stated, “You can’t protect Bakugou from his own actions, Izuku…”

—and Shouto doesn’t want Izuku to protect him. He deserves any punishment he gets. Who does he think he is? Hurting a person as kind as Izuku for such a pointless reason, telling a person as kind as Izuku to kill himself. Even if Izuku has already forgiven him for everything, Shouto hasn’t—

Nedzu continued, “Now, the extent of this punishment is something that we wish to talk over with you, Midoriya, because we understand that past authority figures in your life have failed you when it came to this issue. We can’t ignore it even if you want us to, but we can hear out your opinion on the matter and tell you what actions we must take.”
“Firstly, both your mother and Bakugou’s parents must be informed.” Nedzu steepled his paws together. “The details of Bakugou’s punishment will depend on him and his parents, but I’m assuming you don’t want us to press for expulsion.”

“No, definitely not,” Izuku firmly replied. Shouto let his boyfriend hold his hands for comfort.

“If we continue Bakugou’s education here at UA, mandatory counseling for anger management and proper quirk usage will be an absolute requirement. Most likely, he will be put on a probational status where if we believe he is falling into old patterns of behavior, he will be immediately expelled. Do you understand this?”

Screwing his mouth into a frown, Izuku replied, “Yes… As long as– as long as he’s given a chance. That’s all I ask for…”

“On that note,” Nedzu trailed into a different topic, “please keep quiet about this– but for the practical final this semester, we are changing things up so that the students are paired up to fight teachers. Originally, it was planned for you to team up with Bakugou, but we do not want to put you in that sort of situation if it makes you uncomfortable…”

A small sense of surprise shot through Shouto and Izuku, but Izuku recovered quickly to say, “I– I’ll be fine with that.”

Aizawa cut in once again with heavy words, “Will you really? I saw your body language yesterday– the two of you still have the mental expectation of violence occurring between you on Bakugou’s part. In a high stress environment, he might not catch himself before acting out on it.”

“Kacchan will be able to handle it,” Izuku insisted, “I won’t be in any danger from him.”

Their teacher’s single eye judged Izuku, then narrowed as he expanded, “For his own sake, he better. This test will be a test of his behavior as well. If he acts inappropriately towards you at any point of the test, I’m dropping him from the heroics course.”

A gasp emerged from Izuku’s throat, and Shouto just held onto his hands tighter.
“He won’t be told this of course– if he can’t figure that out himself even after we have already initiated these disciplinary actions then his potential is zero. But I have no patience for policing his behavior 24/7. If he can’t even reign himself in for an important test, then I’m done with him.”

Izuku crouched into himself.

“I didn’t… I never wanted to jeopardize his future like this. That’s why I never said anything…” Izuku confessed in a rough whisper.

Shouto whispered back, “You aren’t doing anything, Izuku. Bakugou jeopardized his own future. That’s not on you.”

“Todoroki’s right, Midoriya. And this is something else we need to talk about– your mind set towards Bakugou,” Nedzu intoned.

Izuku looked back up in confusion. “What… What’s wrong with it? I’m not even mad at him or anything.”

“Honestly, I would be less concerned if you were mad at him, Midoriya,” Aizawa sighed, “It’s concerning that Bakugou can literally tell you to kill yourself, and your emotional response is to think that would be nice.”

Izuku flinched back. “You’re taking out the most important context for that! I wasn’t suicidal, and I certainly don’t think that would be nice now. Dying once was– ” Izuku’s voice broke, “already enough to last a lifetime!”

Aizawa’s face finally softened.

“I realize this, that’s… an opinion and experience we both share. But it’s still concerning. You’ve shown that you’re willing to excuse a startling amount of ill behavior from Bakugou and as your teacher I cannot allow behavior that hurts you. So at the very least, if he starts acting up with you again– please inform me. Don’t brush it off.”

Their teacher got up from his seat to crouch down in front of Izuku and place a hand on his shoulder. He stared into his eyes as he declared, “I refuse to be one of the many that have failed you. I owe you too much to fail you.”
Izuku had no response to that. He just stared at Aizawa as though he couldn’t believe a person would ever say that to him. And seeing that made Shouto’s simmering anger burn even more.

When Katsuki had been discretely told by Deku that their teacher had overheard their conversation for the day before and that there was going to be a “talk” about it with the Principal, Katsuki had honestly thought it was the end of the road for him. This thought strengthened after Aizawa-sensei officially delivered the news that his parents would be brought in for this talk at the end of the day with a dark eye that seemed to be reassessing his worth.

He stewed in his dread throughout the day, which was so strong that shitty hair—who was completely unaware of everything that was going on—didn’t even try to drag him into conversations. He just looked at him then looked away in concern. But as he processed the news that he was actually going to get consequences for his actions, he realized that as much as he didn’t want to face this—he had to.

Because really, what would’ve been the alternative? Telling Deku that he was going to make up for his mistakes only to avoid their consequences his entire life? *Utter bullshit that would’ve been.* And he knows the nerd would’ve been fine with that too, that Katsuki’s fake promises alone were “proof” that he had changed. But that shouldn’t be enough.

If Katsuki didn’t accept all the consequences of his actions unconditionally—from the scars they left on his used-to-be friend to the black-mark on his record and potential career—then any attempt to make up for his actions would be meaningless.

So when he’s brought before the beady eyes of the principal and the dark eye of his homeroom teacher, his parents sitting beside him, to give his own account of his treatment of Izuku throughout the years, he doesn’t leave a single thing out. No sugar-coating, no excuses—just the straight facts about his everyday behavior and thought process. And the facts spoke for themselves.

Considering he did, in fact, break the law, he thought getting stuck with counselling and probation instead of expulsion was fairly lenient. It probably would’ve been a very different story if he had
continued his bullying of Izuku while attending UA, so that probably helped. But he also knew for a fact that Izuku wouldn’t have wanted him to be punished at all, so that probably helped more.

Overall, he’s glad the school isn’t letting him get away with his shit like Izuku would have. If they had, they would’ve been just like the teachers Katsuki had had previously, and Katsuki would’ve lost respect for them.

But that didn’t make the sense of judgment he got from Aizawa-sensei any easier. And it didn’t make the sense of judgment from his parents any easier either.

Katsuki knew he was in deep shit with his mom when she didn’t yell at him once during the car ride home. He got a lot of his traits from her, including his tendency to respond to anger with shouting and curses, so sitting through a tense silence the entirety of the way home was so off-putting that he would’ve preferred it if she just started screaming at him already. It didn’t help that his dad kept looking at her nervously, like he was waiting for a time bomb to go off.

When they finally arrived at the house, Mom didn’t look at him as she stated in a flat voice, “Katsuki, come with me to the living room. We need to have a discussion.” His mom left the car using her crutch to support the dead weight of her right leg, and he followed her to the house while his father—who looked at Mom with an understanding expression that said he knew what she was going to say to him—stayed seated in the car without a word.

Their tense silence continued from that, only being broken by the opening and closing of the front door. His mother still wouldn’t look at him. Instead, she sat down on one side of the couch, and picked up a small picture that stood on the side table next to her. Her crutch was left to lean against the back of the couch.

Katsuki recognized the picture as the one of Deku, Katsuki, and their moms that was taken when they were about a year old. The sight of it made Katsuki’s body stiffen in anxiousness. He stayed standing instead of moving to sit next to her.

“Mom…” Katsuki pleaded in a rough voice, “Can you please just say something already? I– I know I messed up, so…” He didn’t know where he was going with this, he just wanted to know what she was thinking to make her act so subdued.

“…Do you remember what I told you when I explained how my leg became crippled, Katsuki?”
Katsuki blinked at her in confusion. *That came out of nowhere—“It was a car accident, right?”*

“That’s right… but there’s also more to it than that.” His mother set the picture down on her thighs, and her gaze shifted its focus to the hands that were holding it.

“That car accident wasn’t some random coincidence, Katsuki, it was *fate*. It was my punishment for being alive when I wasn’t supposed to.”

Shock rang through Katsuki’s system at those words.

*“So could it be that Aizawa-sensei actually died and you “fixed” him by bringing him back to life?”*

*“My eye was a casualty of the villain attack. There will be no questioning about it”*

“I know it sounds ridiculous,” his mother continued, bringing Katsuki out of his thoughts, “but just a week before that incident, I was involved in another accident that I died in. And I… I don’t even remember how I was able to come back, it’s like I’ve forgotten something important—”

“A villain killed me on my way home. And then when I opened my eyes again, I had my father’s quirk. *You don’t remember me having a dad, right Katsuki? That’s because he gave up his existence to bring me back*”

“—but I do know two things; that my fate had to be changed, which led to me getting punished, and that *Midoriya Inko shared half of her life with me in exchange for that change.*”

He suddenly felt like he couldn’t breathe. His limbs start to tremble along with his voice, “Mom…”

His mom ignored him to continue speaking, “Inko is my best friend, and she is the reason I was alive to have you, Katsuki. *But do you realize the kind of cost she took upon herself for me?* Someday, Izuku is going to be without his mother earlier than how it should’ve been. Maybe she won’t be there the day he gets married. Maybe she won’t be there the day he graduates from UA. *And it will be because she gave that time to me.*”

One of her hands came up to rub at her closed eyes. Katsuki couldn’t remember the last time he had
heard her speak so softly, “You’re going to have to face a day like that too, Katsuki, but I can take comfort in knowing that Masaru will be here for you. *Izuku doesn’t have that*, he only has *Inko*. And one day, I’m going to have to face that child knowing that he’s all alone when he shouldn’t be because *I lived the rest of my life when I shouldn’t have.*”

Katsuki sucked a sharp inhale through his clenched teeth. He had to stumble to the couch to lean on it for support. The dread he felt now was so much worse than what he had felt the whole day, thinking he was going to be expelled. “*Mom…*”

“That’s why on the day I was supposed to die, I promised her—” her voice started hitching, “I promised her that I would make it up to her. That I would pay her back that time in whatever way I could, even though she just smiled at me and said it wasn’t necessary— that she was just glad I was alive. *So how could this have happened, Katsuki?*”

When Mom finally turned her face towards Katsuki, her eyes were watery with tears. *He couldn’t remember the last time he had seen her cry.*

“This is– is this my fault, Katsuki?” she sounded lost, “Did you act like that because I was too free with my anger, so you thought it was okay? Did you think that you were better than everyone else—*better than Izuku*—because I didn’t try hard enough to teach you the value everyone else has? Did you think it was okay to use your quirk like that because I praised it too much, along with everyone else?”

“No! That’s wrong, *Mom!*” Katsuki cried out involuntarily, leaning forward towards her but unable to touch her, “You didn’t do anything, I’m the one that—”

“The problem *is* that I didn’t do anything!” Mom finally raised her voice, only for it to go back to a whisper, “I’m your mother— It’s my job to correct your misbehavior when you do things wrong, *so that you can learn what’s right*. I didn’t do enough to curb your attitude, I didn’t watch you enough to realize how big of a problem it had become, I didn’t pay any mind to you not being friends with Izuku anymore—I was disappointed, but it’s perfectly natural for friendships to end over time. I didn’t think enough on what could’ve been going on for it to end.”

His mom’s face tightened, and she turned back down towards her lap. She held her face with her trembling hands.

Mom’s words turned into sobs and her body began to shake, “How— How could I have failed so much as a parent that I raised a child who would hurt Inko’s son *so badly*, that would *tell him to die*— *How could I have failed her so badly!*”
Once she finished speaking to cry in full, the front door opened to let in his father. He took his mother into his arms and let her cry into his shoulder, carrying a firm and steady demeanor that was nothing like the shy timidity that he usually had. And all Katsuki could do was freeze in place and cry at the sight of it.

The despair he felt from losing his battle trial to Deku was nothing compared to this—*He’s never felt more like a complete failure in his entire life.*

Kacchan and his parents had been brought to the Principal’s office just before Izuku had gone there once again with his mom. She broke down in tears when she had heard of the bullying Izuku had faced, committed by a childhood friend of Izuku’s and the son of her own friend at that. She had known things weren’t great for him at school—*prejudice against quirkless people was a common thing*—but Izuku had hidden the full extent of it from her. He had wanted to save her from this pain.

When they went home, she constantly apologized for failing to notice his pain, and he started crying too as he tried to reassure her.

From what he could tell, Kacchan accepted his counseling and probational status without complaint. But he hadn’t told Izuku what he thought about all of this.

When he nervously tried to approach Hitoshi about what he had overheard, Hitoshi claimed that he wanted to put off their conversation for now, stating that he was concerned that he might distract Izuku from his studies and that once tests were over they could devote more mental energy to it. Izuku was already fairly distracted, but he relented anyway. From the contemplative look on Hitoshi’s face when he had said this— it seemed like he was still thinking some things through and wasn’t ready to talk.

Also, Hitoshi was taking the practical final exam as a metric to see whether he was ready to enter the heroics course—Izuku didn’t want to distract his friend from his own preparations.
When the day of the final exam arrived, Izuku was a nervous wreck. And it only got worse when All Might announced–

“Your opponent will be me!”

*Please Kacchan, if there was one time in your entire life for you to agree to teamwork now would be the time–*

“Izuku,” Kacchan interrupted his thoughts as they walked into the fake city that would act as their testing area, “I’m… sorry.”

Izuku stopped walking at that. “What…”

Katsuki never turned towards him, but he quietly confessed, “I’m sorry that I hurt you, and I’m sorry that I was cruel to you. I’m sorry I told you to kill yourself without a second thought. I’m sorry I made you feel like you were *worthless* and would never amount to anything.”

“But I’ve decided that I don’t want these regrets to become permanent– *so I’m going to make it up to you*, and I’m starting now. What would be easier; getting handcuffs on All Might out here, or transporting All Might to your pocket dimension to get them on in there?”

After a few seconds to process what Katsuki had said, relief filled Izuku’s chest. His eyes became slightly watery.

*Getting an apology isn’t something Izuku had ever expected to happen, but now that he has… he feels like a misplaced piece inside of him that he never noticed before was put back into place– he feels like that pain that he felt was valid, and that he wasn’t just overreacting, and that Katsuki actually was wrong to say all those things to him.*

*He never really put much thought behind how Katsuki and his teachers and society had wronged him– he knew it that it was wrong objectively, but the only thing he could do was accept that things would never be right for him.*

*But now, things were right*
“I accept your apology. We would have more of a chance if we transported him considering that we can do that remotely. Also, he specializes in close combat, so he’ll most likely come into contact with me or my fighters. Still— trying to win a fight against All Might of all people… No matter how I look at it, it’s going to be difficult. We’ll need to do something he won’t expect. Maybe we should run instead?”

“Trying to run is a crap idea when he’s faster than both of us— so the only way to win is to fight.”

Finally, Katsuki looked back at Izuku. His steady red eyes convey a serious but controlled attitude. “You know why they put us together with him, right? We’re two of the most powerful in the class. And that’s exactly how we’ll win.”

Izuku blinked at him. He couldn’t believe that he had heard that— that Katsuki would say that this will be their win.

It made a smile break out on his face, but Kacchan just averted his eyes from it.

“I realized recently that I— haven’t really been loving myself, that I hadn’t really loved myself for a long time, because I couldn’t accept that I was quirkless”

Was young Bakugou the reason for that, young Midoriya?

When Toshinori had been told that he needed to look out for antagonistic behavior from Bakugou because of his past actions towards Midoriya, and what those actions were, he had been shocked. Midoriya had never acted towards Bakugou like the boy had hurt him in such a way. Midoriya had even been eager to help the boy. To know that their history was drenched in such turmoil was disturbing.

He’s upset and disappointed that Bakugou allowed himself to fall so far, but he’s still hopeful for his future as a hero— it seemed like he was reflecting properly on his actions. Toshinori just hoped that
the boy would commit to improving himself.

But even more than that, he’s pained at the thought of Midoriya’s struggles and pain.

All Might carried that pain as he dashed through the cityscape, and first caught sight of the two from afar. Bakugou had his back turned to Midoriya.

“I told you I don’t need your help!”

“Please Kacchan, we have to work together– ”

All Might’s smile faltered as frustration ignited in his chest. “Is this really the time…” He sped to the pair to appear in front of Bakugou. Even as he wound up a punch, he made sure to reduce his power and avoid grievously injuring him. “…to be sticking to your stubborn ways!”

“Survival– ”

As he threw a punch towards the boy’s chest, a splash of white blurred behind his target and pulled him aside to take his place. His fist crashed through hard metal and tangled wires.

Teddydrum White’s red eyes looked down at where All Might’s arm was stuck in its leg.

“–Strategy!”

They were prepared for him to attack Bakugou first– Were they acting?!

He tore his arm away, but it was too late. They were already at the familiar scenery of the Dueling Arena. Midoriya blurred into existence about a meter away from him and suddenly, All Might was falling through the air beside the tower.

You’ve gotten faster young Midoriya! But I hope you don’t think I can’t handle something like this–
All Might pumped his legs into the air to generate a shockwave that pushed him towards the tower. Once he had a hold on it, he forced his fingers into the wall to climb up. Having only fallen a little before he caught himself, he quickly scaled his way to the top and pulled himself over the ledge.

_Now that he’s here, he either has to take out Midoriya within the boy’s own domain, or keep them busy until the time runs out._

When he was crouched at the ledge taking in the situation, his eyes widened at the scene before him.

Midoriya was in a dip with his upper body being supported by one of Bakugou’s hands, and Bakugou’s other hand was clutching a black sword handle with a green gem in it that was sticking out of the Prince of the Crystal’s chest. Around sword handle light burst out, and the Prince’s red cloak bellowed around them both as their hair was ruffled by the invisible force moving through the air. The Prince’s eyes were closed– as though he was trusting that his partner wouldn’t let him fall.

Bakugou’s eyes were staring at Midoriya with the same sense of awe that All Might was sure his own eyes held.

Midoriya announced, “*Grant us the power to bring the world revolution!*” And Bakugou pulled the sword out of his chest to grandly point it into the air.

A wide smile found its way back to All Might’s face, and he charged at the two. He was intercepted by a familiar muscled penguin.

“She’s a fucking penguin All Might?!”

All Might’s fist met Little Might’s clenched flipper, the penguin was grinning at him with a disturbing teeth-filled beak. A shockwave rang out between them.

“Don’t let Little Might distract you Kacchan– ”

Little Might’s small body made him more evasive, and he was able to get inside All Might’s guard to punch him in the abdomen– taking his breath away. His feet skidded on the dirt, but he stopped himself from flying back.
Out of the corner of his eye, All Might caught sight of the Champion of the Rose Bride charging at him. He grabbed Little Might by his outstretched flipper to throw the penguin at the Champion.

Midoriya blurred away from Bakugou to stand somewhere behind All Might, while the two Teddydrums were on either side of All Might in the air. All Might looked at Bakugou’s mean grin, before turning his head to look at the also grinning Midoriya.

“This is some frightening teamwork you’ve coordinated. But now the only choice you have is to fight.” He punched the air towards Midoriya to send a shockwave at him just as Midoriya raised the black sword he was holding above his head to slash it down. “But is your power enough to handle my power, heroes?!”

The swing of the sword produced a slashing force that cut through the shockwave. All Might jumped to the side to dodge it. Where he was once standing, the ground was cleaved with a deep fissure.

The Teddydrums fired at him in unison. All Might leaped into the air to both dodge it hits and grab the leg of Teddydrum Black. He threw the robot at Bakugou, and was about to follow it up by speeding behind Midoriya, but Little Might appeared above him to kick All Might back down to the ground.

All Might hit the floor with a crash but wasn’t much in pain. He grabbed the squishy body of Little Might to pitch him towards Midoriya. Midoriya raised his hand and redirected the penguin when he got too close. Little Might was now headed back towards All Might, but All Might use his arm to bat Little Might through Teddydrum White’s torso. The penguin let out a squawk of anger at all the manhandling as the robot hunched over the hole in its middle.

They can sure keep a handicapped All Might busy, but unless they can make a finishing move, they’ll only waste their own time.

This time, Midoriya slashed his sword horizontally and All Might had to jump into the air to avoid getting cleaved in half. Teddydrum Black rushed at him in what should’ve been a tackle, but All Might turned the tables turning around and throwing the robot over his shoulder at Midoriya.

All Might landed on the ground to find both Little Might and Penguin Yagi charging at him. When he punched the penguins away, it revealed the crouched form of a grinning Bakugou pulling out the
pin of his grenade gauntlet. At his side, 90 degrees from Bakugou’s position, All Might could feel the familiar speedy appearance of the Champion. Unconsciously turning his head, he saw that it was brandishing Bakugou’s second gauntlet.

All he could do was brace himself as powerful twin explosive blasts battered him from two sides at point blank. The pain of their burn was intense.

“–But it’s still not enough!” All Might yelled as he extended his singed right arm to clothesline his explosive student–

He froze when he saw a thoroughly blackened and burnt Izu-ppingu was holding on to his wrist. A handcuff bracelet was dangling next to the penguin.

Clapping sounded out from the middle of the White stands. All Might looked up at them to see a familiar looking hand mirror set up in a sit in a chair.

“When the old order has fallen, a new one will have to replace it,” Momoka declared with Midoriya’s voice, “That is what revolution means!”

Seeing that All Might stopped his attack, Izu-ppingu released its grip to let himself fall with a pained squawk.

Bakugou rushed forward to catch the penguin before he hit the ground. “Fuck– is this thing okay?!”

Midoriya appeared next to him with his face pinched in concern. “Izu-pringu, I’m so sorry we used a strategy where you had to be hurt– Behold the Gift from God”

Tiny white flowers sprout from underneath the penguin’s feathers all over its body with a healing green glow. Izu-pringu simply raised his flipper into the air –is he trying to do a thumbs up with no thumb?

“Ah… All Might, do you want me to heal you too?”

All Might blinked, before he gave a huge grin. “There’s no need for that, young Midoriya. Recovery
Girl can fix me up just fine. More importantly, you two need to show that you’ve captured me to officially win your test!"

“That’s right! Sorry Izu-pingu, we’ll leave you under everyone else’s care so you can finish healing. Kacchan, you can just hand him over to the Champion of the Rose Bride. Teddydrums, go get repaired at the Workshop.”

After Bakugou did as Midoriya directed, All Might let his hand fall on the boy’s shoulder. Red eyes with furrowed brows looked up at him apprehensively.

“When I heard about how you treated young Midoriya before, it was… disheartening. But now I can see, young Bakugou, that you’ve really improved yourself a lot from that time. This type of close-knit teamwork isn’t something that would’ve been possible for the Bakugou that first showed up here at UA…”

He gave Bakugou’s shoulder a reassuring squeeze. “I’m sure you’ve been scolded at length already about your actions, so instead I will tell you this—I’m proud of how far you’ve come, and I look forward to seeing how you improve yourself even further. I’m proud to say that I see a bright future as a hero ahead of you!”

Bakugou’s eyes widened, and he stared at All Might in shock for a moment. Then, he averted his gaze to scoff, “Don’t be proud of me for just reaching everyone else’s starting line…”

“But that is something to be proud of. Changing who you are for the better is a very difficult thing to do.” All Might gave a reassuring pat to Bakugou’s shoulder and looked to Midoriya. The boy had a small smile blooming on his face.

“Survival Strategy Complete!”

When they reappeared in the fake city, it was well within the allotted thirty-minute time-limit. After the speakers announced their victory, Midoriya energetically brought Bakugou into a celebratory hug, and Bakugou’s face flushed with red. But he didn’t try to pull himself out of Midoriya’s grip.
“This is an announcement. The second team to pass is Midoriya and Bakugou.” Recovery Girl’s voice called out through the speakers.

Well, that’s good for them. Hitoshi still couldn’t believe the teachers had paired the two together even after hearing about their train wreck of a past, but as always Midoriya made it work…

“Midnight-sensei, aren’t you enjoying having an underage student in your lap a bit too much?!” Hitoshi jeered from his hiding spot behind a rock a far distance away from the range of Midnight’s quirk, but predictably the teacher stayed silent. Hitoshi quietly cursed.

Things had started out fine. He was able to use his cool-looking metal mask along with his Eraserhead-esque support gear. His teammate Sero had recognized him as “Midoriya’s gen ed friend” and didn’t seem too bothered by his villainous quirk. He had even swung Hitoshi away from Midnight before she could put him to sleep. But now Sero got to enjoy a nice nap while Hitoshi was left alone to pull a victory out of his ass.

*When this is over he’s requesting an air filter be added to his mask…*

Hitoshi got up from his crouch and prepared his gear. Then shot out of his hiding spot to charge towards Midnight and the gate.

*If it’s like this, then the only way to move forward towards his goal is to risk it!*

Midnight removed Sero’s head from her lap to stand up and face him. He shot his capture gear towards the teacher only for her whip to grab hold of it. She smiled at him as she overpowered Hitoshi to pull him forward into the danger zone by his own gear.

Recovery Girl’s voice echoed around the area, “All teachers, please cancel your tests and report to my station immediately! An urgent situation has occurred!”

Midnight turned her head towards the speakers in shock and exclaimed, “What– ?!”
Hitoshi felt his quirk settle in place as she cut herself off.

He swiftly let go of his capture gear to rush out of the pink-tinted air and take a deep breath. Having to speak without being able to breathe took a load on his lungs.

After a second to collect himself, he straightened up to toss a pair of handcuffs towards Midnight and ordered, “Put those on one of your wrists.” She picked up and clicked one of the cuffs into place, and the escape gate announced “Well Done!” to him.

The actual Recover Girl then declared, “Team Sero and Shinsou have passed.”

Hitoshi sighed in relief as he released his quirk’s hold. Midnight blinked at him and her wrist in surprise.

“Oh, I see…” Her look of surprise changed into a grin. “Shouta-kun never told anyone your gear had a voice-changer. How devious~!”

Hitoshi felt his cheeks blush upon hearing his mentor’s silent form of support.

Ochako sighed in relief after she had used her training from Gunhead’s agency to take down Thirteen with Aoyama’s help. Their pass was announced, and they were now headed back towards the main campus by bus with Thirteen driving.

During this time, Aoyama struck up a quiet conversation while sitting next to her. “You know, mademoiselle, originally I had thought that you had a crush on monsieur pingouin—”

“Eh!” she couldn’t help her shocked response.
“–But I’ve realized that your thoughts towards him don’t seem to be romantic. However, you pay him quite a lot of attention. During our fight you were even thinking “What would he do?”, right~☆?”

Ochako felt her face heat up as she glanced away from Aoyama to admit, “…That’s true, I was thinking that. But it’s not like my admiration for Deku-kun is connected to romantic feelings or anything. It’s just…” She grimaced down into her lap. “I don’t know how to describe it…”

“It’s like he’s a shining star –a shining prince– that one can’t look away from, but can never be reached?”

Ochako looked back up to Aoyama in surprise, but the boy wasn’t looking at her.

“That– That’s right! Deku-kun… it feels like he’s from a completely different world, and on a completely different level than me.” Her hands lightly clenched into fists in frustration.

“It’s like… I’m just a normal girl playing at being a hero, while Deku-kun is already a princely hero who can hold his own no matter what comes his way. He did something to help at the USJ that I don’t know about, and he did so well in the Sports Festival and is able to fight people like Bakugou and Todoroki. He was able to defend himself from the Hero Killer. And just now– he had to go up against All Might and he won!”

She looked back down at her fisted hands as she confessed, “Seeing all of that… It makes me want to be like him, to become a “prince” like him. But I know that I can’t be like him, because I’m just myself; I can’t do any of the magical stuff that Deku-kun can do effortlessly or think the way that he can– all I can be is myself. And I’m not a prince, I’m not even a princess. If anything… I’m just a poor commoner. Even in our test just now, we barely managed to pass, didn’t we? It feels like I’ll never be able to reach that level…”

“Hmm… I understand how you feel. I feel the exact same way, really.” That recaptured Ochako’s attention, making her glance back up at him. Aoyama was gazing out of the window beside him.

“Midoriya-kun is like the pinnacle of what it means to shine, and I’ve always wanted to shine. Is there anything grander in this world than being a dream come to life like he is? And yet, it’s clear that I’ll always fall short compared to that sort of image. And I wonder, will I truly be able to shine when the stars around me are so blindingly bright? But even so– I still reach for that image anyway…”
Then, Aoyama turned his blue gaze to Ochako.

“But I don’t think it has to be that way for you, Uraraka-chan. You see, I overheard Midoriya mumbling to himself during your fight with Bakugou, and he said— ‘Ochako-chan isn’t in the heroics course to become some damsel in distress— she’s here to become a knight!’ There’s no need for your heroic image to be that of a ‘prince’, you can be a ‘knight’ instead. Why not reach for something that’s also grand and shining, but still you?”

Awe sprung into her chest as she thought about those words—‘to think that Deku-kun thought that she could become something like a knight, that she could be that sort of grand hero.’

But as hope for her future lifted her heart, she also thought of her partner’s words for himself—

“That sounds like a good idea, Aoyama-kun, but aren’t you aiming to be a knight yourself? That’s how you designed your costume. Why do you need to try to be like Deku-kun?”

She held out her hand to him with a smile. “You should follow your own advice and shine in your own way! We can become our own grand, shining heroes together!”

Aoyama stared at her hand in shock for a moment. Then, he returned her smile and grasped her hand for a handshake.

“Oui~☆!”

Chapter End Notes

References from this chapter:
The ability that Izuku uses with the Sword of Dios is based on what the actual sword from Revolutionary Girl Utena can do.
But Connections Formed by Fate are Eternal

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Well, I can understand how people have been swept up by his attempt at revolution, when he spouted such pretty words. But they were only words. When one thinks carefully on the meaning behind them, one will find that there is no meaning. They were crafted purely based on emotion. There was no thought given to the practicality of society enacting that sort of revolution. That is why even if people believe in his words, they will not be capable of achieving the better end that the Black Knight foresaw— because even the best of intentions can pave the way to Hell. That is what I think.”

Tomura scratched at his neck in confusion as he watched the video playing on his computer. This was the third time he had watched it since it first came out days ago, and he still couldn’t figure out what the hell this kid was talking about. Was he even speaking Japanese?

He sighed as he resigned himself to cheat codes.

“Kurogiri! Do you know what the kid is saying? I know it has to do with Stain, but it sounds like he’s just rambling about nothing!”

Kurogiri walked over from where he had been polishing his glasses at the bar. “Hmm… He is rather vague about it, but essentially the core of his dissent against the Hero Killer is that his ideas aren’t practical to implement.”

“Huh? That guy was all about making current heroes into real heroes, wasn’t he? And all that crap about getting rid of society’s corruption. Wouldn’t a heroics student like that kind of idealized bullshit?”

“Midoriya Izuku makes no mention as to whether he agrees with the Hero Killer’s beliefs concerning the hero industry or society,” Kurogiri clarified.

“He is simply stating that he doesn’t think those beliefs could become reality— that Stain or anyone attempting to act in his place will be incapable of “revolutionizing” society into the image that he wanted. If I had to guess, he most likely doesn’t think demanding heroes to go without monetary compensation is a practical idea. Because while that seems like a just ideal to uphold, it would actually be very difficult for people to still be heroes full-time without pay. Money is required to survive in this society, after all.”
“I see… When you put it like that, that makes sense…” His fingers stopped scratching as he replayed the video with this in mind.

“Well, I can understand how people have been swept up by his attempt at revolution, when he spouted such pretty words. But they were only words—”

Tomura blinked at the screen as a thought came to him.

“Midoriya Izuku… the way he speaks is similar to how Sensei speaks, isn’t it?”

Kurogiri nodded his head in agreement. “I had thought about that as well. His speech at the Sports Festival was also spoken in a similar manner. Perhaps that increased All for One’s interest in the boy… but that is a matter to consider later. Giran will be coming soon so we can meet potential recruits.”

And what a meeting that was– A psycho teenage girl with a crush on the Hero Killer and an edgy, scarred Stain-wannabe were the last people Tomura wanted to work with. His agitation at their praise for the Hero Killer grew until he tried to attack them, but Kurogiri just diverted everyone’s attacks.

Kurogiri whispered to him that they should just take advantage of the Hero Killer’s fame like they had originally planned, but Tomura still had to get his frustration out of his system.

“You want to make the Hero Killer’s will reality– But do you really believe something like that is even possible?” Tomura scoffed, “Some people think his ideas just wouldn’t work…”

The scarred guy who gave the fake name “Dabi” narrowed his eyes at Tomura. “Like how that UA kid that the Hero Killer tried to kill talked about, right? Obviously, his opinion is biased– he was targeted as a fake hero after all. But he is still a kid, so he’s still got some time to be enlightened.”

“We wanted to take the kid alive for a reason, it’s a good thing he didn’t die! Stain was just overreacting to the situation! And you’re not even going to consider what he’s talking about just cause he’s on the opposite side of you when it comes to Stain’s ideology? That’s a narrow-minded way to think.” –Not that Tomura himself would consider anyone’s opinion that he didn’t like, but that was irrelevant.
Dabi raised an eyebrow at him. “Well why are you considering it? You were the one working with the Hero Killer, so surely you must think that’s all crap too.”

*Because he fucking hates the Hero Killer! But he can’t actually say that—*

“Shigaraki Tomura is interested in fully examining and criticizing heroes and society. That is why we worked with the Hero Killer, and why he is also considering the opinions of the Hero Killer’s opposition,” Kurogiri covered for him.

“Eh, that sounds boring~” Toga Himiko interrupted with a teeth-filled grin, “Just find a person you want to be and become them! Why do you need to think about it?”

*What the hell is she even talking about?*

Tomura groaned as he gave up on the conversation. He stalked out of the door, and on his way down the hallway he could hear Kurogiri talk about how *he knew what answer he had to give*. He stormed out anyways, stuffing his most important had –*father*– in the pocket of his hoodie.

Shouta-sensei surprised the class by revealing that the people who failed the practical final would still be going on the summer training trip, and said failures –Kaminari, Ashido, Satou, Kirishima, and Sero, who was an unexpected addition– all cried tears of joy. They all stopped once Shouta clarified that their supplementary lessons would make their time there even more of a hell.

Almost everyone had something they needed to buy for the week-long camp, so Hagakure suggested a class trip to the mall during the weekend. Many of the Izuku’s fellow classmates showed up for it, including Kacchan shockingly –*even Kirishima was shocked about that and he was the one who asked the boy to go*– but unfortunately, Shouto visited his mother on that day so he couldn’t go. Izuku promised to get him whatever he needed in his place.
Izuku heard from Hitoshi that his pass in the final allowed Shouta to permit his presence at their summer training camp to avoid him falling behind compared to the other students, and that as long as nothing unexpected happened he would be officially accepted into class 1-A at the start of the new semester.

Izuku burst into tears of joy, which thoroughly embarrassed Hitoshi, and he promised to plan a party to celebrate his acceptance after the summer was over. Hitoshi tried to convince him it wasn’t necessary and failed miserably. He had invited Hitoshi to join the rest of his classmates for their shopping trip, but his friend declined saying he still had a training session with Shouta on the same day.

So now here he was, at the mall alone, with all his classmates having scattered to do their own thing. Even Ochako had been lured away when she got a text from Tsuyu—who was originally not planning on coming– had arrived late, and set off to find her and lead her through the mall.

Really, what was even the point of everyone coming in a large group? They just broke down into smaller groups anyway…

A chill of fate ran down Izuku’s back. Not as intense as the ones he usually gets, but notable nonetheless. He stopped in his tracks to swerve his head around frantically.

He found himself face to face with Shigaraki Tomura in a black hoodie with extra hands missing. The villain’s long bangs covered his eyes, but his crooked smile said enough about what kind of look Izuku would find in them.

“Well– what a surprise this is… It’s probably not the best idea to touch you, so I can’t make you do anything, but do you really want to test me and see if you can catch me before I reach out– ”

A dry hand left Shigaraki’s pocket to stretch half way out towards the unknowing crowd of people passing by them. Izuku flinched as he saw it point to a toddler walking beside their parent. “–and kill at least one of these NPCs?”

This is bullshit. Izuku checked with Momoka right before coming here and there was no new story in her book. That thing is useless–

–Shouta-sensei face down on the ground, blood everywhere around him, Fruit of Fate gone, how could this have happened–
Izuku felt himself stiffen as he asked in a flat tone, “…What do you want?”

Shigaraki tilted his head to the side as he chuckled, “Wow, what a freighting look in your eyes! Should a hero-wannabe really have such intense hatred inside of them? Haha—” But then his tone took on a more serious note as he continued, “Why don’t we just sit on that bench over there. Don’t worry, I just wanna talk for a bit. But the second you try to call for help someone is going to die.”

As Izuku hesitantly followed the villain, he glanced his eyes around. Whenever he’s out he should always have some heroes patrolling nearby but not too close, are they just not near enough to see who Izuku’s with—

He caught sight of what suspiciously looked like an undercover hero flirting with a female vendor, most likely thinking that this would just be a simple shopping trip for the kid he was supposed to keep an eye on.

Oh, he is so getting that guy fired! Izuku never thought he would think this but really, in some cases, Stain was right dammit!

Stewing in silence, Izuku sat on the bench with the leader of the League of Villains sitting about a meter away from him.

“Man, I really can’t believe it. I can’t believe that I would see you again in a place like this! It makes me feel like there’s something to it…” Shigaraki trailed off with a scratchy voice and Izuku got the feeling he was being examined from under those bangs, “something like fate or destiny…”

Maybe it was stupid to do so right next to a murderous villain, but Izuku couldn’t help but snort at that, “Oh– this was definitely the work of fate.”

He came here with like, what– 11 people? And he still ended up alone with this guy? Who apparently didn’t even make some dastardly plan to meet Izuku, but instead just happened to be at the same place at the same time? What are the chances of something like that even happening?!

Shigaraki just hummed at in curiously in response, “You were a lot more scared the last time I saw you… Aren’t you afraid I’m going to end up killing someone?”
Izuku narrowed his eyes at the man. “I wouldn’t be talking to you still if I wasn’t. And really, it’s your own fault I’m so desensitized now– You did send a serial killer after me, didn’t you?”

“Hmm, I guess you have a point, but I think there’s something more to it…” Shigaraki’s smile curled at one corner to give a creepy grin. “Could it be that your hatred for me is stronger than your fear? What did I do for you to hate me so much? Actually– I should be asking which thing that I did led to this; the Hero Killer thing, or the USJ thing?”

“That USJ thing,” Izuku deadpanned.

“That’s an interesting answer, you didn’t even get hurt during that…”

Shigaraki’s grin turned into a frown. “And in the end, Eraserhead survived. I wonder– do you know how that happened? I could’ve sworn he was corpse when we left.”

Izuku’s fear finally grew to the point that it rivaled his anger – if the League of Villains, All for One, ever figured out what his quirk was, or what the Penguindrum was…

“You just weren’t as thorough as you thought you were,” he lied, “Isn’t that a mistake a lot of villains make– assuming that the hero is dead when they aren’t?”

The villain next to him leaned back while making a tsk of annoyance. He dropped that topic, leading to relief dissipating some of Izuku’s fear. Instead, Shigaraki sighed, “I pretty much hate everyone and everything but right now, what really grinds my gears is the Hero Killer.”

–Oh God. Is he just talking to Izuku to rant about the Hero Killer? Izuku really wishes that everyone would just shut up about that guy honestly, it’s bad enough there’s merchandise for him–

“Everyone’s got their eye on the damned Hero Killer– our attack at UA, the Nomu I released in Hosu City. Hell, even for your kidnapping that everyone knows the League of Villains orchestrated and just used Stain to do the dirty work, he’s still the main focus of their attention! No one’s noticing me, why?”

Izuku was hoping that once he had gotten the villain talking, he could take him off guard. But Shigaraki seemed to be carefully watching individuals in the crowd as they passed by, he was preparing targets to go after first if Izuku made a bad move. He just can’t risk it.
“He can grandstand all he wants, but in the end– all he’s doing is destroying what he hates. All he’s doing is trying to break this world’s shell, just like I am. So what makes us different, Midoriya?”

Fighting his tightly clenched jaw, Izuku asked, “…Why do you think I could give you the answer to that? I’m just a kid training to be a hero– don’t you discard the opinions of people like me?”

–Stretch out the conversation, Izuku, you’re good at that. Maybe fate will have some mercy and let a hero capture this guy if he can stall this long enough–

“Usually I don’t like listening to people I don’t like, yes, but I think there’s something different about you.” One of Shigaraki’s hands started to mindlessly scratch at his neck. “I had a hard time understanding what the fuck you were saying about the Hero Killer, but it seems like you look at him differently than the sheep that make up society. The guy is getting sympathy even from people that don’t care at all about is ideals, but you? You dismissed him without a second thought. And I want to know why everyone else doesn’t.”

That… makes a lot of sense, actually. Izuku hadn’t realized that his vague answer to some reporters would get him this kind of attention. He really should’ve thought that through more…

“The difference between you and him…” Izuku repeated in thought as he stared at the villain next to him. He might as well be thorough about this to extend the conversation, and maybe collect some info– “Tell me, Shigaraki Tomura, exactly what is it that you’re trying to do?”

“I want to create a world without All Might– ” Izuku couldn’t help but shudder at the malice in the villain’s tone. “–and cause enough destruction to show society how fragile their “justice” really is!”

He tried to keep his voice even, “Okay, and how do you plan to accomplish this goal?”

Shigaraki seemed to blink at him in confusion. “By destroying what I don’t like, including All Might.”

Did All for One seriously leave this guy in charge of his organization? Izuku could do a better job than this–
“I think I see the problem here,” he deadpanned, “Personally– I hate Stain, and I don’t think he’s anything special just because he could handle speaking at the top of his soapbox well. He had charisma, but his ideas were so misguided that there was no way he would be able to accomplish them. Because of that, I don’t take them seriously– but most other people are stuck looking at his charisma. That’s the difference between me and everyone else.”

Shigaraki stopped scratching at himself. Izuku eyed his still hand carefully.

“But as for you… it seems like you have ideals, but you don’t have a clear idea on how to get what you want. Stain essentially had a bullet point list of things he wanted to change –demonetize hero work, remove government corruption, convert the ideology of society on heroes to reflect his own–and chose a specific method to execute this –purging fake heroes to spread his ideals.”

“Of course, this didn’t accomplish the main goals of what he wanted because he chose both his goals and his methods poorly. But you…” Izuku fought to keep his voice neutral, not reflecting the anger he felt for the villain, “it seems like you’re just deciding on your method as things come to you. And while technically that’s not a complete hinderance, something like that requires a solidified sense of conviction and idea of what you want. So that whenever an opportunity comes about, you can take it without hesitation.”

His voice finally increased its intensity as he asked, “So, what kind of revolution do you want to bring about, Shigaraki Tomura? Just saying things like “destroying All Might” and “showing how fragile justice is” isn’t enough. What is the specific image of the future you are trying to create?”

Shigaraki was silent for a moment.

Then, the villain responded, “The person who chose me said something once that stuck with me so much, I could remember what he said word for word…”

Shigaraki held out his hand like he was staring at it.

“He said, I realized one morning... That I hate this world. This world is made of countless boxes. People bend and stuff their bodies into their own boxes. And stay there for the rest of their lives. And eventually, inside the box, they forget: what they looked like; what they loved; who they loved. That's why I'm getting out of my box. I'm one of the chosen. That's why I'm going to destroy this world.”

Those last words rang through Izuku’s head like bell declaring a prophecy. He had to keep his hands
clenched on his knees to keep them from trembling.

“With those words, I realized that I hated that idea– the idea that I was just stuck in some box, forced to just accept my place in this world no matter how awful it was,” Shigaraki’s voice started to waver a bit, “So I decided that I would break my box, that I would help him destroy this world where everyone is stuck inside their boxes– where society forces everyone in it into those boxes using ideas on what is good and what is evil, or what is justice, or how All Might is the supposed pinnacle of what it means to be a hero, that he can do no wrong.”

Shigaraki clenched his hand. “They’re all just ideas that someone else decided for me! Society just arbitrarily decides that this quirk is bad, or this hero is good, and everyone is supposed to accept it as the word of God? I hate it! I’m the only one that can decide my place in this world and my future! Why should I care about what these faceless people think?!”

Suddenly, Shigaraki shot up off the bench, and Izuku involuntarily scuttered away from him.

Giving a heavy exhale, Shigaraki continued with a calmer tone, “…During your speech in the Sports Festival, you mentioned stuff like that, right? About how other people and fate decide things for you? About how those who defy their fate are granted glory? Well– I don’t believe in fate. The only thing keeping people in their boxes is this society. So I will break the boxes that are made by the current order society, and there will be nothing to decide things for me anymore.”

Shigaraki took a loud step towards Izuku, and he rushed back out of his own seat, his heart beating erratically. Izuku’s hand moved behind his back.

“The revolution I will bring will be one of anarchy!” the villain declared, “Is that a strong enough image, Midoriya Izuku?”

Answering that question was redundant at this point. Izuku could tell just from his words alone, just from his convictions and ideals that were so genuine but twisted into the wrong direction, that this man would truly be willing to turn the entire world to ashes if it meant that he could burn down his box along with it. Izuku could tell that this man’s ideas, All for One’s ideas, were dangerous.

So instead, Izuku focused on planting a seed of doubt–

“But that is that truly the kind of revolution you want, Shigaraki Tomura?!” Izuku interrogated with firm words that could not be dismissed, “Will that truly give you what you want? Or are you just
allowing yourself to be pulled from a box made by society into a box someone else created for you?!

Shigaraki froze up unnaturally. “What… are you talking about?”

Izuku had to keep a mean grin off his face and elation out of his voice because he’s taken the bait—
“Tell me, Shigaraki Tomura, do you know who Shimura Tenko is?”

“Am I supposed to know who that is?” It truly seemed like he had no idea.

Izuku doesn’t know how he forgot his own name, but if it’s like this–

“Yes,” he asserted, “So if you don’t know, you should find out.”

For the first time during their whole conversation, Izuku could see Shigaraki’s red eyes. His stare pierced into them to deliver his point.

“I won’t decide anything for you, I don’t even know everything behind what’s going on with these circumstances. But if you learn everything there is to know about Shimura Tenko, I’m sure you will be able to decide for yourself if you are truly breaking your box or not…” Izuku prepared the hand that was still behind his back to throw the crystal he had just formed in it–

“Deku-kun? Is that… a friend of yours?”

Dread burst into his chest and Izuku’s head swerved to see Ochako and Tsuyu approaching him cautiously.

“It doesn’t seem like it, kero…” Tsuyu eyed Shigaraki with suspicion.

The new arrivals snapped Shigaraki out of the stupor he had been in before. He casually spoke, “Ah– my bad. I didn’t realize you came with other people.”

Shigaraki backed up while facing Izuku into the crowd and warned, “You know what will happen if
you follow me.” Then he turned his back to slink through the mass of people.

Tsuyu stiffened at the sound of the villain’s voice. “That– that man is the leader of the League of Villains!” her voice trembled slightly.

“What?!” Ochako paled beside her.

Izuku wanted to comfort his friends, but he was too busy trying to make a discrete call to the police, “Hello? There’s a villain currently exiting the Kiyashi Ward Mall– ”

Seeing that the same nearby undercover hero was still a little ways away flirting, Izuku pitched his crystal marble at his head. When the man cried out, clutching the back of his head and turning to glare at Izuku, Izuku glared back and gestured for him to come over. “–I’m in the middle of notifying the hero closest to the scene, but I doubt he’ll be enough to catch this one…”

Predictably, the incompetent hero failed to catch Shigaraki, as well as the couple of other heroes that were scattered throughout the mall.

The detective in front of him who Izuku remembered to be one of the few Toshinori told about his quirk, Tsukauchi Naomasa, carefully asked, “So basically… Shigaraki interrogated you about your opinion on him and the Hero Killer Stain, and you gave him constructive criticism…”

Izuku winced at that.

“Oh– I don’t mean that in a negative way! You handled the situation quite well, really.” Tsukauchi tried to placate him with an empathetic smile, “This is also the most specific information we’ve gotten on Shigaraki’s overall goals and mind set.”
Even so, Izuku gazed down at his clenched hands in frustration. “I just wish I could’ve captured him before he got away…”

Tsukauchi shook his head in response. “You made the right call by going along with his requests the best that you could– a physical confrontation might have ended in disaster.”

Izuku sighed, “It was probably because there was no physical confrontation that we didn’t get a warning about it… but I suppose that was the best realistic outcome we could’ve hoped for.”

Later, Toshinori came to check on him, and before his mother arrived to bring him home, Izuku asked him, “Toshinori-san… you want to save Shimura Tenko, don’t you?”

Toshinori stiffened at that and hesitantly replied, “Yes– but I won’t let that get in the way of my efforts to protect you from the League of Villains or Shi– Shigaraki himself.”

“I won’t try to talk you out of that conviction…” Izuku gazed up at his hero, “But you should know that Shigaraki is dangerous right now and doesn’t even know that he used to be Shimura Tenko. He’s a villain because he hates his lack of control over his life– so the only way for him to be saved is if he decides for himself that that’s what he wants.”

“…I know. Gran Torino told me something similar. But– ” Toshinori ran a hand down his face in exhaustion. “I also can’t really ignore what I’ve learned either…”

“*I want to create a world* without All Might”

Izuku frowned in displeasure.

“It’s fine if you can’t ignore it. But you *must* make sure you don’t ignore the danger that man can bring, All Might…”

Chapter End Notes

References from this chapter:
Parts of Shigaraki’s dialogue with Izuku before Izuku answers his question are from bnha.
“I realized one morning... That I hate this world. This world is made of countless boxes. People bend and stuff their bodies into their own boxes. And stay there for the rest of their lives. And eventually, inside the box, they forget: what they looked like; what they loved; who they loved. That's why I'm getting out of my box. I'm one of the chosen. That's why I'm going to destroy this world” is a quote from Mawaru Penguindrum
Laying on his side in the grass with his head propped up by his hand, Hawks stared at Izuku with half-lidded, deadpan eyes.

“So what you’re telling me is that you went out to a completely average shopping trip, with a little more than half your class, under hero watch as usual, and you still somehow ran into the leader of the League of Villains—by random chance—and gave him constructive criticism to avoid escalating the situation.”

Izuku glanced away awkwardly while fiddling with a flower in his hand, then turned his eyes back. “Yes…”

*Only with this kid, honestly…*

Hawks stared at him for a few more seconds, then let his head flop back into the grass to look at the blue sky. That day they added a couple of clouds to watch.

“I don’t know whether to be anxious that I’m not in charge of you now—making this not my problem anymore—or to be very, very thankful that this is not my problem anymore.”

“I’m pretty sure my homeroom teacher would tell you to be thankful…”

Hawks snorted at that, “I’ll bet.”

Izuku should’ve realized how his first day back after the mall incident was going to go when, after
escaping his nervous, paranoid mother – “it’s not paranoia if people and fate are actually out to get you, Izuku” – he saw Kacchan waiting for him a little ways away from his house.

Izuku stared at him in confusion and ran up to him. “Kacchan, what are you doing here? Did you need something?”

Kacchan scowled down at him, but kept his tone calm as he questioned, “Do you not want me here?”

“No! That’s not– I like your company Kacchan!” Or at least now he did…

“Then I’m walking to school with you,” with that said, Kacchan started walking towards school. Izuku had to put aside his confusion to follow him. It was only after he caught sight of Kacchan eyeing a passerby in suspicion that Izuku realized Kacchan was looking out for another villain encounter.

That theme continued to follow him throughout the day. When in Shouta’s class and Hizashi’s class, Izuku caught them glancing at him every five seconds– as though if they looked away from him for any longer a villain would spontaneously appear in the school beside him. The really sad thing is that Izuku can’t prove them otherwise, so he couldn’t dispute them on it.

“Next time you go anywhere, ever, I’m just going to cancel my plans and come with you…” Shouto told Izuku at lunch. He gave a deadpan stare that was devoid of the anxiety Izuku’s fated encounter had probably given him.

Before Izuku could protest, Hitoshi added, “Honestly? Same. I’m sure Aizawa-sensei would understand– maybe I can help give him some piece of mind.” His deadpan stare was very similar, but tinged more with exasperated disbelief at the ironic fate that wove itself into Izuku’s life.

“At least you were absent from the affair,” Tokoyami intoned while shaking his head with closed eyes. “I was present and didn’t even think of the kind of madness that might have followed Midoriya as it always does. Clearly, a serial killer targeting him was not a random coincidence– but the sign of a pattern.”

“Guys, really– ”
Ochako cut him off with, “Let’s just all agree that someone needs to watch Deku-kun at all times! Maybe if at least one person is with him nothing will happen?” She furrowed her brows and scratched at her cheek in a way that suggested she didn’t believe in her own proposition very much.

“I think you’re taking this too far—”

“What an excellent idea, Uraraka-kun!” –Great, now even Tenya was cutting him off– “I suggest we make a rotation schedule to ensure that one of us is always present with him outside of his home and school grounds!” He gestured with a knife hand to emphasize his point.

“Kero, maybe we should include school grounds too. If something like the USJ happens again, it would be better to be safe than sorry…” Tsuyu tilted her head to the side in thought.

Izuku slammed his hand onto the table. “There’s no need, I’m fine guys! I literally just talked to him! And I’ve already got a procession of undercover heroes following me around!” indignation was clear in his voice.

“Yeah, and the “pro hero” you had on hand the other day was fucking useless!” from out of nowhere, Kacchan inserted himself into the discussion. He slammed his hands onto their lunch table. “I bet every single one of these fuckers would’ve done a better job than that moron!”

Ochako blinked up at him. “Was… Was that supposed to be a compliment?”

“No! I’m just making a point dammit!”

“I’m sorry, but who invited you to join this conversation?” Hitoshi scoffed, glaring with narrowed eyes at Kacchan in a way that said “I know what you did”. The glare was mirrored by Shouto, who chose to express his disapproval in silence. They made Kacchan freeze up in hesitation.

“Hitoshi-kun, Shouto-kun; Kacchan’s fine!”

“I think we all should just calm down for a second to get a proper perspective on things…” for the first time since this topic was breeched, Shouji made his opinion known. Before then, he had just been watching everyone like how a bystander watches a car wreck in progress.
He leaned forward on the table to gesture with two of his right hands. “Everyone here knows that Aizawa-sensei wouldn’t stand for a mistake like that to happen in the future. I even heard that he’s personally vetting each and every hero that watches Midoriya from now on. With that in mind, there’s no need to start a *Midoriya Watch*.”

“Thank you, Shouji-kun!”

“Aizawa-sensei never mentioned that… how did come to learn this?” Aoyama, who had been brought into the lunch group by Ochako, leaned towards Shouji in interest.

“I eavesdropped on Aizawa-sensei talking about it with Mic-sensei in the teacher’s lounge.”

“You eavesdropped on our teachers’ private conversation?!” Tenya exclaimed in outrage.

“I just happened to hear them mention Midoriya’s name, and thought it would be for the best if I listened in— for the greater good of 1-A’s sanity.” Shouji side-eyed Izuku as he said this, so he must have been wondering why Hizashi-sensei spoke about him in such a personal way. He had enough tact to not mention it though.

“Squawk squawk, squawk! Squawk squawk!”

“O-Oh– I see… uh, does Midoriya know that?”

Izuku whipped his head towards Kouda to see his classmate bending down in his seat, looking under the table. Ducking his head, he found Izu-pingu seated on the floor under their table. He seemed to be playing cards with Dark Shadow.

“Izu-pingu?! What are you doing out?!”

At that cue, everyone promptly stuck their heads under the table.

“Aw, Izu-pingu’s so cute Deku-kun! And he’s playing with Dark Shadow? That’s too cute!”

“Dark Shadow… what are you doing?”
Dark Shadow threw his cards on the ground in front of him in frustration. “I’m losing at poker to a fat, flightless bird is what I’m doing, Fumikage! How does a penguin even know poker?!” the shadow demon growled.

“Because I know how to play poker, and Izu-pingu knows everything I know,” Izuku answered thoughtlessly. “Can you please answer my question, Izu-pingu? I can get paper if you need it…”

Kouda responded to him in a quiet voice, “He said that he was going to be out more to watch you, so we don’t need to set up a Midoriya Watch.”

“What?! Izu-pingu, I’m sorry, but you’re a penguin. I can’t just let you follow me around everywhere!”

Izu-pingu put his flippers on his hips and squawked at him for a bit.

“He said that being in plain sight would give up your element of surprise, so he’s going to be hidden the whole time. Therefore, you don’t need to worry about that since no one will see him.”

“Izu-pingu, we’ve talked about this… There aren’t going to be hiding places on the road for you, and you’re a very unstealthy, very noticeable, penguin. This just isn’t going to work!”

“Well, well– what suspicious activity is going on with class 1-A? You better not be doing any illicit activities that could get you expelled!” Monoma’s voice sounded from out of their view, his footsteps approaching.

As soon as he placed a foot down next to the table, Izu-pingu flashed forward to peck at it with his beak. It pulled back immediately as the boy cried out, taking his pained foot into his hands and hoping back on one leg.

“Oh! What– why is that penguin here?! Control your mangy mutt!”

Izuku pulled his torso out from under the table and sighed, “Mutts are dogs, Monoma-kun… And Izu-pingu is just acting out because you’re antagonizing me.
“Oh, so you’re blaming the victim, huh? What if that thing pecked off my foot?!” Monoma glared at him with his arms crossed over his chest.

“You don’t need to worry about that happening,” Izuku tried to reassure him, “Izu-pingu would only peck off a person’s foot if they were an actual danger to my safety, so he wouldn’t do it to you just for acting annoying towards me.”

“…Wait, you mean– that thing can actually peck off a human’s foot?”

“That’s beside the point. Just know that you have nothing to worry about.”

“How can I not be worried about that?! Everything from your crazy knock-off fairytale land is out to get me!”

“If you stopped calling it a “knock-off”, then maybe you-know-who wouldn’t be out to get you, Monoma-kun…”

“She’s actually out to get me?!”

*Maybe someday, Monoma will realize that Izuku’s life is already too filled with bullshit for him to be able to bullshit about this kind of stuff. Maybe someday, Hitoshi and Shouto won’t glare at Kacchan like he had killed their first-born child. And maybe someday, Izuku’s friends and loved ones would calm down and stop being overly protective of him.*

At the end of school, Togata met him by the gate with his nervous-looking friend Amajiki, who he had told Izuku about previously.

“Hi Togata-senpai! Is there a reason why you wanted to meet up today?”

Togata gave him a thumbs-up and sparkling grin. “I’m here to walk you home as your unofficial last-line of defense! Since I’ve got a provisional license, I can legally act in case an emergency villain situation happens a third time!”
His other hand thumped Amajiki on the back firmly, bringing attention to him. The other upperclassman crouched in on himself more as a result. “Tamaki and I are two of the three top students of the third year heroics course. You’ll be perfectly protected under our care!”

“S-Sorry for imposing…” Amajiki bowed his head in time with his muttered words, his eyes never quite focusing on Izuku.

“Uh… I mean– thank you for going to all this trouble, but there’s really no need– ”

Izuku’s phone buzzed three times in rapid succession. With a sinking feeling in his chest, he pulled it out to examine the screen. On it were notifications that his mother, Toshinori, and Takahiro had all texted him asking if he was walking home with friends today. Toshinori’s specified that he was also asking for Hizashi and Shouta.

*But that day is certainly not today…*

Izuku was in the middle of last-minute preparation for camp –trying to get ahead on some of the new spells he had been dying to learn– when Momoka made an unusual request.

“When you go on your trip, little Izuku, bring the Penguindrum with you.”

Izuku immediately paused his current train of thought to whip his head towards Momoka, who was currently in the hand mirror being held by Izu-pingu.

“Wha– You want me to bring the *Penguindrum*?” Izuku questioned in disbelief, gesturing a tensed hand for emphasis, “The mystical item of power that is very losable and very steal-able? You want me to take it out of it’s very secure safe, *to bring it on a fieldtrip*?”
Momoka wasn’t fazed by his doubt, keeping her expression—*or rather, the expression of Izuku’s reflection*—completely neutral. “You’re working on *Through the Looking Glass* now, aren’t you?”

“Yes? Now that I’m mostly done with *Divine Protection*… What does that have to do with this?”

“After you get the basics down for the *Through the Looking Glass* spell, you can learn a different spell that you should really know how to use. It’s the only spell that requires the physical presence of the Penguindrum.” Momoka gave a teasing grin to go along with her words.

Izuku’s brows just furrowed with further confusion. “Huh? But you can’t bring that version of the Penguindrum to the Crystal World…?”

“That’s right!” Momoka confirmed, her grin growing and her pink eyes sparkling.

“…You’re not going to tell me anything else about this spell, are you?”

“That’s right!”

“How am I supposed to learn this spell if I don’t know anything about it?!”

“Hmm… Maybe I’ll give you some more hints after you’ve learned the prerequisite spell.”

Izuku just sighed, making a mental note to tell Shouta-sensei that he was bringing his mystical item of power with him to camp.
even got to sit next to his boyfriend surrounded by rows of his friends, including Hitoshi-kun. Everyone was having a fun time.

So Izuku was totally unsurprised when they were kicked off the bus and thrown off a cliff—Shouta-sensei was not the type to let hero training be considered “a fun time”.

Before a wave of dirt pushed him off the ledge, Izuku grabbed hold of his friend that was most likely to not have a way to save himself from a cliff-dive and transported them away. When they reappeared, Izuku was riding on the back of Teddydrum Black and Hitoshi was being held bridal style in its huge arms. It gently lowered them to the ground with Teddydrum White following behind.

When Teddydrum Black had first picked him up against his will, Hitoshi had looked thoroughly embarrassed. Now that they were on the ground though, he looked almost pleased.

Hitoshi made no move to pull himself out of the robot’s arms. His eyebags looked especially dark as he turned his head to look at Izuku. “Midoriya, do you put drugs or something on your Teddydrums? I feel like I’m in the nicest bed ever. How about you just let me stay here and wake me up when we reach the campsite?”

Tenya knifed his hand towards Hitoshi and ordered, “Shinsou-kun! Do not be seduced by the cuddly arms of the Teddydrums! This is a serious assignment that was given to us for the purpose of—”

“Yeah, yeah I get it…”

Hitoshi moved to get up, only to be squished into Teddydrum Black’s chest. It seemed that it liked Hitoshi’s previous idea better. Hitoshi gave up escaping, seeing it as a lost cause.

Izuku sighed—he should have expected this, but it was still sad to know Hitoshi-kun is so in need of comfort… “Teddydrum Black, please put down Hitoshi-kun. He can ride on the back of Teddydrum White.”

Carrying an air of disappointment, the Teddydrum carefully set Hitoshi down on his feet. Hitoshi just barely had enough time to strap himself into Teddydrum White’s harness before a monster burst out of the forest with a roar. It was little larger than the Teddydrums.
Instantly deemed a threat to the many children surrounding them, the Teddydrums blasted it to bits of earth and rock with rapid fire shots from their cannons.

From his spot on Teddydrum White, a pale-faced Hitoshi looked like he was clutching its neck as if his life depended on it. “I can’t tell if this is the best place to be right now, or the worst.”

“I never thought I would say this, but your teddy bear robots are scary, Midoriya! So fast!” Kaminari was watching the Teddydrums cautiously, probably imagining himself being shot by laserbeams.

“Who cares if they’re deadly?! I want to be carried by a Teddydrum like Shinsou-kun was!” Hagakure declared. Her clothes were turned towards Hitoshi in a way that suggested she was looking at him in envy.

“That’s not fair, Midoriya! I called dibs ages ago! Why does Shinsou get to have his turn first?!” Ashido whined, shaking her fist in the air.

Twin roars echoed around them as another two Earth Beasts revealed themselves. The Teddydrums split their targets, focusing on one each but without the concentrated fire power, they were left riddled with holes but still standing. Kacchan exploded the rest of one away, while Shouto sent an ice spear through the other.

“This is…” Izuku rubbed at his eyes as he exclaimed in exasperation, “so not the time for this!”

After that spectacle, Izuku was sorely tempted to just order the Teddydrums to carry as many of his friends as possible and fly them right to the camp, skipping over fighting their way through the forest entirely. But since he figured the purpose of this exercise was to fight, he stuck it out with the rest of his classmates instead of leaving them behind.

By the time they had arrived, it was way past lunch and Izuku was regretting his honorable decision. At least he wasn’t as exhausted as the others since he rode Teddydrum Black most of the way. Shouto slowly made his way next to Izuku to lean his tired body on Teddydrum Black. The robot set a steady, large nub on Shouto’s back to help support him.

Izuku winced and pulled himself out of his harness to drop down next to him. “You could’ve come up if you wanted, you know?”
“It’s fine. They’re part of your skillset, not mine. I needed to do this for myself…”

Hitoshi, having made the honorable decision to get off Teddydrum White at some point to work on his stamina and physical training, looked like he also very much regretted his decision. He was much less used to extreme physical exertion than Izuku’s heroics course classmates. Hitoshi fell onto his knees, and then face-planted into the dirt with a loud groan once they reached the clearing. When Teddydrum Black picked the boneless Hitoshi off the ground to hold him in its arms again, Hitoshi didn’t say a single word of protest. Izuku just sighed and let the robot have its way.

As the crowd of stumbling, exhausted students approached their teacher and the two Pussycats, Sero complained, “It’ll only take three hours. Yeah, right…”

With a pinched face, Kirishima cried out, “I’m so hungry I’m gonna die…”

“Sorry, that’s how quick we would have made it!” Mandalay from the Wild, Wild Pussycats explained with a smile, totally uncaring of the sorry states of the children before her.

“We actually thought you’d take longer!” Pixie-Bob snickered at them, even less caring of their plight. “You dealt with my Earth Beasts pretty easily, not bad!”

Izuku let himself reexamine the two’s flashy idol/cat themed costumes, and thought– See, my Prince of the Crystal uniform would fit in perfectly here! It’s not that weird! It’s everyone else that’s too normal!

His attention was forced back to the conversation when Pixie-Bob came up close to him and Teddydrum White. She had a cat-like gleam in her eyes that put Izuku on edge. “I had seen these things during the Sports Festival, but watching them in action up close was pretty interesting! Were they just made to have such fast reaction times?”

“Uh– kind of? But their reaction speed increases when they’re acting to protect kids, so that was sort of like their high-end speed.”

“What a strange mechanism! You were also pretty fast when it came to evaluating the situation and acting accordingly– must be because of your previous experience!”

Then, Pixie-Bob licked her lips in a cat-like manner and crowded him with outstretched arms. “I’m
looking forward to where you are in three years! I call dibs–”

Huh?! Is Pixie-Bob a cougar?! That’s actually a pretty good pun...

Shouto was instantly steady on his feet as he planted himself between the two of them. Izuku couldn’t see his expression, but he must have been giving Pixie-Bob a fierce expression since she backed off immediately with a nervous smile.

Shouto’s voice was a low rumble as he stated, “He’s taken.”

“Oh… is that so…” Pixie-Bob was still smiling, but her eyes became unfocused. She stared blankly into space with a sense of soft despair. “So this 15-year-old– No, these two 15-year-olds, have a more active love-life than I do. I see…” –She’s in shock?! Is this woman okay?!

“…Mandalay,” Shouta grumbled in displeasure.

“Ah, sorry about that. She’s at that age where she’s worried about never getting married…”

Shouta’s single eye narrowed in a glare at Pixie-Bob. “Well… the next time she tries to set herself up with one of my students, you’re going to have to work around having three team members instead of four.”

Mandalay leaned away from the man with a wince. “…I’ll make sure she understands that.”

As Izuku looked at Mandalay and Shouta, he noticed the little boy that had been with the Pussycats earlier was still there.

Their eyes met for a moment, and even though he was a child half of Izuku’s height, those eyes were encompassed by scorn and distain. The boy scowled at him before refusing to make eye contact any longer.

Izuku turned on Conductor– the Fruit of Fate in the boy’s chest was frozen solid. Overwhelming sadness burst into his chest at the sight.
But… he’s so young…

Mandalay must have noticed his stare, because she wove her paw-gloved hand toward the boy and introduced him, “By the way, this is my cousin’s child, Kouta. Kouta, come say hi– You’ll be spending the week with them after all!”

As Tenya approached the boy –limping due to the injuries he sustained during their trek through the forest– Kouta gave him the stink eye. Tenya ignored it to present his hand for a hand shake.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, my name is Iida Tenya– Arg!”

Tenya crouched forward from the pain of his balls being punched. Teddydrum White walked over to him to pick up Tenya, comforting him through the pain since Teddydrum Black was already holding Hitoshi. With his face pinched in second-hand pain, Izuku softly hissed.

“Kouta, why would you do something like that?!” Mandalay asked incredulously, turning her head towards where her nephew was walking away.

Kouta looked back with a piercing glare and gritted teeth. “I don’t intend to play nice with people who want to become heroes…”

He’d bet good money that this had to do with his condition… What could have left a child so jaded?

“Alright! Enough loitering, let’s– ” Shouta-sensei cut himself. He was frozen staring at Teddydrum Black for an elongated moment.

Then, he rubbed his good eye with a hand and sighed, “…Why is Shinsou sleeping in Teddydrum Black’s arms?”

Izuku whipped his head around to see Hitoshi curled up against the Teddydrum’s metal chest, quietly slumbering. His face was relaxed, with his eyes gently closed, and his chest moved up and down with even breathes. Teddydrum Black was softly petting his head as the robot looked down at the child in its arms with fondness in its glowing red eyes.
“Oh no— I totally forgot he’d probably fall asleep from that!”

“Your Teddydrums induce sleep too?” Shouta asked, sounding like he actually didn’t want to be answered.

Izuku answered anyway, “Well, yeah. They’re robots, but they’re still teddy bears, you know…”

“I really, really don’t know anything anymore, Midoriya…”

Chapter End Notes

References from this chapter:
The spell name Through the Looking Glass is obviously a reference to "Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There", the sequel to "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland"
From this point on, I'm going to be updating the story slower than I have before. I'm thinking it'll either be something like one chapter a week or one chapter every two weeks, but I'll have to see how it goes. Don't worry about me possibly dropping the story though. I already know what I want to do for all the major plot points and ending, so I am committed to finishing it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

After waking up Hitoshi, dropping off his things—and checking on the Penguindrum that he was keeping in a hidden pocket in his bag— Izuku ate a hot meal with his classmates, and everyone got to enjoy the hot springs. But while Izuku was trying to just enjoy the warm water and have fun with his friends, he kept getting… distracted.

It's not like I haven't seen Shouto-kun's body while changing in the locker rooms before— Izuku thought to himself as he peeked at where his boyfriend was seated beside him. Shouto raised his torso out of the water, and droplets of water clung to his chest, making it glisten in the dim light and highlighting the beauty of his skin. Izuku quickly averted his eyes from it, and his already flushed face became even redder—But this is an entirely new perspective on it…

He had always found Shouto to be beautiful and good-looking, even before he had fallen in love with him, but to see this much of him at once, in this kind of setting… it turned Izuku's chest into a nervous flutter of butterflies and breathlessness.

How on Earth did he end up with such a gorgeous prince? All of fate's luck for him must have been spent on that blessing…

As Shouto quietly sighed, he used his wet hand to push his bangs out of his face. The wetness made his hair shine and set it slicked back to the side. It gave Izuku an open view to Shouto’s gray and blue eyes, which turned their gaze towards him to pierce through his heart. The sight made his heart beat erratically. His body was already hot from the water, and this was only bringing his temperature even higher.

He might be making light of his more unfortunate life experiences by saying this— but if that was the case, Izuku thought it was luck well spent.
Shouto glanced around them for a moment, checking where everyone was. It seemed like their other classmates were being conscientious of the love birds—*Izuku should tell that joke to Takahiro-san, the man will appreciate it*—in their midst though, because they were being given a lot of space. It left them a nice secluded corner of the hot springs to enjoy in peace.

After his eyes turned back to Izuku, Shouto turned the rest of his body to face him fully. “Izuku…” he started in a soft voice. Shouto hesitated to speak his thoughts, glanced down at the water between them.

*How he loved the way Shouto-kun said his name*—“Yes, Shouto-kun? You can say whatever you want to. I want to hear what you have to say.”

Shouto fidgeted in place for a second, before he peeked his eyes back up to Izuku. Izuku couldn’t help but think he looked absolutely adorable.

“Izuku, I— I know we haven’t been dating for that long, and that you’re doing your best to make sure I’m fully comfortable with everything we do,” he quietly spoke, a tiny hint of nerves could be heard at the edge of his steady voice., “But, I’ve been thinking for a while now, about how we haven’t properly kissed yet…”

Izuku jolted in place as his breath caught in his throat.

“And I’ve been thinking that… *it would be really nice to—***”

Izuku’s heart skipped a beat as nervous joy erupted in him at those words.

“I don’t know if my feelings for you are as strong as yours are for me yet, but—” Shouto seemed to give him a once over, and his already warm face reddened slightly. He started to stutter his words, “You look… really good right now. And it— *it makes me really want to kiss you, so…”*

Shouto unconsciously tilted his head down and to the side, and his stunning eyes peeked at Izuku through his lashes. “*…is that alright?”*

Izuku tried to speak, but all that came out of this throat was a croak. He felt hot—*too hot*. Black was creeping in from the sides of his vision, and he felt his body tipping over. *Oh no this can’t be good—*
In the few seconds it had taken for his head to hit the water, Izuku had already blacked out.

Shouto could only blink as his drop dead cute, handsome, prince of a boyfriend dropped dead into the water. He pulled him up with a startled shout and splashing, but Izuku was unconscious.

“Midoriya’s dead!” Kirishima cried out. Shouto glanced over to where he was by Bakugou to see his hands were holding the sides of his head in shock. He must had looked over because of the splashing.

“What?!"

“How?!"

“Please refrain from causing panic with false information, Kirishima-kun!” Iida shouted over the pandemonium. The class president rushed over to look at Izuku’s very red face. “Izuku-kun is most certainly not dead. Most likely, he is having a heat stroke.”

“Oh–” Shouto breathed on in relief, “I’ll take him out then…”

“Dammit– don’t scare us like that, shitty hair!” Bakugou cursed in his usual angry tone.

“You were scared for Midoriya?” Kirishima sounded delighted.

“Shut your fucking mouth already!”
As Shouto began moving out of the water, he heard a sigh from Shinsou, who came over to help him pull Izuku out. They carried him between them, with Izuku’s arms around their shoulders, so that Izuku was on Shouto’s right side. He used his quirk to gently cool the boy.

When walking Izuku to the office of the building they were in to find medical assistance. Shinsou’s tired eyes glanced over at Shouto. “So… What happened to cause this? Did he really just stay in too long?”

“I don’t know…” Shouto furrowed his brows in confusion as he looked down at Izuku. “I was just telling him that I wanted to kiss him and he fell over…”

“…Are you fucking with me?”

Shouto looked back up to Shinsou. The boy had a tired, exasperated expression on his face that, when combined with his dark eyebags, made him look remarkably similar to Aizawa – Is he Aizawa-sensei’s secret love child?

“Todoroki, I’m not sure if you’ve noticed,” Shinsou retorted sarcastically, “but you’re a pretty boy– You’ve got that same princely ‘I’m so attractive and charming but I’m not even trying’ vibe that Midoriya’s got. People like you and him have to be careful of what you say, or you might make normal people swoon by accident.”

“Really?” Shouto thought to himself for a bit as they walked and realized, “…Actually, that’s exactly how I first became interested in Izuku– he was acting and speaking really romantically, but he wasn’t even trying to be romantic.”

“I’m not surprised.” Shinsou raised an eyebrow as he asked, “But what exactly did he do to win you over? You seemed like a real ice-cold prince before.”

“Well, the basics of what happened is that he took me to his glamorous ballroom, danced with me in the light of candles lit by my quirk to make a point about how my quirk can be a good thing, and gifted me a single white and red mixed rose. Then he confessed his love to me during our fight in an indirect way, then after the Sports Festival he confessed directly while saying that he had saw everything there was about me and loved it.”

“…And he seriously wasn’t trying to seduce you?”
“That’s what he said.”

“The fuck…” Shinsou set his exasperated gaze on the unconscious boy between them. “What the hell, Midoriya?” he ranted, despite knowing that Izuku couldn’t hear him.

Shouto hummed in agreement. Then, another thought crossed his mind.

“…You think Izuku and me are attractive and charming?”

Shinsou rolled his eyes while scoffing at him, “Oh— don’t you dare try to start on that, I bet half your class thinks Izuku and you are prime boyfriend material. It’s not my fault I have working eyes and ears.”

When Shouto blinked at Shinsou with incomprehension, his friend just gave a long sigh.

When Izuku’s eyes fluttered open, he was staring up at a white ceiling from his spot lying down on a sofa.

“Oh good, you’re awake!” Izuku turned his head to see Mandalay sitting in a chair near him. She smiled at him kindly. “You passed out from the heat, but it seems like your body has finally cooled down. Just lay here for a bit to regain your strength.”

He felt himself blush in embarrassment. “Thanks for the help…”

Mandalay just waved him off. “It’s no problem! Eraserhead should be here soon to check on you— I’m surprised that he acts like such a mother hen…” Izuku felt his face heat up even more at that.
But then, as Mandalay turned to leave, a thought crossed Izuku’s mind that sobered his mood.

“Mandalay-san…” She paused her movements to look at him. “What… What happened to Kouta-kun? This may be prying but– his attitude towards heroes is abnormal compared to what children usually think of heroes, and– ” he tried to think of a way to say what he wanted without giving too much away, “ –I just get this feeling that it’s like he heart has frozen over…”

Mandalay’s brows furrowed in sorrow as she glanced away from Izuku in thought. “Kouta… If he had been raised normally, he’d probably look up to heroes the same way most children do. But as it happens, he and his parents –who were pro heroes– were the victims of a tragic reality…”

As so, Mandalay went on to explain how Kouta’s parents had died in the line of duty protecting civilians from a villain two years ago, and how society had praised their honorable actions and death. How a child whose entire world was made up by their parents couldn’t understand why society would praise them for dying and leaving him alone. How heroes were people that Kouta couldn’t understand, how their quirk and hero focused society was something Kouta couldn’t understand.

“I realized that I hated that idea– the idea that I was just stuck in some box, forced to just accept my place in this world no matter how awful it was”

“Society just arbitrarily decides that this quirk is bad, or this hero is good, and everyone is supposed to accept it as the word of God? I hate it! I’m the only one that can decide my place in this world and my future! Why should I care about what these faceless people think?!”

Izuku didn’t want to admit it, but when he had heard those words –about the boxes society forces people into, and about the things they decide for other people and how those things hurt people– Izuku found that he agreed with them.

He didn’t believe destroying society to free people from these constraints was the right solution, but how could he not empathize with the frustration Shigaraki felt for this society after the life he’s lived as a quirkless child who would never amount to anything?

How could he not feel frustrated about the pain it brought Hitoshi for his “villainous” quirk? About the cage it forced Takahiro into without any regard for what he wants, because getting to be a hero must be a “good thing”? About how someone like Endeavor, who hurt his family and the person that Izuku is in love with, could rise so high as a “hero” that he was second from the top?
How could he not feel frustrated that society kept crying for All Might to save them so much, even when there were other heroes they could call upon, that it led to Toshinori ruining himself?

–It’s no wonder this child couldn’t fathom the logic society uses to decide these things, Izuku could barely understand it himself–

These were the kind of thoughts that ran through Izuku’s head when he changed into his clothes to rejoin the others, only to run into Hitoshi in the hallway right outside the office. He kept his eyes averted from Izuku’s, staring at the floor, as he asked him if they could talk.

Izuku knew exactly what this talk would be about, so he just transported them to the Crystal World. Momoka left her mirror without complaint.

Sitting on one of the black sofas right next to one another, Izuku began the conversation, “So what do you think about what you heard, Hitoshi-kun?”

“I think…” Hitoshi started in a low voice. His gaze moved from Momoka’s Mirror, which now only held Hitoshi’s image, to Izuku’s eyes. There was a serious look in them. “…that I don’t understand why the fuck you want anything to do with Bakugou anymore.”

Izuku just sighed, “Kacchan’s different from how he was before, Hitoshi-kun. I know it’s hard for you to tell since you never saw what he was like before, but trust me when I say that there was some major improvement to his personality…”

“No, you see– that’s the thing.” Hitoshi threw his arm over the back of the sofa to turn his body towards Izuku, with his other hand raised to gesture at him.

“Even in the case where Bakugou isn’t doing anything wrong with you anymore, I don’t understand why you would just let it go so easily! I know that if any of the people who had told me that I was a worthless villain-in-waiting ever came up to me one day as a changed person and apologized, I would just tell them to fuck off. And none of them had ever even told me to kill myself or physically hurt me—probably because they were too scared of retaliation—so… I just can’t imagine ever being able to let go of that pain.”

Izuku frowned to himself. “It’s not really like I’m letting go of the pain I felt— that isn’t something I can forget. It’s just that… Kacchan is special to me. He was my first friend, and he was the goal that I set for myself to overcome. Even when it would have been better for me to do so, I was never able
to let him go. And now that he’s not hurting me anymore, I don’t have to.”

Izuku gave a bitter smile as he looked into the mirror that was empty of his image.

“You all make it sound like I’m either just forgiving him out of the kindness of my heart, or I’m stuck in a toxic mind set where I feel like I have to forgive him, but it’s really much more selfish than that. After all these years, I’ve finally gotten what I wanted from him— he’s chosen me. I don’t need to spite him because I’m already satisfied.”

From the mirror, Izuku could see Hitoshi’s face screw up as though he had eaten something bitter. His friend’s purple eyes glared down into his own lap.

Hitoshi was quiet for a moment, but when he spoke again, his voice was a hoarse murmur, “After my quirk appeared… my mom left me at a park and never came back for me.” Izuku’s head whipped back towards Hitoshi in shock, but his friend still wasn’t looking at him.

“If by some chance she had decided to come back for me during those first couple of years where I was being passed from foster home to foster home, I would’ve gone with her without a second thought. I would’ve forgiven her immediately, just because she had changed her mind and decided that she actual did want me like I wished that she would. But over the years, I’ve realized that… that wouldn’t have been good for me.”

Hitoshi’s eyes became watery as he turned his gaze to glare at himself in the mirror. “Why should she deserve a second chance when she was the one to throw me away? How could I ever trust that she wouldn’t just change her mind again and leave me in the streets? There’s just no way I could ignore the pain I felt –the pain that she gave me– when I realized that she never loved me.”

Hitoshi’s hand on the sofa started to fidget in place, randomly curling its fingers into the material. He started to speak hesitantly, becoming self-conscious about the pain that he had revealed, “So– I guess what I’m trying to get at is… Is getting what you want from Bakugou really a good thing for you?”

Izuku’s own eyes became watery as his heart resonated with Hitoshi’s pain. He gently took his friend’s free hand, bringing those purple eyes to focus back on him. A golden apple ringed with a halo of fire appeared in Hitoshi’s chest.

He tried to keep his voice steady as he explained, “I think that the circumstances between what happened to you and what happened to me are a little different… Kacchan is only a child, after all.
He’s still learning. And if a friend stops loving another friend, well… it’s a sad thing, but that’s just sometimes what happens. But for a parent to stop loving their child… there’s something wrong about that, I think.”

“Once they’ve made the decision to bring a child into this world and made the decision that they were going to be the ones to care for that child– there’s no turning back. It’s a life commitment that isn’t taken as seriously as it should, and unfortunately the children are the ones who pay the price for that.” Izuku smiled sadly at Hitoshi, looking at the connection formed between them by their hands.

“A few years after I found out I was quirkless, I looked up a couple of statistics on the internet and found out that I was actually incredibly lucky to be born to parents who loved me unconditionally. The rate that quirkless children are put up for adoption is proportionally much higher than the national average.”

Izuku unconsciously clutched Hitoshi’s hand tighter, and Hitoshi looked like he couldn’t turn away from Izuku even if his life depended on it. Izuku’s voice started wavering from the sadness growing in his chest, “I– I couldn’t imagine being abandoned by the entire world like that. My mom loves me so much, and my dad loved me so much that he was willing to die for me. If… if I had been abandoned by them like you had been, I think I really would have taken up Katsuki’s suggestion and jumped off that roof– because they were the only people in this world that loved me, so what other reason would I have to stick around?”

Izuku brought Hitoshi’s trembling hand close to his chest as he looked up at him. Hitoshi’s still watery purple eyes looked at him with such pain, like he couldn’t comprehend that there was a person in this world that could understand the depth of that pain. It was the first time that Izuku had ever seen him so vulnerable.

He stated, “It’s like you said before, isn’t it? “To be unchosen is to die”, that’s why I think… that you’re incredibly strong, Hitoshi-kun, because even after having no one to keep you in this world– You made it through alright, because you’re still here.”

Hitoshi just looked at him with a wide-eyed stare, seemingly speechless. So Izuku scooted closer to him and let go of his hand to bring it around his body with his other hand for a tight hug. Even sitting down, Hitoshi had a considerable height advantage, and Izuku closed his eyes while pressing his cheek into his friend’s shoulder.

“I’m so glad you’re still here, Hitoshi-kun.”

Hitoshi’s breath hitched, and his body trembled as his arms moved themselves around Izuku’s body to hug him back. His head hung over Izuku’s shoulder, and his next exhale turned into a sob. Fingers tightly clutched the back of Izuku’s cloak.
But Hitoshi still wouldn’t let himself break down. Instead, he spoke in a broken whisper, “I– I want–” he had to stop when his voice involuntarily hitched, “I want you to look into my Fruit, and see everything there is to see about me, and–”

He cut himself off before he could finish his request, but Izuku knew what he wanted.

He looked into Hitoshi as easily as breathing, and said, “I see all of you, Hitoshi, and I am so glad you’re still here. I am so glad you’re my friend, and you’re such a good person. You can be a hero. As long as I can assert my will over fate, I will never leave you.”

“Izuku…” Izuku ran his hand over his friend’s wide back. “You deserve to be loved.”

Hitoshi’s body was shaking, and finally, he started sobbing. His arms wound themselves tight around Izuku’s torso, not wanting to let him go. Izuku just held him steady.

Hitoshi was crying in Izuku’s arms. Crying because no one had ever told him they were glad he was alive, because no one had ever told him he deserved to be loved.

–If everything is caused by fate, then God must be incredibly unfair and cruel–

Early in the morning of the second day of summer training camp, Shouta was supposed to be completely focused on preparing his students’ training regimes. But as soon as he caught sight of the red string around Shinsou’s wrist –which was a perfect match for the one Midoriya swore that Todoroki could use to remove himself from his home should his father become violent with him– he rushed to find his problem child before the start of training and called him over for a private talk in an empty room.

Because while Shouta had missed signs that his students’ private life featured distressing
circumstances, Midoriya had proven to be adept at sniffing them out.

He got right to the heart of the matter, being so blunt that it might be considered insensitive, “Is Shinsou’s home-life abusive?”

Midoriya jolted back in surprise. “…What?”

“It’s something I’ve been considering for a while now.” Shouta made sure to keep eye contact with his student to emphasize his concern – Midoriya responds well to people being concerned for other people. “He said to me when we first started that “his foster parents won’t care” about him staying at school late to train. And I didn’t pay it any mind then, but he’s shown a distressing disregard for his personal accomplishments during the course of me teaching him, and his guardians haven’t made any attempts to learn more about what’s going on with their child. So after learning about Todoroki’s home-life, I thought that he might have meant that as they don’t care about him at all.”

“Admittedly, I’ve been searching for physical markers of abuse – such as mysterious injuries gained outside of his training– and haven’t found anything. But I still have a sense that something is off about him…” Shouta trailed off, hoping that was enough information to prompt Midoriya to reveal what was most likely extremely personal information about his friend to his teacher.

“And you saw the Red String of Fate I gave him, and thought that was a sign he needed it the same was Shouto-kun does,” Midoriya stated with a nod. Not asking for confirmation, but showing that he recognized Shouta’s thought process. Shouta just nodded back and waited for him to speak more.

Midoriya glanced away for a moment – likely considering the pros and cons of letting Shouta into what was going on– before he looked back at him to inquire, “Shouta-sensei… how do you feel about Hitoshi-kun?”

Is he trying to confirm that Shouta is prying out of a sense of genuine concern? He doesn’t usually like admitting these types of things to other people, but in this case it may be for the best.

“…I think that he’s a good, bright kid, that reminds me of myself in many ways. He’s determined to be a hero even if he has to try harder than everyone else to make up for his disadvantages, but knows that just “trying” isn’t enough and that he has to be smart about it too. I know I’m supposed to be impartial as a teacher, but I’m eager to add him to my class.” He let his eyes glance away as he admitted, “The thought that he may be hurting and keeping it all to himself… is painful to think about.”
“And… do you know what Hizashi-sensei’s opinion about him is?”

Okay, now that’s just a random question—“How does Hizashi have anything to do with this?”

“I’ll tell you if you give me an answer.” Midoriya raised an eyebrow at him—this kid is going to be the end of him.

Shouta just gave in with a sigh, “Most of his exposure to Shinsou is what I tell him about the kid, but he seems to like him. He likes to tease about the similarities he finds between us, and keeps saying that I should bring the kid over to our house for lunch after our Saturday training sessions even though that is a completely unprofessional thing to do. Is that what you’re looking for?”

“Yes,” Midoriya responded, despite the fact that that was supposed to be a rhetorical question. He had a somber expression of his face as he said, “Hitoshi’s foster family isn’t physical abusive, but they are emotionally negligent towards him because of their aversion to his quirk. He isn’t getting the support and care that he needs from them, and he has an extreme need for it because of his personal circumstances that I won’t get into—because I think you should try to find out for yourself.”

Shouta grimaced—That isn’t exactly the worst-case scenario that he was imagining, but it was still concerning—before he realized that Midoriya seemed to be trying to hint something to him. “…Why do you think I should try to find out for myself?”

“Well…” Midoriya gained a nervous grin as he glanced away from Shouta, it reflected the apprehension in is voice, “I was going to ask my mom if she would consider adopting Hitoshi so that we could give him the care that he needs, but if you already have such a strong foundation for that… maybe you would like to consider that yourself?”

…What?

As Shouta struggled to process that his problem child was actually trying to set him up to be a parent, Midoriya suddenly gained a frighteningly neutral expression on his face as his eyes whipped back to Shouta. Their green seemed to pierce into his soul.

“But if you have no interest in fully committing to that sort of relationship with Hitoshi, Shouta… then don’t bother. He doesn’t need his hero abandoning him too.”

Chapter End Notes
I added more short stories to Children of Absurdity. The new chapter features Shouto in a princess dress and Izuku reciting Shakespeare, Shinsou polling 1-A to see which of them thinks that either Izuku or Shouto are prime boyfriend material, and Izuku giving his teachers crises via standard teacher reviews.
Once his talk with Shouta-sensei was finished, Izuku joined the rest of his classmates to start their training at 5:30 am. Everyone was given an individual training regime that would help them expand the limits of their quirks, and like most things that had to deal with Izuku, his was rather unique.

“Midoriya, you are going to alternate between expanding the range of your Survival Strategy spell and working on that… other spell you mentioned needing to learn.” Shouta’s eye twitched upon remembering Izuku had brought the Penguindrum with him on a fieldtrip. “Most of the day you will spend on Survival Strategy, then you’ll have some time to work on the other spell. Izu-pingu will also be doing some work. But first things first…”

Shouta gave Izuku a mean grin, causing him to involuntarily lean away from his teacher. The man’s face was matched by his ominous words, “Let’s find your breaking point.”

And so, Izuku started out his training by transporting himself in and out of the Crystal World in rapid succession without a break. Half way through, his voice had become hoarse from endlessly saying “SurvivalStrategySurvivalStrategyCompleteSurvivalStrategySurvivalStrategyComplete” like it was a weird tongue-twister. He had never felt like the Survival Strategy spell took any real effort outside of visualizing the crystal appearing for the ranged version, but now that he was forced to continuously perform it he realized that it actually did take a toll on him.

And by the time he felt like his voice was going to give out completely, he fell to his knees on the dirt ground of the training camp to throw up his breakfast.

Another one of the Pussycats, Tiger, was watching him while waiting for the power-up type quirks from 1-B to start their training. He came over to rub at Izuku’s back to help his sickness away. Only a few seconds later, Izu-pingu to popped into existence next to Izuku. He held up a score board that read “95” on it.
“95 times in succession, huh… That’s a fairly high limit. Good work!” Tiger gave him a slightly foreboding grin with his cat-like mouth, but his thumbs up could only be interpreted as a positive thing. “Rest up a bit to get your stomach and vocal chords together, then do the same thing with the ranged version to work on expanding how far the crystal shards spread out. I heard your current limit is a two-meter diameter, let’s see if you can make it three or four by the end of the week! Show me that plus ultra!”

*He never wants to say the words Survival Strategy ever again, and he hasn’t even gotten to the main part of his training yet…*

Tiger handed him a water bottle, which Izuku gratefully accepted to wash out his mouth before drinking. He stood up from the ground, though was still hunched over his stomach, to look up at the extremely tall and muscled man wearing a cat/idol costume, complete with the same type of fluffy skirt all the other Pussy Cats wore.

He found himself asking the question that had been on his mind since seeing the man, with his croaking, hoarse voice, “T-Tiger-san… excuse me if this is rude to ask, but– have you faced problems with people taking you seriously due to your choice of style?”

“Of course. There will always be critics of the unconventional, but I do not let that get in the way of my own personal decisions,” Tiger responded seriously, before tilting his head in a questioning manner. “That is not a question most people think to ask me, so why do you have an interest in that?”

Izuku looked down at himself as though he expected to see his Prince of the Crystal uniform on even outside of the Crystal World.

“You see– I go through an outfit change whenever I’ve in my pocket dimension, and the clothes that I wear there have sort of a strange style to them. It’s a mix-match of styles, and more feminine than masculine in nature. Though I thought it was weird before, at this point I’m not bothered by them. But almost everyone else that first sees me in them are totally put-off by them.”

Izuku frowned into the air as he remembered the various time people have asked him about what he was wearing. “It’s even to the point where I once transported an actual villain to my pocket dimension and captured them, only for them to find that my uniform was the most notable thing going on! It’s frustrating to have to repeatedly deal with it…”

Tiger was quiet for a moment, before saying, “I see… Let me tell you something then, child.”
Izuku’s attention was brought back to the man in front of him, he looked down at Izuku with an expression of understanding. “Before I completed my transition, I was worried that my costume would convey to people that I was a woman instead of a man, like I wanted to be recognized as. However, I still wanted to wear this costume, because it is a uniform that unites my image with the others on my team.”

Izuku was vaguely surprised to hear that Tiger was a transgender man, but it was clear just from his style alone that he wasn’t what society would consider “conformative”, so Izuku supposed he shouldn’t be too surprised.

“And then after my transition, I was no longer as concerned with that, but I was now faced with people saying that I was “unsuited” for this look. I’m the wrong gender and the wrong genre is what they usually think about it,” Tiger scoffed a bit at that, “I have come to realize, though, that I should not worry about either of those things! Wearing a feminine costume does not take away my manhood and is my choice. Just because other people find it weird or abnormal does not mean it cannot be my normal.”

Tiger tapped an oversize finger of his paw-glove on Izuku’s chest, and Izuku saw that his Fruit of Fate was a pristine gold.

“You cannot control what other people think of as being “normal”, but do not let their opinions make you feel ashamed about who you are. It is not that you are “abnormal” or “weird”, it’s just that your normal is different than everyone else’s. Do you understand what I mean by that?”

Considering all the objectively strange and fantastical stuff Izuku has to deal with in his everyday life that most people don’t even know exist—he understands that perfectly.

Izuku gave Tiger a bright smile. “Yes sir!”

Tiger gave him another thumbs-up in return.

“If you’re in the middle of a break,” Shouta-sensei cut in, Izuku turned his head to see him meander over to where Izuku was still on the ground, “then how about you help out Shinsou with his training? I want to see how many people he can hold under his brainwashing at once.”

Called to action by a request to help one of his beloved friends, Izuku fought through his sickness to
drag himself over to Hitoshi. Hitoshi looked over his hunched over form and frowned in worry.

“Um… You doing okay, Izuku? I’m pretty sure I just saw you barfing over there just now…”

“I’m okay– ” he reassured before cutting himself off. He was almost glad when Hitoshi’s brainwashing kicked in, it distracted him from his turning insides.

Hitoshi individually brainwashed ten people before his quirk gave out. When Izuku was released, Shouta nodded and told Hitoshi, “That’s a good starting limit, but let’s see if you can get it higher. Also, I’d like to see if you can brainwash at least two people at the same time by the time the week is over. Half your time will be spent on this quirk training, the other half on improving your physical condition and combat skill.”

Hitoshi winced, imagining the mental and physical energy that would take, but responded, “I’ll do my best, Aizawa-sensei.”

“I know you will…” Shouta hesitated for a second, then clapped a hand on Hitoshi’s shoulder. The boy jolted in surprise at the contact. “And good job, Shinsou.”

Hitoshi’s cheeks turned pink, and he bashfully turned his head away from his hero in a vain attempt to hide it. “ …Thanks.”

He really hopes Shouta-sensei decides to take in Hitoshi, Izuku knows it would mean the world to his friend if the hero he looked up to for so long chose him in that way. And Shouta-sensei would make a good parent.

Before continuing on with his training from hell, Izuku brought Izu-pingu over to Shouta as he requested.

Shouta sighed –probably questioning what life decisions he made led to him needing to train penguins– and stated, “Izu-pingu, it’s clear your best asset is that you can surprise Midoriya’s opponents to use his ‘quirk’ when he’s unable to, so I want you to undergo some stealth training.”

Izu-pingu pumped both of his black flippers into the air in victory, squawking in delight.
“You’ll be trying to move around the students without getting caught by me. If I see you, I’ll shoot you with this painful paint gun. This way I can also do some training to improve my abilities when it comes to my lack of vision and depth perception.”

Izu-lingu silently dropped his flippers and hung his head in defeat. From the side, Izuku could hear Hitoshi snort in amusement at Izu-lingu’s plight.

Izuku just pat his penguin on the head, making sure to avoid Izu-lingu’s crown. “Do your best!”

Then just as he was about to leave, a thought came to Izuku’s mind. “Sho– Aizawa-sensei, can I borrow Kaminari to test one of my other spells later?”

Shouta’s single eye squinted at him in suspicion. “Which one?”

“Divine Protection– I wrote what it did on that list I gave you, right?”

“Yes, I remember. But what do you need to test for exactly?”

“The level of response it gives is supposed to correlate with the amount of ill intent it senses from my opponent, so I was wondering how it would react to someone that’s attacking me for an exercise or something like that. Out of everyone, Kaminari should be the least affected by it– so if worst comes to worst, he probably wouldn’t die from it…”

“… Probably? And could you actually kill someone with that thing?”

“I can’t make a definite statement on it since I’ve never used it with people before, but it should be very, very unlikely. And if someone was attacking to kill me then… it might be enough to kill them, yes.”

Shouta sighed – he does that a lot around Izuku – and put a hand over his eye. “If you’re only probably sure that it won’t seriously injure Kaminari, then no. You cannot.”

Izuku winced. “Ah… That’s what I thought, yeah…”
“If you’re ever looking for volunteers to try your shit on, Izuku, remind me to not volunteer,” Hitoshi deadpanned.

“Most of the things I can do wouldn’t kill you, Hitoshi-kun. Only some of them.”

“That is not reassuring at all…”

Once Izuku started repeatedly forming his crystal, using Survival Strategy, and transporting himself back to do it all over again, class 1-B joined in with their training. There was a short lunch break followed by more Survival Strategy, then Izuku finally got a break in the form of staying in the Crystal World to work on Through the Looking Glass.

“Okay– so from what I’ve figured out, the spell summons mirrors –obviously– and when you go through one it… does something? I don’t know, that’s all I’ve got,” Izuku sighed at the place he was trying to bring a mirror into existence in the library, “I just know that saying the spell and thinking about creating a mirror doesn’t do anything.”

Beside him, Penguin Yagi and Toshi-pingu rubbed their non-existent chins in thought. Then, Yagi straighten up and pointed the tip of a flipper into the air, like he was pointing a finger in realization.

Sir Nighteye was always a good hero for intellectual work– “What did you think of, Yagi?”

Yagi waddled over to a desk and started writing on a piece of paper. When he was done, he held it up to Izuku with one flipper while pushing up his glasses with the other. The paper showed a crude drawing of what seemed like the frame of a mirror, and a person walking through it like it was a doorway. On one side of the mirror the scenery was colored in, and on the other it was left white.

Izuku tapped on his cheek in thought. “So what you’re saying is that if the looking glass is being used to go through it, then that suggests a change of setting– It’d be like a transportation portal!”

He tried the incantation with this in mind, imagining the mirror showing the image of a destination, but still nothing happened. There must be something else he’s missing…

In the end, his training time finished without him having figured it out, but Penguin Yagi seemed like
he was thinking things over so maybe there would be a breakthrough during their next session.

This time for their dinner, classes 1-A and 1-B had to make their own meal. All the ingredients for curry were set out for them, and everyone worked together to prep the various vegetables and meat to cook.

Izuku was happy to have curry on the menu tonight, but it was times like this he wished he could share this kind of experience with Momoka. One of the only bits of personal information he had heard from her is that curry –or at least a specific recipe of apple curry– used to be her favorite food when she was alive, which was why the mannequins in the kitchen of the Crystal Palace could make it. Izuku had tried that curry before, and knew it was as amazing as Momoka had advertised.

It was sad to know that she can’t enjoy it anymore…

“Hey Todoroki, can we get some fire over here?” Ashido’s request brought Izuku’s attention back to reality. He looked over from his spot carrying some wood just in time to see his boyfriend’s hand light up with gentle flames, which spread to the logs in the brick firepit. Shouto looked down at his fire with a soft expression, and its light made his face glow, highlighting his elegant features and the carefully hidden warmth that rested in his eyes.

The sight of it warmed Izuku’s chest, and a smile bloomed onto his face. Shouto seemed to sense his stare, because he turned away from the fire to look up at Izuku. He must have recognized the look on Izuku face, because he asked, “…What do you see, Izuku?”

“And what do you see right now?”

“I see you, and the ballroom, and the light that shines on it all”

“I see you, and your fire, and the light that it shines on everything around it,” Izuku declared, he wished his hands were free so that he could use them to hold Shouto’s face, “Your fire is so beautiful, Shouto-kun. But… seeing you in the light of your fire is even more beautiful.”

Shouto’s cheeks flushed a faint pink and his eyes averted themselves, but the corner of his mouth curled up into a small smile.

“Careful there, Izuku,” a passing Hitoshi warned with a smirk, “If you say too many things like that,
Todoroki may be the one to pass out this time.”

Izuku sputtered as his face lit up red remembering that particular embarrassment, “I– that just happened because I was already hot from the water! That wouldn’t happen normally!”

Ashido, who Izuku had completely forgotten was right next to Shouto, burst into laughter while holding her hands over her stomach, “Haha! Is– Is that why you passed out yesterday Midoriya?! Oh my God, that’s too hilarious! Looks like you can dish out dreamy romance but can’t take it yourself! Ha!”

“Whatever you say, Prince of the Crystal, whatever you say…”

“I’m serious!”

Soon, everyone was enjoying a piping hot plate of curry and rice. Izuku ate at a table with his friends, but was distracted by his thoughts. He had noticed that Kouta left into the forest without taking anything to eat, and was worried that the boy might still be hungry. He was also worried about the state of his Fruit of Fate, and the information he had just learned yesterday.

It’s clear by his attitude that Kouta is in a state where he refuses to listen to anyone. Any objection or denial to the worldview he has doesn’t mean anything when its being given by people who are complacent with the system. The way he is now, he won’t listen to Izuku.

How do you try to help a person who rejects it? How do you try to persuade a person who won’t listen?

Those questions brought memories to the front of Izuku’s mind. He remembered Shouto, who needed action to go along with Izuku’s words. He remembered Hitoshi, who needed to hear from Momoka—a child who used to be forgotten and unwanted just like him—before he was willing to accept Izuku’s friendship. He remembered Tenya, who wouldn’t listen to Izuku no matter how hard he tried, because he was set on the path he wanted to take.

He remembered Shigaraki, who doesn’t listen to people he doesn’t like, but listened to Izuku anyway because he thought Izuku was different.

The answer is that you don’t try to do either of those things. Instead, you do something else.
After collecting another plate of curry, Izuku follow a small set of footprints into the forest. They led up a hill to a plateau. When he saw the seated form of a child, he called out, “I bet you’re hungry. I brought up a plate in case you wanted some. I’m Midoriya Izuku, by the way.”

Kouta’s head whipped towards him, visibly shocked. Then, gave him a mean glare. “Wha– how did you find me? I don’t want any food, so get away from my secret base.”

Izuku glanced around at the plateau and the cave into the mountain beside it. “So this is your secret base, huh…” He tries to act mature, but he’s still a kid at the end of it all. He’s glad Kouta still has some child-like behavior in him.

“I don’t intend to hang out with the likes of you,” Kouta scoffed at him, “Improving your quirks to the point that it makes you sick… it’s gross. Do you want to show off your power that badly?”

“…I was talking to Mandalay yesterday, and she mentioned what happened to your parents. By any chance were they the Water Hose duo?” By the way that Kouta stiffened up, he guessed that he was right on the mark. “I remember what happened to them. It was unfortunate…”

“Shut up,” Kouta’s voice wavered from the anger simmering inside of him. The boy turned away from Izuku to glare down at the forest. “Everyone’s crazy… Calling each other stupid names like “heroes” or “villains” and killing each other. Talking about quirks and stuff. It’s because they’re all showing off that it ended up like that… Stupid…”

Izuku just looked at the boy in front of him for a moment, before turning his body away from him and towards the wide view of the forest that the hill gave them.

He hummed back in a neutral tone, “Hmm, maybe so. Yeah.”

That seemed to catch Kouta off guard. Out of the corner of his eye, Izuku could see the boy turn to look at him. His voice was much more hesitant when he asked, “You’re… agreeing with me?”

“To some extent, yes.” Izuku continued to look straight ahead at the forest instead of at Kouta. “Our society is obsessed with quirks and heroes, and because of that everyone collectively formed views on what parts of “quirks” and what parts of “heroes” are “good”. But not everyone can be born with a so-called “good” quirk, not everyone can be a hero, and being a perfect hero is impossible, so because of this– individuals get hurt by these imagined standards that everyone else forces upon
Izuku looked down at the plate of food in his hands. “When I think about those people that get hurt—the people that I know and love that were hurt along with myself—it makes me hate it all. It makes me hate that these standards are more important to society than the people that live in it. It makes me hate the fate that was decided for these people, that just because you happen to be born in a way that people find useful, they’ll take advantage of you. That just because you happen to be born in a way that’s different than what other people like, it makes you worthless.”

After saying his piece, Izuku went quiet.

When a couple of moments filled with complete silence passed, Kouta spoke, “Is that all you’re going to say?”

Izuku turned his head to look at Kouta. The boy was turned towards him, looking up at him with a questioning gaze. He wasn’t glaring anymore.

“Do you think there is more for me to say?”

“Well, yeah!” frustration reentered Kouta’s voice, “You just said all that stuff about how you hate the way everyone looks at quirks and heroes, but you’re still trying to be a hero—obviously that can’t be all you think about it!”

“There is more to it than that, yes, but Kouta-kun…” Izuku tilted his head to the side. “…If I told you the rest of what I think, would you hear what I’m saying?”

“Huh? What are you trying to say?”

“You’re the one that said that you “don’t intend to play nice with people who want to become heroes”. I don’t know everything there is to know about you, but from what I’ve seen, you’re stuck only looking at all the horrible parts of the world. You don’t want to see anything that’s not what you already see in it.”

Izuku leaned down to set the plate of food on the ground next to Kouta. “So if I were to try to tell you about all the good parts of the world, would you listen to me, Kouta?”
Izuku nodded at Kouta, who was still staring at him, and turning around to walk away. “If you feel hungry, you should eat. By the way, I’m going to let out one of my Teddydrums soon, and Teddydrum Black likes to be near children, and dislikes when they aren’t being cared for properly. So don’t get too put off if it finds you up here and tries to stick around.”

As he walked away, he could feel Kouta’s stare boring into his back. Seems like he’s taken the bait…

Once Izuku was at the foot of the hill, he brought out Teddydrum Black. Izuku pointed at the top of the hill and said, “There’s a distressed child up there.”

That was all that needed to be said. Teddydrum Black rocketed into the air and up to where Izuku pointed.

It’s best to leave difficult matters to the ones that are specialized in them.

Kouta only got a few minutes to work through what the weird heroics student had just told him when a giant teddy bear robot flew up to his secret base and landed in front of him. It towered above him like it was one of the trees in the forest. He blinked up at it in confusion for a second before he glared at it.

“Seriously?! Why does that guy even have something like this?! It looks ridiculous!” He tried to wave it away. “Go on– shoo! Go back to your owner or whatever!”

The robot did the opposite of what he ordered, sitting on the ground with a loud thump and to stare at him with the red lights that made up its eyes.

“Can you not understand me? Leave!”
The robot continued to stare at him.

Kouta dropped his hands and sighed in annoyance, “Aren’t robots supposed to listen to humans? That guy said you like kids, but I don’t want you here. Why won’t you leave?”

Finally, the robot gave something resembling an actual response, pointing at the plate of curry that was right next to where it was seated.

“You want me to eat? I’m not hungry.”

Right on cue, his stomach grumbled embarrassingly loud. The robot’s stare didn’t change, but Kouta interpreted it as being doubtful now.

“Teddydrum Black likes to be near children, and dislikes when they aren’t being cared for properly. So don’t get too put off if it finds you up here and tries to stick around”

There’s no way he can force this thing to leave if it doesn’t want to… “Ugh, fine! I’ll eat the stupid curry. But when I’m done you have to leave, got it?”

When the robot nodded at him, Kouta picked up the still hot curry and plopped himself down on the ground to eat. He was only a few bites in when he heard the sound of something heavy dragging through the gravel, and he turned his head back to the robot just in time to see it settle itself closer to him with its tall torso at his back.

“Why are you so close??”

The robot put its arms around its body like it was trying to hug itself. Kouta squinted at it, trying to figure out what it was saying. Then, realization struck.

“…Are you saying that you want to cuddle because you’re a teddy bear?”

The teddy bear robot nodded vigorously.
“No way! Teddy bears are for little kids!”

The robot seemed to give him a once over.

“I’m not that little anymore– I don’t like that kiddie stuff!”

Predictably, the robot ignored him, gently pushing Kouta back so that his back was resting on its torso.

He was going to yell at it for that, but the feeling of the so called Teddydrum’s metal at his back made him pause. It felt soft, and warm, making Kouta much more comfortable than he was before. It was also nice to be able to rest back on something.

“Whatever. I don’t care what you do, just don’t try to hug me or anything…”

He continued to eat his curry like that, becoming more and more relaxed as time went by. And by the time that he was finished eating, he felt his eyes struggling to stay open.

The way that he feels right now… It reminded him of the warmth he used to feel whenever his parents had let him sleep in-between them in their bed. He hadn’t felt that warmth since they’d left him…

Eventually, Kouta lost his fight, and fell asleep against Teddydrum Black. Satisfied, the Teddydrum carefully lifted the child and brought him back to the camp where he could sleep in peace.

“Hey, Bakugou… have you been doing alright dude?”
Katsuki paused just outside the eating area and looked at the classmate that had walked up to him in their spot of relative isolation. Shitty hair was looking at him with his brows furrowed in concern, making a stark contrast to his usual annoyingly up-beat demeanor.

“T’m fine, shitty hair. Why are you asking stupid questions like that?” Katsuki grouched at him defensively.

Shitty hair winched a bit, glancing down at the ground self-consciously before his eyes focused back on Katsuki.

“It’s sort of weird but… At first, it seemed like you were doing really good –you’ve been responding to me and the others more, and you even went out with us to the mall trip!– But… I just get this feeling that you’re not as confident in yourself as you were before, you know? You’ve never held back when it came to your actions or opinions before, it’s a really manly trait you have! But now it feels like you are, and you’ve been sort of down ever since the final exams, so… did something happen?”

“How could this have happened, Katsuki?”

Katsuki grimaced as the now familiar feeling of shame rose within him. “Even if something did happen, what makes you think I want to tell you about it?”

“Telling friends about your problems helps with things sometimes!” Shitty hair earnestly asserted, bringing a clenched fist to his chest, “Even if they can’t help you find a solution, just talking about it can help! I want to help you and… we’re friends, aren’t we?”

Katsuki couldn’t help but be surprised by that question. Whenever Katsuki tried to put distance between him and Kirishima, the other had never seemed to doubt that his attempts to interact with Katsuki made them friends. From Kirishima’s perspective, he’s sure that the spikey haired boy thinks they’re friends– but he’s never asked if Katsuki thought the same.

Does Katsuki think they’re friends? The last time Katsuki had a real friend –not just a follower like his middle school lackeys– was when he was friends with Deku. And that ended horribly through his own stupid sense of superiority. 

–If Kirishima knew about that, would he even want to be friends anymore? He’s a kind person. He
Katsuki was taking too long to answer, but Kirishima waited patiently nonetheless. The other boy gazed at him with pleading red eyes. It was obvious what answer he was hoping for, and that he was worried he wouldn’t get it.

Katsuki had to avert his eyes away from Kirishima as he asked a question that had crossed his mind before, “...Why do you even bother with me, Kirishima? You’re the type of person people like– you could be friends with anyone you wanted, and yet you’re focusing so much of your effort on an asshole like me. It doesn’t make any sense.”

Kirishima didn’t respond immediately, so Katsuki glanced back at him only to see that his eyes were wide and his mouth was agape. He was also blushing slightly. “You– You called me by my actual name! That’s the first time you’ve done that! Holy shit!”

That made Katsuki eye twitch in irritation, and he roughly gestured his hand at Kirishima as he yelled, “See! I’ve literally only referred to you as shitty hair and you still waste your time on me! Why?!”

“Well, it doesn’t really bother me since you call everyone insulting nicknames except for Midoriya. That’s just how you are.”

“That’s not the point! The important thing is that you don’t need to put you with that at all! Everyone else will treat you with basic decency, you don’t need to put up with me!”

Kirishima frowned at that. “I guess you’re right that I don’t need to, Bakugou, but I want to! I think you’re a manly, cool guy, and I admire how strong and confident you are. And even though you call yourself an asshole and you can be mean sometimes, you’re also sometimes really considerate towards others. I really– ” he suddenly cut himself off, forcing his mouth closed before he could finish what he was going to say. Kirishima averted his gaze to stare down at the fist that was still over his chest.

“...I just want to be friends with you, Bakugou. Isn’t that okay?”

Before Katsuki could respond –before he could even think of how to respond– Aizawa called out from somewhere in the building, “Remedial group, it’s time to begin your extra lessons! Report to me at once!”
Seeing the apprehension on Kirishima’s face as he looked towards where their teacher’s voice had come from, Katsuki sighed, “Go, shitty hair. We can finish talking about this when we’re not busy as fuck.”

He didn’t wait for the other to leave, instead walking away himself. Kirishima didn’t try to follow.

But he only got a couple of minutes of solitude before he heard, “Kacchan… can we talk for a second?”

_Fuck. Compared to talking to shitty hair about friendship, talking with Deku about anything is the fucking max difficulty level of conversations. He doesn’t need any more existential crises!_

Katsuki just stayed silent and let Deku lead him to an empty room that looked like a large storage closet.

“What do you want, Izuku?” he started off the conversation, trying to get this over with as fast as possible.

Deku glanced at Katsuki’s chest – _a bad sign, that means this has to deal with that fate shit_ – before he looked back up at Katsuki. “Well… I’ve been meaning to say something since the final exams, but never got the chance because of the villain scare we had. I have good news and bad news, what would you prefer to hear first?”

_God, just put him out of his misery already– “Bad news.”_

“The lower half of your Fruit of Fate is poisoned,” Izuku informed him with the air of a professional diagnosis, “But the good news is that only the upper fourth of your Fruit is burning now, and at that level you don’t have to worry about the ‘turning your fate to ash’ thing. So… good job with that?”

Katsuki hand slapped over his face, and he groaned, “What the fuck does _poison_ mean?!”

“Basically, it means that you have some sort of unhealthy, self-harming mind set…” Izuku frowned at him in concern, much like shitty hair had just before, and he said, “This has to do with your guilt about how you were with me before, doesn’t it? Katsuki… it’s good that you regret your mistakes,
but you shouldn’t let that make you think badly of how you are now.”

“That’s impossible,” Katsuki growled out without thinking, “Izuku… did you know that my mom died before, and that your mom helped her? Your dad did that, right?”

Izuku paled, looking at him with wide, green eyes. “You– where did you hear about that?”

“My mom told me after she heard the kind of shit I used to do to you.” Katsuki looked away from Izuku to frown at the wall as crushing pain emerged with his memory. “She was devastated, Izuku. She took it as her personal failure towards you and your mom. And all I could do was watch how I made her cry– ”

Katsuki’s hand grasped at his chest and whispered in frustration, “How can I not think badly of myself after that?”

There was a long moment of silence before Izuku softly whispered, “…I’m sorry, Katsuki.”

“…Don’t apologize for things that aren’t your fault.”

When Katsuki went to bed, his thoughts about Kirishima and Izuku turned in his head. He had a hard time sleeping that night.

Chapter End Notes

References from this chapter:
"Most everyone's mad here" is a quote from Alice in Wonderland. The apple curry Izuku mentions is a reference to the apple curry featured in Mawaru Penguindrum. And some of Kouta's dialogue with Izuku is from bnha.
Those Blessed with Power are Those Created in the Image of Gods

Chapter Notes

I recently checked youtube and realized that someone did God's work and uploaded the whole Mawaru Penguindrum OST! Before there were only a couple of songs from it because the copy-right for it was stringent. Here is a link to the first song in the playlist, which happens to be named unmei no kotachi (aka children of fate), so that you can listen if you like. All of the songs with unmei no kotachi in the title are ones that feature the melody that I consider to be the main theme of this story:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oO-Y795GnHk&index=1&list=PLNVAlU48hx_5FseRUX_HSrrbA2P81AfyD

On that note, one of the songs that was previously not on youtube pairs well with the two villain scenes at the end. Most of the villain build-up scene in the future will also probably fit with it as well:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_F5Tn60bGE&index=16&list=PLNVAlU48hx_5FseRUX_HSrrbA2P81AfyD

Also, I got more fanart! Fanart of CoF!Izuku by user Scinn:
https://scinn-tilly.tumblr.com/post/181937371420/skosnosnsosjsosnks-can-i-just-say-how-much-i

See the end of the chapter for more notes

For his third day of quirk training, Hitoshi got a surprise volunteer to use his quirk on for part of the morning.

“Well Shinsou, I must say– it’s nice to see you outside of that bubble of 1-A associates you have,” Monoma drawled at him with a smirk. His words held their usual snide attitude, but it was clear from the pale look on his face that he was running on empty.

“Monoma… Come to think of it, someone from the remedial group said that you also had extra lessons. Did you volunteer to get a break?” That’s the only reason he could think of for why this guy would volunteer to be brainwashed.

He thought he heard some of the 1-A remedial group bring it up with Aizawa, who denied them saying that their extra exhaustion would be a lesson to do better on their next practical tests. The 1-B homeroom teacher, Vlad King, must have a different opinion if Monoma was accepted as a volunteer.

“It is true I had… extra lessons– but don’t let that fool you! 1-B only had one student fail the
practical final while 1-A had five; that means my class was the clear victor this round!” Monoma declared with a hand pointing up in the air. He chuckled softly with an expression of delusional superiority that seemed to indicate he was completely aware that he was ignoring the fact that he was the sole failure of his class. **What’s with this guy…?**

“But that’s not the reason why I volunteered, Shinsou,” Monoma brought himself out of his delusions to continue speaking, “You see, I’ve been wanting to speak with you for awhile now, but you were always surrounded by 1-A students. I thought this would be a good opportunity to use as a starting point.”

Hitoshi raised his eyebrows, then looked around to make sure no one was within hearing distance before asking, “What did you need to talk with me about? Does it have to do with that fate stuff?”

Monoma’s half-lidded eyes examined him carefully as he explained in a more serious tone, “Not at all. I simply thought it would be interesting to talk to you since we seem to be similar.”

Those words got a genuine response of surprise out of Hitoshi. He blinked at the blond boy for a few seconds before narrowing his eyes at him. “I really don’t see how we’re similar outside of the weird fate terminology…”

Monoma gestured towards him with a delicate hand movement. “I’m betting that people have told you that you couldn’t be a hero with the quirk that you have, right? It’s the same for me. As you probably remember, my quirk is *Copy*. Everyone said that I wouldn’t be able to do anything on my own, that I would make a worthless hero. I know what it feels like to be unable to do anything; that’s how we’re similar.”

Monoma moved from standing in front of Hitoshi to stand beside him, watching the 1-A and 1-B students training. Hitoshi just watched him with a neutral expression.

Still looking away from Hitoshi, Monoma continued, “Despite the fact that you stand with many from the class that I dislike –and are close to that particularly vexing golden boy– I’ve taken a liking to you. You need to be broad-minded to survive– you’re the same type as me. We’re unchosen, so we need to go to extensive lengths to make ourselves chosen.”

Hitoshi felt a pit of displeasure build in his chest, and he grimaced. “I have the feeling that you aren’t unchosen to the same extent that I am. Also, that doesn’t make me happy.”
“But it’s the truth!” Monoma laughed out, spreading his hands. Then, he side-eyed Hitoshi. “Back at the Sports Festival when you brainwashed Midoriya, how did you get him to open his mouth?”

“You’ve been so blessed! To have been granted a miracle like that—to have been saved from being unchosen—without even having to work or sacrifice for it!”

“Don’t talk about things you know nothing about”

Residual guilt joined the displeasure still in his chest. Hitoshi had to look away from Monoma as he admitted, “Based on the speech he gave, I thought comparing his current situation where he had a quirk to his situation before when he was quirkless would be an emotional topic for him, and I was right. But I said some things that I shouldn’t have… So as a word of warning, don’t talk shit to him about that. He wasn’t born with that quirk…”

Monoma hummed at Hitoshi, as though he had confirmed an assumption the other boy had. “I suppose I’ll respect your request. But in any case, in order to become heroes we have no choice but to resort to un-hero-like conduct. Otherwise, we can never match up to those powers that can do anything and everything. We don’t resemble those figures we aspired to be in the slightest.”

Reminded of how he had to trick a teacher with a fake announcement that implied there was a villain attack just to pass his final and come on this trip, Hitoshi sighed, “I guess you have a point. But just because we’re similar in that way doesn’t mean we have to like each other, you know.”

Monoma finally frowned at that. “I suppose you would think that way, seeing how your closest friend is one of those people that can do anything and everything.” His eyes glanced away from Hitoshi to observe Izuku, who reappeared out of nowhere in the distance. Hitoshi’s eyes followed the other’s gaze to watch as Izuku disappeared once more with a shattering of crystal.

“What a miracle it must have been to wake up one day and find that he had such an extraordinary power, both from his quirk and that other thing. He’s one of the blessed now, Shinsou, and the blessed have power. Personally, with the kind of power that boy and other possible “Children of Fate” like him have—the power to “change fate”—I think they’re powerful enough to destroy this world. Even many of the normal people blessed with power could probably manage it. Doesn’t that scare you even a bit?”

“Izuku wouldn’t do something like that!” was Hitoshi’s instant angry response, but then he considered what he knew of his friend’s stance on society for a moment and amended it with, “…Or at least, he wouldn’t “destroy” it in the sense that he leaves it in ruins. He does seem discontent with things, so he might want to make a new world order or something.”
“You say that like it’s a normal thing for people to be capable of making a new world order…”
–And yeah, Monoma might have a point with that. Hitoshi has become very desensitized to abnormal things ever since he started hanging out with Izuku...

“But anyway,” Hitoshi tried to continue with his dissent, “can you really say they’re “blessed” when they’re literally punished for being able to do what they can? That sounds more like a curse to me. And that’s what we are trying to avoid. After all, if they have the power to destroy the world, then we have the potential to do so as well. It’s even in the name– Potential Children of Fate.”

Monoma’s eyes widened in surprise. He looked away from Hitoshi and brought his hand up to cup his chin in thought as he said, “We have the potential to do so as well, huh? I hadn’t considered it like that… For the kind of depressed and tired atmosphere you give off, you’re a surprisingly optimistic person.”

Hitoshi felt his eyebrow twitch at that. “Depressed and tired atmosphere– and you’re trying to say that you like me?” he questioned in exasperation.

“Oh, I’m sorry– did I give you the impression that was a romantic confession? I know this must be a huge disappointment for you, but I meant that in a “I like you as a friend” kind of way. Maybe with time you can convince me otherwise!” Monoma teased with a smirk returning to his face.

“You know that’s not what I meant…”

Monoma just continued on with his thoughts as though he hadn’t heard Hitoshi, “I guess being able to use that kind of power isn’t entirely a negative thing– Oh, so now that Hitoshi’s mentioned that Monoma has the potential to use that power, it’s suddenly not such a bad thing. Honestly, this guy is just…

“–after all, it certainly seemed to work out in the favor of 1-A’s homeroom teacher.”

Hitoshi’s thoughts came to a crashing halt.

“What– ” he had to pause to reorient his words, “What are you talking about?”
Monoma glanced back to Hitoshi with a look of careful consideration. “You mean you haven’t figured it out? Obviously, something major happened during the USJ incident that required the use of Midoriya’s quirk. He said that his quirk transfers pieces of those so-called “Fruit” at the cost of a punishment, and the example punishment he gave for Children of Fate at least involved damage to body parts.”

A sinking feeling entered Hitoshi’s stomach. His jaw clenched hard, and his lungs felt like they had trouble breathing.

“And after coming back from the USJ, Eraserhead just happens to be missing an eye, and Present Mic just happens to have permanently lost control of his quirk? You can argue that the first is just a coincidence, but people don’t just randomly lose control of their quirk—especially not after having spent years perfecting it as a hero.”

Monoma leaned towards him with a serious glint in his eyes to whisper, “That means… that something must have happened to Eraserhead that was worse than a missing eye, worse than a hero losing control of their quirk, and could only be fixed by changing his fate. I can’t say for sure what happened, but Midoriya was very touchy about the topic, so… it must have been bad.”

“Shinsou, Monoma! I don’t see any brainwashing going on here—” Hitoshi violently jolted back as Aizawa walked up to them. It seemed like the man was about to berate them, but after getting a look at Hitoshi’s face, his expression changed from one of irritation into one of concern. “Shinsou, you look pale…”

Aizawa placed a warm hand on his shoulder and looked down at Hitoshi with his single eye, but Hitoshi could only stare at the eye covered by the stark white medical eye patch. “Did something happen?”

He wanted to say, *I don’t know— did something happen, Aizawa-sensei? Izuku’s mentioned that his quirk can revive people. Did he need to do that for you?*

But of course, he couldn’t manage to say anything right now, let alone *that.*

“I think Shinsou needs a moment to rest, Aizawa-sensei,” Monoma answered for him, Hitoshi could just vaguely make out that concern was in his voice too.

Ragdoll -who was acting uncharacteristically serious- walked up to the teacher to whisper in his ear,
but Hitoshi could still hear what she was saying due to how close Aizawa was to him, “It seemed like they were talking about something serious, so I let them talk for a bit, and by the end Shinsou heard something shocking. I think he just needs some time to process it…”

Aizawa frowned, before leading Hitoshi away to a bench next to the building. “Sit here for a few minutes, and… consider talking to me about your troubles. You’re well-being is my number one priority.”

Those words would usual bring a feeling of elation to Hitoshi, but right now all they did was worsen his dread at what might have happened.

Izuku finally had a breakthrough on the Through the Looking Glass spell when he came into the Crystal Palace’s library during his allotted training time to find Penguin Yagi prepped with a piece of paper. It had a drawing of Kurogiri from the League of Villains on it forming two separate warp gates a small distance away from each other. One had a small Shigaraki by it sticking his leg through, as though he was about to walk into it, while the other had the leg sticking out of it.

Izuku slapped a hand over his face. “I need another mirror where the destination’s at!”

Penguin Yagi nodded in agreement while adjusting his glasses. Toshi-pingu clapped in celebration of the other’s brilliance.

Izuku pictured two mirrors about the size of his head, one by where he was, and the other next to Momoka’s Mirror. With that in mind, he intoned, “Through the Looking Glass!”

Two oval mirrors materialized in the air starting from the bottom at their silvery frame and leading up to their tops. When Izuku looked into it, it seemed like a regular mirror, only showing his reflection.

When he touched his finger tips to it, the surface rippled and they passed through as though the mirror was made of water. There was no sensation to it, like his fingers were simply passing through
air. Izuku stuck his whole hand through to watch as it came out of the second mirror simultaneously. He waved at Momoka with it, who was watching from her mirror with amusement.

“This should make taking multiple people or items to different places in the Crystal World more convenient, but for individual travel just moving myself is easier,” Izuku muttered to himself. He withdrew his hand from the mirror and found he could easily will the mirrors away.

Repeating the spell with taller, full-length mirrors, Izuku walked through to stand next to Momoka. The mirror stayed in existence even after he finished passing through, so it was clear they were meant for more than one-time usage.

“Will you give me a hint for the spell you wanted me to learn now?”

Momoka smiled at him. “You need two mirrors for the spell to work –just like the regular version– but they work differently.”

Izuku waited for a moment.

Then he asked, “…Is that all you’re going to give me?”

“You’re a smart boy, little Izuku, you can figure out the basics just with that and what you already know about it.”

“Evidently not, since I needed a penguin to help me with the regular version!” Izuku pointed at Penguin Yagi for emphasis.

“Yagi is a very smart penguin. Much smarter than the human he was named after at least.”

Izuku sputtered indignantly, “Toshinori-san is smart too! You’re just saying that because you know it would annoy him if he heard you say that! And I still need more to work with— I don’t even know the incantation for this one!”

“Hmm… fine. One more hint!” Momoka held up a single, black gloved finger. “This spell isn’t just an alternate version of Through the Looking Glass, it’s also an alternate version of another spell you
“…How on Earth was I supposed to figure that out on my own?”

“Through logic combined with trial-and-error.”

“That would’ve taken ages!”

Predictably, Izuku did not figure out which spell he should try combining with Through the Looking Glass until after his training time had ended and he was helping his classmates prepare stew for dinner. When the thought came to him, he unconsciously dropped the firewood he was holding in shock, and crouched over to hold his head in his hands.

He started muttering under his breath with frightening fervor, “Oh my Momoka– the spell needs the physical copy of the Penguindrum, which can only be accessed outside the Crystal World, and the only spell that can be used outside the Crystal World is Survival Strategy! I have to relearn Survival Strategy dammit!”

From beside him, Shouto blinked down at his pitiful form. “Did you just use Momoka’s name as a replacement for God?”

“Yes!” Izuku cried into his hands, “Because she’s more frustrating to work with than any God or gods that exist in this universe!”

Momoka watched Izu-pingu preparing to leave from her usual place in the mirror. The penguin seemed excited –one would never think that he had only just previously come back to wash off a thick coat of pink paint that covered his entire body, signifying his painful failures throughout the day.
“Make sure you tell little Izuku that you’ll be sneaking around the forest during his test of courage to scare the 1-B kids,” she reminded him.

Izu-pingu looked at her with a disappointed look that said, *If I do that, he won't let me. He’ll think it’s cheating or something to scare them when it’s their turn.*

“Oh Izu-pingu, have I taught you nothing?” Momoka grinned the bird, “Just don’t phrase it like that! Say you’ll be doing more “stealth training” instead.”

Izu-pingu immediately regained his excitement, sticking a flipper towards her in a manner that suggested he was giving her a thumbs up with no thumb.

“Do me a favor and focus your efforts on Alice’s Sister, will you? Also, remember to not come back unless you have to— little Izuku sent off Teddydrum Black to watch over that child again. He’ll be upset if you accidently transport it away.”

Izu-pingu nodded once more, then with three squawks disappeared from the Crystal World.

As though it was waiting for that que, a golden light caught Momoka’s eye. She turned around to look at the mirror version of the library, and saw that her storybook was lit up. The light was a beautiful gold— hiding the ominous warnings it surely contained. She narrowed her eyes at it.

Despite being alone, Momoka couldn’t help but let out a sarcastic retort, “Fate always has the *best of* timings…”

As Dabi and the rest of the Vanguard Action Squad prepared to dispatch themselves to various parts of the Wild, Wild Pussy Cats’ land, he scowled at the hulking creature before him. It failed to react to his displeasure.
This thing the League leader lent to Dabi –a Nomu is what they called it– was a fucking creepy-ass creature that doesn’t even look like it has eyes, but Shigaraki still insisted it could see just fine.

Well it better– if this thing kills the people Dabi has to tell it to avoid, he’s certainly not going to be the one to accept responsibility for that.

But the ability of this unnatural creature to distinguish the images of people was of vital importance. Not just for the mission, but for Dabi’s personal goals.

Wouldn’t it just be the peak of comedic tragedy for him to go through all this effort only for this thing to mess it up and kill the only person in this god-forsaken forest that Dabi can’t accept being killed? He’s already on edge with the possibility of the other crazies doing that, and he can’t even tell them not to without looking like a suspicious fuck.

It’s not that he particularly wants to kill children –he would prefer not to, actually– but Dabi had turned away from conventional morals after taking on his name years ago. And the Hero Killer’s words solidified his belief that if he wanted to accomplish his ambitions, sacrifice was required.

“I must make things right… Someone must be stained in blood…”

“The world is corrupt– Society is corrupt! Heroes are corrupt! It’s all about winning and losing, who is ranked above and below you, the profitable and unprofitable, the accepted and unaccepted, the chosen and unchosen. They never try to give, all they care about is taking!”

To Dabi, truer words have never been spoken.

The world was an ugly place; made even uglier by the so-called heroes who fail to save those in need, ignore those in need when it suits them, or even outright abuse their power at the cost of the people they claimed to be protecting. This society was an ugly one; made to be ugly by the people in power at the top who used the hero industry and society’s quirk hegemony to reinforce their power and leadership, and covered up the ugliness with a fool’s gold paint made of flashy “heroes” and media coverage.

That was why he was here, about to assist in a plan that would likely kill and hurt many children whose only sin was that they had bought into the hero industry rhetoric that society had force-fed them since before they could talk. It was regretful to think about, but to make a new order, the old order must fall first– and nothing will make it fall faster than the public seeing how the fake heroes
fail to protect their upcoming generation.

–He excuses his actions with that, but on the inside he knows that his actions aren’t ones made for altruistic goals. There’s only one “hero” that he really wants to see fall, it’d just be nice to see the rest fall with him–

But even with that in mind, there was a line that he refused to cross. To Dabi, there was one person in the forest that he couldn’t allow to turn into a sacrifice. He may make things harder for that person or even hurt that person in the future with some of the plans he was considering putting into action, but if Dabi is the cause of his early death, then he would be nothing less than a complete failure even if he does get everything else he wants. That was why he pushed to get the position of squad leader.

Seeing that none of the others were close by, too preoccupied with their own preparations, Dabi presented three pictures to the Nomu and pointed at them. One was of Bakugou Katsuki, another one was of Midoriya Izuku.

And the last one was of Todoroki Shouto.

“When I send you out to fight later, do not engage these people. Understand?”

The thing nodded dumbly at him, mumbling nonsense in response.

God he hopes this thing is smarter than it looks…

“The Vanguard Action Squad has assembled and finished their preparations, and they’ve been briefed that the student with the mind-control quirk is among the heroics students. Also, the leader of the operation, Dabi, has just received the Nomu,” Kurogiri reported in his usual professional tone.
“Excellent,” All for One responded from his seat, connected to various machines with tubes. He steepled his hands to lean forward. “Make sure Shigaraki reminds them that when it comes to Midoriya Izuku, his live capture is the number one priority. If it comes to letting him leave alive or taking him dead, he must be left alive. His quirk is much too valuable to lose in another scare like what could have happened with the Hero Killer. We can always attempt another capture operation for him in the future.”

“Understood…” Kurogiri confirmed, trailing off a bit. The mention of Midoriya Izuku made Kurogiri’s mind into a mess.

It made him think of that boy’s quirk.

Of that glittering opaque crystal that was colorless yet refracted light into countless colors within its body, colder to the touch than it looked.

_Of that crystal shell he had awoken in, with the top breaking into pieces as he rose to look at the handsome man standing by his side. The man who, like a god, had told him the reason for his existence, and given him his name. Of the questions that the man wove away as simply as one waves away the smoke of a small, inconsequential ember._

_That man is no longer handsome, but Kurogiri’s questions still persist in the depths of his mind._

Lately, those things have been the only things he thought of during his free time.

It seemed that All for One noticed this, because he then asked, “What have you been mulling over, Kurogiri? It’s not like you to be this distracted.”

He was hesitant to question his master about this matter, but he had little choice in it. While All for One may have phrased his order as a request, it was still an order.

“I’ve been looking back over the Sport Festival footage of Midoriya Izuku since Shigaraki Tomura has been so preoccupied with him, and I realized that the large crystal he used to capture the mind-control student during the tournament… _is very much like that crystal from before._”

Kurogiri’s lit-up eyes focused on his master, and the mist that made up both his body and his warp gate was unnaturally still from his forced control. “You said that you knew of that quirk previously,
“Ah, so you have been dealing with one of the basic questions humanity faces; how we came to be in this world is a question that every human has asked themselves, I’m sure. I will say only this— that quirk was involved, but do not waste any energy in trying to figure out how it occurred. There are some things in this world that you are not aware of that even I barely comprehend, trying to look into them will do you no good.”

All for One spread his hands out in a grand gesture as he smiled at Kurogiri. “But do not be discontent with that. After all, you already have had many of the other basic questions humanity faces answered for you, have you not? What or who gave you your existence? Me. What is the reason for your existence? To serve me. Do you really need to know anything more than that?”

Kurogiri glanced away from his master for a moment. “I suppose not. I apologize for my impudence.”

All for One simply laughed at him good-heartedly, “There is no need to apologize! After all, the fact that you can consider these things means that you were a success, Kurogiri…”

Even though the man had no eyes and was sitting down, placing him at a lower height than Kurogiri, he tilted his head in that way that made it seem like he was looking down at Kurogiri. Like how a scientist looks down at their lab specimen.

“It brings me joy to see how closely you replicate humanity, Kurogiri. It’s almost like you’re a real person.”

Kurogiri used to feel a pang of pain in his chest whenever All for One had said things like that about him before, but he’s come to accept his existence as an artificially made being.

All for One turned his head away from Kurogiri to look at a file on his table. Kurogiri recognized it as the one on Midoriya Izuku.

“Perhaps if I can collect this quirk, I can make more successes like you…”

Chapter End Notes
References from this chapter:
Some of Monoma’s and Shinsou’s dialogue is from the bnha manga
Blessings and Curses are Rolled into One

Chapter Notes

More fanart! This one is a WIP by user Scinn again :) https://scinn-tilly.tumblr.com/post/182265935500/a-wip-of-cof-izuku-gonna-use-this-as-lighting

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Once upon a time, there lived a handsome prince who turned into a monster, the Beast.

He was the son of the Evil Queen who was jealous of the fair knight Snow White, and the Evil Queen was not kind to his children. The Beast was considered a worthless prince that could not succeed his father’s throne, much like the rest of his siblings were with the exception of his youngest brother, Cinderella.

However, despite being the heir to the Evil Queen’s kingdom and delusions, Cinderella was not loved by the Evil Queen, but reduced to a mere servant that was meant to be an extension of his father by surpassing Snow White as the fairest knight in all the land. The Evil Queen carelessly hurt everyone around him, including the entirety of his family, in his pursuit to be the fairest of them all. And over time the Beast came to hate him for this.

Because of that hate, one day the once handsome prince faced his father in battle. But he was beaten effortlessly. In his desperation to punish his father for the pain he brought upon their family, the prince burned himself alive with his own power to strike a blow on the Evil Queen.

But this was not enough. And thus, the prince who had turned into a beast wandered the land in a self-imposed exile.

However, the Beast had never let go of his hatred for the Evil Queen. In fact, it had grown to the point that he wished to kill his own father. Then, the hatred grew to encompass all the knights in the land, seeing them as imposters who do not adhere to true justice— for how could they be true knights if his father is among them? And how could the kingdom they served be considered just, when it purposely ignored the sins of his father?

Thus, his heart had become ugly as well as his appearance.
And so when the Black Knight’s attempt at revolution was spread throughout the land, he decided to join the order of the Huntsman and Witch to aid them in their war against Snow White.

In the Huntsman’s and Witch’s next step towards revolution, the Beast will be the one to lead the charge. He will perform the Huntsman’s bidding due to his ugly heart and hatred, even if it places him against his still beloved family. And with him, he will bring all manner of the deranged and discarded to fight.

Will this order of evil triumph over the knights by leaving a scar on their next generation and the hearts of the kingdom’s people? Will the Huntsman continue to serve the Witch without realizing the shackles upon him? Will the Witch get the power and revolution that he desires?

Will the Beast stay a mere beast, or will the curse upon his heart be broken by beauty?

Most of those are questions that will be answered at a later time, but they are the questions embroiled in this battle. So when will they be answered?

Only fate will decide, perhaps.

A golden book closed shut once the reader had reached the end of the black inked words and could see only blank pages followed.

“That Evil Queen really has made a mess of his kingdom… But even so, I wonder how you will insert yourself into this tale, my dear Prince of the Crystal…”

“You’re not leaving to see that kid like you did yesterday?” Shouto asked him during dinner.

Izuku shook his head as he finished the last spoonful of his stew, and then got up to prepare a bowl
for Kouta. He tried to find a way to speak vaguely so their closer classmates wouldn’t overhear something they shouldn’t, “His… condition is like yours, and time is needed for ice to thaw. I left him something to think about yesterday, so now I’m waiting to see if he’ll approach me about it before the end of the trip. Teddydrum Black was able to get him to eat though—so I’m sending it back to him again.”

Shouto looked down at his own chest in remembrance. “I see… by the way, how has my condition been doing? You haven’t mentioned anything in a while.”

Izuku smiled brightly at him. “That’s because it’s been doing well! You made a lot of progress by… admitting what you did to Aizawa-sensei.” He tried to mime the shape of an apple, then wrapped his hand around the bottom half of it as a way to show Shouto’s Fruit of Fate was only half frozen now. Shouto nodded in understanding.

After Izuku finished sending off Teddydrum Black with Kouta’s stew, everyone prepared for the test of courage. Around this time, Izu-pingu came out with a piece of paper saying that he was going to take this chance to do more stealth training in the forest.

Izuku was not fooled for a second. “If Momoka-san told you to prank Monoma, he’s at remedials. He won’t be in the forest with the other 1-B members.”

Izu-pingu hung his head in disappointment.

Izuku just rolled his eyes. “If you want to try sneaking around the forest, fine. But don’t freak out class 1-B.” Izu-pingu saluted in confirmation before waddling into the darkness of the trees.

1-A’s remedial group was dragged against their will to the classroom by Shouta. And with them gone, the Pussy Cats could finally set the random pairs of 1-A students that would be entering the forest trail together. Fate continued to show that it liked irony, because Hitoshi got put with Ojiro—who he was still awkward with due to the brainwashing thing from the Sports Festival—Izuku was the only one who had to go alone, and Shouto ended up with Kacchan of all people.

Shouto was glaring intensely at Kacchan, who was purposefully ignoring the mean look, while saying, “Is it really okay for Izuku to go by himself? He tends to have bad luck with these things…”

“For the sake of everyone here, I think either half ‘n’ half or me should switch with someone,” Kacchan said in a completely calm tone, and wow—he must really not want to be alone with Shouto-
kun for an extended period of time. Izuku can’t really blame him though

“Don’t worry about it, boyfriend-kun,” Pixie-Bob waved them off, “This is our private land. The only people your trouble magnet has to worry about are the students of 1-B! Also, switching is strictly forbidden!”

Well… if their forest gets burnt down now, it’s the Pussy Cats own fault really. Kacchan had even tried to be polite about it to show it was serious…

Tokoyami, who got lucky and was paired with his friend Shouji, pushed his hands into his pockets and declared, “What a mad banquet of darkness…”

Once again, Izuku is left to question if Tokoyami’s personality is actually like this, or if the boy is just trying way too hard to be edgy… But that’s a good line, maybe he’ll steal it one day.

Soon, though, these simple fun times came to an abrupt end.

Most of the groups had been sent off, with Tsuyu and Ochako being the fifth group to leave. The only members of 1-A left in the clearing with Mandalay, Tiger, and Pixie-Bob were Izuku, Hitoshi, Tenya, Ojiro, and Kouda.

That was when the sharp, almost painful tension of fate weighted down on Izuku’s back. His eyes widened as his hands started to shake from the electrifying chill of it.

The intensity was so strong, Izuku immediately gasped and yelled to the group, “We need to leave, now!”

“What’s wrong Midoriya– is that smoke?!” Mandalay cried out, distracted by the sign of danger.

With a yell, Pixie-Bob flew towards the forest by some pink-colored force, and her head was brutally punted into the ground by the large object being held by a casually dressed person wearing sunglasses. They stepped out of the darkness of the forest with a lizard-like man dressed in a get up reminiscent of the Hero Killer.
“Stay out of our way, kitty cats,” the villain pinning Pixie-Bob to the ground said with a grin.

“Pixie-Bob!” Izuku tried to run forward, only to be held back by an arm. He turned around to see that a pale-faced Tenya and horrified looking Hitoshi had both grabbed him.

“Pleased to meet you, UA students!” the lizard-man greeted them, spreading his arms out, “We’re the League of Villains’ Vanguard Action Squad!”

“League of Villains?! How did they find us?!” Ojiro asked the million-dollar question. But right now there wasn’t anytime to think about it–

The villain holding the large object added further pressure to Pixie-Bob’s head. “Should I go ahead and crush her pretty little skull in? Should I?”

“As if I’d let you!” Tiger growled.

“Wait, wait. Don’t be so hasty, big sis Magne! Holding power over someone’s life is everything!” The other villain stretched out a scaled hand towards Magne. “Or don’t you believe in following Stain’s tenets?!”

–It all fucking comes back to Stain. When will people just drop that guy?!–

Tenya spoke in a low voice, “Stain… so these are his followers!”

“Yep, we sure are! The name’s Spinner by the way!” Spinner reached at his back for what looked like a large sward covered in cloth, then set his eyes on Izuku. “But more importantly… that kid there helped bring about Stain’s end, didn’t he?!”

Hitoshi visibly swallowed, before shouting out, “Why do you even buy into all that Stain crap anyway?!”

Spinner opened his mouth to argue, but his partner in crime slammed a hand over his mouth, giving a significant gesture towards Hitoshi. Hitoshi scowled at his lack of results.
They know what his quirk is. Did they really just remember from the Sports Festival, or were they told he was here? They shouldn’t have expected for Hitoshi to be on this trip with them when he’s still a general education student.

“Tiger! I’ve broadcast the order, Ragdoll will make sure the other students are safe! Our job is to hold these guys here!” Mandalay relayed, then she turned back to the students to order, “Get back to the lodge, and remember; no fighting! Lead them class president!”

“Understood!”

But as Tenya turned to leave, Izuku realized that there was no way these were the only villains here. Not only was the smoke coming from a completely different part of the forest, but two measly villains wouldn’t have been enough to warrant how heavy the feeling of fate in the air was.

Kouta should be with Teddydrum Black… but is that really enough?

Izuku’s question was answered when a red beam of light shot straight into the dark sky. He had gone over that signal with the residents of Crystal World before–

It was a distress signal.

Immediately, dread and horror filled Izuku to the brim. He stared at the spot in the sky that had held that signal with wide-eyes.

“Leave without me Tenya–”

“What are you say?!”

“Izuku?!”

“Mandalay!” Izuku yelled desperately to the hero preparing to face down one of the villains, “My Teddydrum is with Kouta, and it just signaled they need help!”
Mandalay grit her teeth painfully hard. Tiger was the one to answer, “What do want to do, child?”

“In this sort of circumstance, there’s no way Teddydrum Black would ever let Kouta go! It’d trust that I’d see its signal and transport them away!”

“Then do it,” Mandalay gave the grim order, “Take the rest of them with you, and stay there until everything’s been taken care of! It’ll be safer for you that way anyway.”

Spinner took off the cloth over his sword to reveal what could only be considered a monstrosity made of many smaller swords tied together that would surely cause the Champion of the Rose Bride to weep in fury at the blasphemy of it. Izuku didn’t stick around to see what happened next though, having already made a small crystal marble and thrown it between him and his classmates.

“Survival Strategy!”

Kouta had just finished eating the stew that the annoying robot had brought him when both his and the robot’s eyes were drawn to the blue flames spreading throughout the forest below them.

“What—” his words were cut off by the Teddydrum suddenly grabbing onto Kouta, holding him in its metal arms. It rocketed into the air with Kouta without warning.

Only to be pulled down and slammed onto the ground. It turned so that its back hit the hard rock while Kouta was left unhurt on its front.

All of this happened within the span of only a few seconds. Disoriented, he looked down at the robot’s long leg to find that the fingers of an overly muscled arm had pierced through the metal. And when Kouta’s gaze followed up the arm, he was staring at a masked man.
Then, that man carelessly threw off his mask with his free hand, and Kouta was staring into the face of his parents’ murderer.

The man gave him a creepy grin as he stared down at Kouta and the robot with one normal eye and one artificial eye. “I was just coming up here for the view, but this thing is one of Midoriya Izuku’s robots isn’t it? He and that Bakugou kid are our targets– you don’t happen to know where he is, do you kid?”

Kouta couldn’t get any words out through his horror. He just trembled, frozen in place. Teddydrum Black held him closer to its chest and tried pull away its leg, only to fail. The man’s grip was too strong.

Cannons appeared from its shoulders and fired at the villain, only for a shell of muscle-fibers to enclose him and take the hit. The murder seemed completely fine as it laughed at the robot, “Ha! What is this thing trying to do? Teddy bears can’t actually protect kids, you know! Even if it’s big, there’s no way this hunk of junk can take me on–”

The murderer –Muscular, Kouta remembered from the reports– punched the end Teddydrum Black’s free left leg, which had tried to kick at the man. A shell of muscle around the hand protected it from the fire of the rockets as his punch crunched through the foot and destroyed them.

He threw the Teddydrum against the wall of Kouta’s secret base. Once again, the robot positioned Kouta away from where rock slammed into its side. Kouta could hear one of its cannons scrape against the wall as the Teddydrum’s body formed a gorge, getting torn off with in a bunch of metal scrap and wires. Through his tears, the sight of the gaping spot on Teddydrum Black’s right shoulder looked like it should be painful.

The damage to the mountain side caused by the robot’s hit led to a cascade of many rocks and boulders chipping off and falling. Teddydrum Black abruptly switched them around so that it was crouched over the ground and Kouta –with one arm bracing itself up by the elbow and the other still holding Kouta– as the rock fall rained down upon its back.

Muscular took advantage of Teddydrum Black’s diverted attention to lift one of the very large boulders that had fallen down, and slam it onto the robot’s right leg– crushing the end of it and pinning it in place. Teddydrum Black swiftly moved Kouta’s positioning so that he was under the lower part of its chest. And he figured out the reason why only a second later when Muscular’s overly enlarged arm punched straight through the area of Teddydrum Blacks torso where Kouta had just been.
Kouta could no longer see his parents’ murderer, but he could see his hand cruelly tear itself out of the Teddydrum’s chest, breaking more of its metal in the process. “Come on now! Let me play with the kid a bit, will you? Actually… what am I doing, talking to a stupid robot– if protecting this kid is wired into its programing so badly, I’ll just have to tear it apart to get to him!”

With that, Muscular started tearing off the metal on Teddydrum Black’s torso.

And Kouta knows this guy is right, in a sense. Teddydrum Black is only a robot, it probably doesn’t even feel where its body is being destroyed, but–

“Kouta, your mom and dad… It’s true that they went before their time and left you behind… But it’s thanks to them that lives were saved”

Teddydrum Black jerked the leg that was pinned by the boulder violently, and the lower part of its leg broke off at where its knee joint should be. Various gears, wires, and metal shards flew through the air as the now freed robot rolled over to shoot a short beam of light straight up into the air with its remaining cannon. Then it rolled right back over as Muscular grabbed upper part of the arm not holding Kouta and tore off that cannon.

“Did this thing seriously tear its own leg off?! Robots can be scary sometimes, huh!” the murderer of Kouta’s parents was still laughing.

“You’re going to meet a certain someone one day too, and then you’ll understand…”

Kouta started to sob. Teddydrum gazed down at him with its red eyes, and just continued to hold him, repositioning Kouta whenever Muscular’s hand strayed too close. Not even bothering to try to protect itself against the murder that gleefully tore it apart piece by piece. Muscular began going for its neck.

But how can it just be a robot when it’s protecting him so faithfully? When it’s arm around Kouta’s body was as warm as the arms of his parents had been?

Why is it letting itself be destroyed for him?!
“…Someone who will stake their life to save yours…”

After clearing up the excess metal around the neck, Muscular quickly let go of the arm to tear off Teddydrum Black’s head.

“…To you, that person will be– ”

Still being held up by the motionless, wrecked body, Kouta inched his head around to see his parents’ murderer holding Teddydrum Black’s large over-sized head and examining it in curiosity. The red lights of Teddydrum Black’s eyes died out into gray darkness.

Kouta screamed at the sight of it.

Izuku transported everyone to the Dueling Arena, and everything was a mess.

Teddydrum Black had pieces of its body scattered all over the place. A villain with some sort of muscle quirk was holding its head between his hands. And Kouta, held in the arm of the lifeless corpse of Teddydrum Black, was *screaming*.

Izuku didn’t even think twice before he blurred himself over next to the villain, and threw him off the edge of the tower. Teddydrum Black’s head was placed gently on the ground.

He then moved next to the crying Kouta, and gently took him from Teddydrum Black’s grip.

“I’m sorry… I’m sorry…” Kouta sobbed when he looked up at Izuku with teary eyes. He trembled in Izuku’s arms. “Because it had to protect me, _Teddydrum Black was–_”
“It’s okay, Kouta,” Izuku pushed past his own pain to respond in a wavering voice, “Teddydrum Black will be fixed good as new. I promise. I’m sure it will be happy to know it held out long enough for me to come help…”

At that point, Izuku’s classmates moved over to where Izuku was. Hitoshi clenched his jaw as he softly placed his hand on a patch of unbroken metal on Teddydrum Black’s torso.

“Izuku… I don’t want to be insensitive, but was it really alright to deal with the villain like that?” Ojiro questioned nervously, glancing over his shoulder where the villain went flying.

“It seems like he has a strong strength augmentation quirk, so I’m sure he can find a way to push himself to the wall of the tower with force before he finishes falling.”

–And if he can’t, who cares? Let him splat on the ground and break into a million pieces like Teddydrum Black. This isn’t the kind of damage that comes from a fight, this was torture–

“That means we need to prepare for when he comes back up… Mandalay said we aren’t permitted to fight.” Tenya intoned with serious consideration. Kouda looked over were the villain was sent over in fear.

“They said to not fight, but that isn’t really an option when we’re the only ones stuck with him here. If Izuku brings us back, then it’s just going to overwhelm Mandalay and Tiger in a three on two fight. And by the looks of Teddydrum Black, he’s a brutal fighter,” Hitoshi stated in a low voice, still pressing a hand to Teddydrum Black. Tenya didn’t look happy about that, but didn’t argue against Hitoshi’s point. In a place of complete isolation like this, there were no professionals to leave things to.

In Izuku’s arms, Kouta began to cry even more.

For the first time ever– Izuku thinks he honestly, truly, wants to kill someone

But that’s not what Kouta needs

Kouta just watched someone get torn apart trying to protect him, he doesn’t need to see more unnecessary violence. He needs reassurance that he’s safe and that no one on their side is going to be hurt anymore.
He needs to see an indomitable victory

“Just leave it to me. As long as we’re here I can deal him on my own,” Izuku firmly declared, “You all just need to stay close to me.”

Imagining a decent sized circle, Izuku incanted, “Divine Protection”

A circle of light a couple of meters in diameter formed in the ground around him, then went dark. “Everyone needs to stay within the circle.”

With a moment of hesitation, the others that were not in the circle started moving closer to Izuku, but Hitoshi still argued, “You can’t be serious about taking that guy alone…”

“I am serious. You’re the only other person that could deal with him without getting close enough to let him hurt you, and he probably knows what your quirk is like the other villains. I won’t even need to touch him.” Izuku side-eyed Kouta as he stated, “He’s no match for me here.”

Kouta looked up at him with disbelieving, teary eyes. And it was then that a silently furious Teddydrum White flew towards Izuku.

“He’s climbing up now?” The Teddydrum nodded in a disappointed manner –*most likely, it had wanted the man who had killed its counter-part to fall to his death.* “Then we need to hurry up…”

Izuku’s expression softened as he looked down at Kouta. “I’m going to let Teddydrum White hold you for right now, is that okay?”

Kouta nodded despite his tears, and once Izuku had passed him off to the comforting arms of Teddydrum White, the Prince of the Crystal called, “Come to me, my Champion of the Rose Bride!”
After being treated to a light show where a mannequin pulled a sword out of Izuku’s chest—and what does it say about Hitoshi’s life now that he was completely unsurprised by that?– their little group made up of UA students, one giant robot, and one kid stood together in a tight circle as they tensely waited for the villain that Kouta had identified as Muscular to finish climbing up.

This tension was broken a little by Iida’s apprehensive question of, “Izuku, forgive me if this seems rude… but what are you wearing?”

“Ah… I was wondering about that too, actually,” Ojiro admitted with a nervous wave of his tail. Kouda nodded in affirmation.

“Is this really the time for that, guys?” Hitoshi glared at the bunch of them as he gave a cutting retort. He was confused about Izuku’s outfit when he first saw it too, but there also wasn’t an extremely dangerous villain approaching during that time either.

“It’s fine, Hitoshi,” Izuku told him, before turning to the others standing behind him. His crown was gleaming, and he flipped back one side of his red cloak, letting it bellow out dramatically and revealing the smooth skin of his shoulder and thigh as well as the side of his puffed-up coat-tails. Izuku boldly asserted, “This uniform signifies that I am the owner of this world. In other words– it is a symbol of my power.”

Damn. Hitoshi wished he had that much confidence. But he also probably wouldn’t look as good in those tiny shorts and over the knee boots as Izuku does…

The small break from the tension evaporated as a hand appeared over the side of the arena. The fingers gorged into the floor and with a single pull of his arm, the muscled villain flew back up onto the ground. He slammed down near the edge of the tower and gave the group –specifically Izuku– a manic grin.

“While that was fucking annoying to deal with, you get points for having the guts to literally throw me off a cliff! Most heroes would be too timid to try that kind of shit!”

Izuku didn’t bother answering, just staring down the man with a piercing glare.
“Come on, don’t be like that. It’s already bad enough I can’t play with you too hard since they want you alive,” Muscular growled out, bulking up his muscle fibers as he spoke.

From his spot in Teddydrum White’s arms, Kouta suddenly cried out, “Water Hose, Mom and Dad—did you torture them to death like you did with Teddydrum Black?!”

Everyone whipped their heads over to him in shock. A horrified feeling erupted in Hitoshi’s chest.

Even the villain seemed surprised, blinking at Kouta in wide-eyed confusion. “Whoa, you’re seriously their kid? This must be fate or something! Water Hose… they’re the pair that gave me this glass eye.”

Izuku visibly grit his teeth at that.

“It’s because of you and people like you that things always end up like this!” Kouta cried in despair.

“Brats like you sure know how to pass the blame,” Muscular huffed while shaking his head, “That’s no good. I don’t hold a grudge against them about my eye. I killed them, just like I wanted to. And they tried to stop me.”

The villain took a powerful step forward as a grin reappeared on his face. “We all did our best and had to deal with the results. What’s bad is when you can’t put your money where your mouth is!”

“In that case,” Izuku interrupted him in with a stoic tone, “why don’t you stop running your mouth and prove you’re not just talk.”

Muscular’s smirk grew at that, and he raised a fist as he finished with, “Well said. I want to see how well you hold up–”

In a flash, Muscular appeared before Izuku, his bulky right arm wound back ready to deliver a punch.

But just as he was within a meter of the invisible protective circle Izuku had designated for them, a flash of light struck.
From the heavens came down a powerful lightning bolt that struck true right into the arm that Muscular was extending. The villain screamed in pain as the force of the bolt sent him flying back.

He landed hard on his back, but was recovered enough to growl at their group even though his body twitched randomly from the shock it had just received. His right arm that was lying on the ground – charred black and spasming violently– was not so recovered.

*Guess that's why Izuku wanted Kaminari as a test subject…*

Muscular’s left arm moved to push himself up, but the Champion of the Rose Bride had already blurred beside him. It speared the black Sword of Dios into the palm of Muscular’s right hand, cutting easily through the shield of muscle to pin it to the ground.

“Fuck—”

“*Will of the Crystal Princess!*”

As Muscular moved to punch away the Champion with his free left hand so that he could pull out the sword, crystal stone burst from the ground around his mostly immobilized form to encase him much like it had Hitoshi during his fight with Izuku during the Sports Festival. The only difference was that this time it looked much thicker and more constrictive.

Muscular groaned from effort as he tried to break the crystal form within his prision, only to be unable to move a centimeter. Even a man that was literally made of pure muscle couldn’t fight his way out of it.

“That did quite a lot of damage for someone that wasn’t supposed to be mortally wounding me… but he *was* probably trying to maim me, and it still didn’t kill him. So I suppose it’d be safe enough to use against non-malicious people too…” Izuku mumbled to himself –*He still hadn’t tested that thing?!*

Then Izuku turned to address the rest of them –*most of who were just stupidly staring at the quickly handled villain*– “I’m going to get some poppies to put him to sleep. Just stay in the circle in case something happens; it still has two more uses before I have to reset it. *Through the Looking Glass*”
A floating mirror the size of half a person appeared before Izuku, and he stuck his arms and torso through, presumably collecting said poppies on the other side of where the mirror lead.

*Just another day in this crazy Wonderland for the Prince of the Crystal, huh…*

“That guy…” Kouta stared at the still struggling villain in wonder, “he really took care of him just like that! Even though Muscular is…” –Obviously powerful and crazy, the man who killed my parents; there were many ways Kouta could’ve ended that sentence, but none would have quite reflected the look in his bewildered eyes right now.

*He looked like his world had been taken apart piece by piece, and then it put together in a strange new way that he could barely comprehend. Hitoshi understands that feeling, and is beginning to believe that many others who have talked to Izuku understands it as well.*

Not being capable of reaching how high up Kouta was in Teddydrum Whites arms, Hitoshi instead patted Teddydrum White’s leg. “That’s just how Izuku is, kid. He’s good at showing people stuff they thought wasn’t possible…”

“I’m so glad you’re still here, Hitoshi-kun”

When Izuku pulled out of the mirror with a bouquet of red poppies, Iida asked, “I understand that this man is quite a dangerous villain, but was that not somewhat… overly forceful, considering we don’t have licenses yet?”

“I only did what was needed to defend against him and immobilize him, so no,” Izuku answered without hesitation, “If I had stabbed him seven times or something, now *that* would have been overly forceful.”

–*That was a suspiciously specific example to choose... But Hitoshi’s certainly not going to be the one to call him out on that*–

Izuku walked towards Muscular. Only after seeing that the man still hadn’t freed himself did Izuku let the Sword of Dios to disperse in a burst of light.

Muscular groaned as he looked up at Izuku, but didn’t particularly seem upset enough for a major villain that just got beat in a fight by a 15 year old. If anything, the way he eyed Izuku suggested he
respected the power that beat him. “Guess this time I really *was* the one that couldn’t put my money where my mouth was…”

Izuku just stuck his bouquet in Muscular’s face. “I don’t talk to people that can’t be reasoned with.”

—Considering *Izuku said he talked to both the Hero Killer and the leader of the League of Villains, that must be a horribly low bar of reasonability to pass, and Muscular still didn’t make it—*

The villain had just drifted off when Kouda cried out, “Izu-pingu’s over here, and he’s unconscious!”

Hitoshi turned to see Kouda had left the circle to approach a different side of the arena. He was holding a limp penguin in his arms. Hitoshi, Iida, Ojiro, and Teddydrum White all rushed their way over.

Izuku quickly summoned Momoka’s Hand Mirror and appeared by Izu-pingu’s side. He placed the mirror over Izu-pingu so that the wheezing penguin was reflected in the mirror along with Momoka. She examined him carefully.

“It seems like he’ll wake up soon. You probably pulled him out of whatever caused him to fall unconscious before he could take in too much of it,” Momoka explained in Izuku’s voice.

Ojiro, Iida, and Kouda all looked to Hitoshi in their confusion at the sight of the talking mirror. Hitoshi ignored them. Kouta didn’t look too put off by it, but kids were resilient to new things like that.

“So you think it was a substance of some sort that caused this, not an injury?” Izuku asked.

“Yes. From the looks of it, it was most likely an inhalant.”

Izuku frowned in displeasure. “Izu-pingu was in the forest, that means everyone there is having to deal with that stuff too…”

“Should we go out and tell the Pussy Cats?” Ojiro questioned, “I know Mandalay said to stay here, but we can just pop out and tell them that the forest is hazardous and also that the villains are after
Bakugou and Midoriya like Kouta told us, and then come back right away.”

“We can do better than that– ” Izuku suddenly straightened from a realization. He was eyeing Hitoshi’s Red Sting of Fate bracelet. “We can leave to tell them that, and then get back-up!”

“How do you plan on getting back-up? We’re quite far away from the nearest city,” Iida asked for clarification, but hope was raising in his voice.

“Hitoshi, can you show everyone what I gave you?”

Hitoshi presented the wrist with the bracelet as was asked, and Izuku pointed at it. “This bracelet lets the wearer use one Survival Strategy to come to the Crystal World without me, but it can also be used to let me appear where the wearer is in the real world with Survival Strategy Complete. And I gave one to Hawks when I went to his agency for the workplace training.”

Hitoshi blinked and couldn’t help but question, “You have the Number Three hero on transportation speed-dial? Then why don’t we get him first?!”

“Because he’s probably going to want to bring some of his sidekicks to find and collect students considering all the ground there is to cover here so there’s going to be some delay, and I need to make sure that at least one person wearing a bracelet is at the camp or else I won’t be able to bring him there.” Izuku cupped his chin in thought. “Shouto-kun has one, but he might end up using it–especially since he should be with Kacchan who is also being targeted. That’s why I need to drop Hitoshi off back at camp, and it’s best if he has all of you with him so that you can all protect each other while going back to the lodge. I can bring Kouta with me and drop him off at Hawks’ agency too.”

Izuku looked to Momoka and handed the mirror off to the Champion. “I should be back here after only a moment, so continue looking after Izu-pingu in the meantime.”

“Be careful, little Izuku,” Momoka responded, “I’m sure you’ve figured it out by now, but there was a new story in my book just now.”

Izuku sighed, narrowing his eyes in frustration, “Of course there was… What did it say?”

“The most important thing it mentioned is something that shouldn’t be said in the company of others–
Meaning Momoka didn’t want them around to hear it; got it. “–but it did say that the leader of this mission isn’t Shigaraki, but a new person it referred to as the Beast, and that the villains are all manner of the deranged and discarded.”

“Well, at least we caught one of the “deranged” I guess…” Izuku muttered while glancing at Muscular.

They huddled up in a loose circle with Teddydrum White acting as a brief shield before Izuku left. Kouta was held by the most mobile of their group, Iida, so that the robot was free to defend. Muscular was still unconscious and inside the crystal, but he would automatically come out with them when Izuku left as well unfortunately.

They mentally prepared themselves to enter the fray.

_But they weren’t prepared enough_

“Survival Strategy Complete! Mandalay~”

Hitoshi barely caught sight of a figure’s long coat and mask before Izuku and Teddydrum White suddenly vanished. Two marbles appeared in the air where they were, and a gloved hand grabbed them. The villain hightailed it back to the treetops before Hitoshi’s, Kouda’s, or Ojiro’s extended hands could grab him. It was all over within a second or two.

“Izuku~” Iida almost threw Kouta into Kouda’s arms to sprint after the fleeing villain with his quirk. His image quickly disappeared into the brush. Hitoshi followed him despite knowing there was no way he could catch up. As he left the field, he could vaguely hear the others shouting.

“Midoriya!” Tiger was cut off from his attempt to chase after the masked villain by a punch from Magne.

Magne grinned at his opponent. “You don’t think I’d let you go after him so easily, do you?!”

_It’s too unfair…_
“Mandalay! The outer part of the forest has some kind of hazardous gas in it, and the villains are after Bakugou and Midoriya! Midoriya was supposed to leave and come back with more pro heroes—” Ojiro kept it together enough to get the message they originally came back to give, though his ending sentence came out strangled –why didn’t they just stay where they were?

Mandalay growled as she dodged a swipe from Spinner’s sword, “I’ve already informed Eraserhead about Midoriya, and am in the middle of broadcasting to everyone about those other things– the rest of you go back to the lodge with Kouta! Shinsou, come back!”

Hitoshi broke through the trees, doing his best to spot areas where Iida had broken various bushes and branches in his haste to follow. He barely even heard the order he was ignoring. All he could hear was the sound of his too-fast heartbeat and–

“As long as I can assert my will over fate, I will never leave you”

It’s too unfair

Finally, Hitoshi has found a person that wants him –that has chosen him– and now they’re going to be lost to him against their will? Does fate truly wish for Hitoshi to be so cursed?

It’s too unfair

“I know what it feels like to be unable to do anything, that’s how we’re similar… We can never match up to those powers that can do anything and everything”

Hitoshi felt tears well up behind his eyes, but he forced them back. All he could do was continue to run in the dark with barely any idea of where he was going.

Chapter End Notes

References from this chapter:
Some of the villains/Pussy Cats dialogue is from bnha. The flashback dialogue in Kouta’s part is said by Mandalay in bnha. And part of Muscular and Kouta’s dialogue is from bnha.
Revolving Actors in the Play Called Life

Chapter Notes

Scinn coming through with that quality fanart again :)
https://scinn-tilly.tumblr.com/post/182341550815/done-whoop-whoop-i-was-gonna-finish-this-in-a-few
https://scinn-tilly.tumblr.com/post/182367784365/a-cleaned-up-sketch-ok-i-am-not-the-best-at-full

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Reporting in– I have just successfully captured the top priority target!” Mr. Compress’s voiced sounded through Dabi’s communicator, “However, the student with the speed quirk, Iida Tenya, is on my tail. I’m able to keep ahead of him due to him having decreased maneuverability moving through the trees compared to me, but he’s fast enough to make up for it so I have been unable to lose him.”

Twice, who had also heard the report from his own communicator, turned to Dabi to give his unneeded and confusing commentary, “Wow, that was fast! He did good work! How could he let a kid tail him? He needs to step it up!”

Dabi just sighed. While it was annoying that the man couldn’t just go straight to the next target to get this over with, Compress really just did the best he could considering the situation.

When Magne and Spinner had first called in reporting that Midoriya Izuku was at their location before starting their confrontation with the heroes, Compress had been quick to arrive in the hopes of following the original plan to trail the kid and pick him up once he was out of the pros’ sight. That plan was summarily ruined when Compress reported that Midoriya had disappeared to his pocket dimension with an order by Mandalay to not come back, and Dabi had spent a good whole minute just staring into space wondering how they could have failed to achieve a major goal of the operation less than five minutes into it.

Luckily, Compress stuck it out and waited at the location in preparation for Midoriya going against the pro hero’s order and coming back – saying something about how he recognized the kid as a fellow “high-quality performer” and that “high-quality performers never leave their stage so easily” or some other theater major bullshit– But he still had to kidnap the target right in front of two heroes and a bunch of the UA heroics students, which were less favorable conditions.

Compress continued with his report, “I would like to head into Mustard’s part of the forest so that he
is forced to stop following me, but I believe the gas is reaching into the tree tops. I would be affected as well.”

“Understood,” Dabi replied in a monotone voice, “Mustard– you heard the guy.”

Mustard’s voice, distorted by his gas mask, came through next, “Alright. I’m just lowering the very top of it, so make sure you stay at the canopy of the trees, Mr. Compress.”

“But of course,” was Compress’s polite response, “As soon as I lose my tail, I’ll set out in search of our secondary target.”

Good. The faster we can leave, the better, Dabi thought to himself, and not just because it lessened the risk to Shouto.

Having to swelter in the heat of his blue fire, which surrounding him in a raging but controlled inferno, was reminding him of painful memories.

Shouta had finished dealing with what seemed to be a clone of one of the villains and was on his way to Mandalay to send out the message that the kids had permission to fight –Because if the main targets of the villain’s attack are the children, they need that permission. There’s no way for the pros to save them all in time the way things are now– when Mandalay sent him her own message.

“Eraserhead, Midoriya was captured by a mask wearing villain who escaped further into the forest! Iida and Shinsou both ran after him, and I sent Ojiro and Kouda back to the lodge with Kouta, but the two villains Tiger and I are fighting won’t let us go after them. I’m sorry– please hurry!”

“Quite worthy of being an instructor at UA, isn’t that right, hero? Is it cause your students are so precious to you? Hope you have what it takes to protect them…”
Shouta grit his teeth through his fear and anger as he continued to run and got another message from Mandalay. This one was clearly meant for everyone on their side to hear.

“Midoriya Izuku and his robot Teddydrum White have been captured by a villain wearing a trench coat and mask, everyone please keep a look out for this individual! Bakugou Katsuki has been labeled as another target, so Bakugou– make sure to avoid the villains and especially the individual I mentioned previously! And along with various fires, deeper into the forest has been reported to be contaminated with some sort of dangerous gas, so please try flee towards the lodge and avoid heading further in!”

Coming from up the trail, Shouta spotted two of his students running towards him with a kid in their arms.

“Sensei!” Ojiro cried out, “The villain with Midoriya is in the forest past where Mandalay and Tiger are!”

“M-Midoriya– ” Kouta, who was being held by Kouda, was tearing up through his words, “Is Midoriya-san really gonna be a-alright?!”

Shouta didn’t break his stride as he ran past them and called out, “I’ll make sure he is kid! All of you just head to the lodge!”

He didn’t let his sight stray from his path. He sprinted for as long as he could until he came upon the sounds of battle and approached a clearing.

“Keep heading straight past us, Eraserhead! We don’t have time for all of us to lag behind dealing with these guys– Leave things here to us!”

Shouta didn’t argue with thoughts Mandalay projected into his head, and didn’t break his stride as he curved around the clearing keeping to the trees where the villains wouldn’t see him. He only allowed his presence to be known once he was almost entirely around the pair of fights.

“Mandalay!” he yelled before he left, “Tell the students of classes 1-A and 1-B that I give them permission to fight back against the villains! They’re the targets of the attack so we have to let them defend themselves!”
“Eraserhead!” the villain wearing sunglasses sounded in surprise, but as they tried to follow him, Tiger gave a strong blow to the head.

Tiger gave a fierce scowl, and moved to punch a second hit. “You don’t think I’d let you go after him so easily, do you?!”

Following the messy trail left behind by his students, Shouta’s speed never wavered.

_Not just Midoriya, but also Iida, Bakugou, and Shinsou— he needs to keep them all safe._

Running around sharp turns and weaving through obstacles was not something Tenya’s quirk was suited for. Engine’s intense burst of speed were best used in open areas following straight paths.

But that didn’t matter to him in the least right now.

Tenya refused to slow down, even as his shoulders and elbows glanced the rough bark of the trees as he swerved around them. Tenya refused to lose sight of the quick-moving villain that possessed his friend, even as he jumped over the tree tops and made abrupt changes to his path, even with the darkness of the night that tried to blur the image of his figure.

“Can I call you Tenya? You can call me Izuku”

_He had always had trouble making intimate friendships with his peers. They tended to see Tenya as being up-tight or stiff, and he tended to not want to waste time dallying in excessive socialization. So being able to call Izuku Izuku like Asui, Uraraka, and Todoroki had been doing and being referred to as Tenya had meant so much to him._
Just being able to be friends with Izuku meant so much…

Tenya refused to let himself feel the exhaustion he was sure his body wanted him to feel— all he could feel was the adrenaline made by his fear.

But all at once, his effort and determination were all for nothing.

His body locked its movement for no reason, and the side of Tenya’s face and torso painfully skidded across the dirt when his falling body continued its momentum. The landing was hard enough that Tenya could feel blood flow freely from scraps on his face. He screamed with effort as he tried to budge his limbs, but he couldn’t move at all.

“No! Why—”

—On the cold floor of an alleyway, his body was paralyzed, the sword impaled in his arm burned in pain, he couldn’t do anything at all—

He was so focused, so singled-minded in his pursuit, it was only now that Tenya noticed the misty clouds of gas that he had been running through. His breathing started to wheeze, and his vision started going black.

But even with all that, a sob hacked out of Tenya’s chest and his eyes welled his tears.

“Tenya… recently, Hitoshi told me that just doing the best that you can will be enough for you to still amount to good… It’s okay for you to make mistakes and be wrong, just do the best you can— alright? That’s all you can do. That’s part of what it means to be human”

Not now. Just doing his best wasn’t good enough now.

He couldn’t afford to make any mistake with Izuku’s life on the line— so how could this have happened?

How could Tenya fail to accomplish anything now?! When his success would mean the most?! Forget tests and classwork— he would have rather failed his final exam a thousand times over than
fail in this moment!

—This wasn’t how it was supposed to go. This wasn’t how it was supposed to be—

“I’m so sorry, Izuku…”

Those were Tenya’s last words before he lost consciousness.

The night had already started off bad for Shouto. He had heard that doing tests of courage with a partner could be a romantic thing —since they would get close to comfort each other throughout the scares or something like that— so he had been hoping to go with Izuku, only to be paired with Bakugou.

The silence between them had been so tense that neither of them could even be properly surprised by 1-B’s horror attempts. If anything, having something else to focus on was a relief. They left a lot of disappointed looking 1-B students in their wake.

Then, things only got worse as fires broke out and the mysterious gas appeared behind them along with an unconscious 1-B student —Tsuburaba if Shouto remembered correctly. Shouto thought they had reached the peak of their misfortune after running into a clearly crazed villain in a full body straight-jacket that was distracted by a severed arm left on the forest trial.

Shouto was proved wrong once they had received the message that Izuku was captured and that the villains were also after Bakugou.

The villain began attacking them with his powerful teeth quirk. They extended out of his mouth like tree branches made of blades, making for a disturbing sight as he loomed above them like a long-legged spider from Hell. The two of them retreated as much as they could before they hit the gassed part of the forest, and at that point they had to defend themselves.
“The best course of action would be to use the bracelet Izuku gave me to evacuate with you and Tsuburaba,” Shouto forced out through his teeth. A shield of ice formed in front of him to block a sharp, fast growing tooth from cutting into Shouto and the boy he was carrying on his back.

Bakugou scowled at Shouto as he dodged a tooth branch that had angled itself around his ice. “And doing that will mean we’re down two of the best fucking fighters in our class! Don’t bullshit me– I know you want to find Izuku!”

“I do!” he admitted in a shout.

*More than anything, Shouto needed to see him! Shouto needed to save him from whatever fate the villains had in store for him, just like Izuku had once saved Shouto from the fate he had given himself–*

“But if we try to go after that villain we’ll just be delivering their second target to them! Izuku is a hard person to capture, so that villain must be particularly skilled at capturing people– we can’t take that lightly!”

“I’ll make sure I’m not caught! And from what you’ve said on how that damn String of Fate or whatever works, using it now would be a fucking horrible idea anyway! In the worst-case scenario where the villains leave with Izuku and he can’t come get us, *how the fuck are we supposed to leave?!* No one else is even going to know where we are!”

Shouto was forced to thicken his ice as more teeth tried to spear them. “Izu-pingu can take us out.”

“If the fucking penguin isn’t available *now* to transport Izuku out of *being taken hostage by a villain*, how can you say it’ll be available then?!”

The irritation in his voice rose, “I don’t know! I don’t know what would permanently take him out other than Izuku dying– *and if Izuku actually dies then Shouto would have much more to be concerned about, but he can’t afford to be distracted by the fear of that possibility in these circumstances* –but right now we are against strong, experienced villain in an area we can’t afford to burn down by going all out *and* we have another person we need to carry and protect!”

*“Eraserhead gives everyone in class A and class B permission to engage in combat! I repeat;*
“Everyone in class A and class B has permission to engage in combat!”

“As if we have a choice at this point!” Bakugou screamed.

Shouto was about to snap at Bakugou in irritation, but the sound of trees falling in the distance drew his attention. The rumbling grew closer, and both Shouto and Bakugou looked further down the path to see that something was approaching. The villain continued to bombard Shouto’s ice wall, seemingly not noticing disturbance.

A powerful roar sounded was heard along with the falling trees, “Where is he?! Where is that villain— he was just here!”

Shouto’s breath hitched. He knew that voice, it was more distorted and primal than he was used to hearing, but— “Dark Shadow?”

Right on que, the final line of trees crashed to the ground to reveal a towering monster of darkness. A wide-eyed Tokoyami was stuck in the middle.

“There!”

A huge claw slammed down onto the villain, breaking the firm, supporting beams he had been using to lift himself into the air. The claw grasped the villain’s entire body, then raised into the air to hit him against the ground again and again.

A bloody crater quickly formed in the spot where the villain was being pulverized. Throughout this, Dark Shadow was screaming, “Midoriya! Where is Midoriya?! Where is Midoriya?! Give him back now!”

“D-Dark Shadow, stop! He doesn’t have Midoriya! Y-You’re going to kill him!” Tokoyami’s strained voice sounded from within his beast. Pained tears were streaming from his eyes.

“Bakugou, Todoroki! Thank goodness—” Shouto turned to see Shouji running over from where Dark Shadow had emerged from. “Make some light to weaken Dark Shadow, he’s out of control!”
They didn’t need to be told twice. Without another word, Shouto and Bakugou rushed passed Dark Shadow using their respective quirks. The demon bird gave a small shriek, letting go of the now broken body of the villain and shrinking down to normal size. Dark Shadow retreated into Tokoyami’s shadow, and Tokoyami fell to his knees panting in exhaustion.

Shouji quickly used his enhanced senses to check the villain over with a couple of tentacles. “He’s still breathing, so he’s just unconscious…”

“What happened with you guys?” Shouto asked the obvious question.

“Tokoyami and I came across that villain earlier and he cut off one of my duplicated arms,” Shouji began explaining, raising the left side of his arms to show that one ended in a bloody stump, “We managed to get away, but the sight of was upsetting for Tokoyami and got Dark Shadow riled up. For a while he was just attacking noises in the area surrounding him, but then…” Shouji glanced at Tokoyami as he trailed off.

“Mandalay announced that Midoriya had been captured…” Tokoyami stated in a roughed-up voice, “In the state he was in, usually Dark Shadow wouldn’t be able to listen to the words of others– but the contents of the message caught his attention. He became frantic and switched from simply letting out his rage randomly to single-mindedly pursuing the villain we had come across.”

Tokoyami scowled at the dirt beneath him. “Shouji… I’m sorry. It’s because my heart is weak that Dark Shadow got out of hand and hurt you. I could have even killed someone– at a time as important as this, when Midoriya needs help…” His hands clenched into fists.

“It’s not your fault, Tokoyami, I forgive you.” Shouji held out a hand to Tokoyami, who looked up at his much larger friend. “But let’s save that for later, like you said; Midoriya needs our help.”

Feathered brow furrowed with unnamed emotion, Tokoyami took Shouji’s hand and stood up. One of Shouji’s tentacles that ended with an extra eye set their gaze on Bakugou, and an extra mouth continued, “But Bakugou also needs to head back to safety…”

Bakugou stood his ground with a glare. “Fuck that shit– I’m coming to get Izuku!”

Shouto cut him down mercilessly, “If we need to keep an eye on you along with everything else, you’ll just get in the way. Do you think Izuku would be happy if you ended up getting taken trying to help him?”
A full body flinch was Bakugou’s response, so his words must have struck deep, but Bakugou grit his teeth and insisted, “I have to help save him!”

Bakugou’s right hand grasped at his chest—where both Shouto and Bakugou knew his Fruit must be—and his next words came out desperate instead of angry, “You of all people know how much I need to make up to him… I can’t turn back now when there’s a possibility I’ll never get that chance again!”

For the first time since Shouto had heard what Bakugou had done to Izuku, he fully looked into the other boy’s eyes. Those red irises conveyed a deep grief and sincerity Shouto hadn’t wanted to accept before, but now they were at full strength.

Shouji cut in with his own thoughts, “I don’t know what sort of history you have with Midoriya, Bakugou, but we can’t just let you–”

“I told him to jump off the roof and kill himself in middle school.”

That stopped both Shouji and Tokoyami in their tracks.

Shouji couldn’t get another word out, all of his many eyes were wide and focused on Bakugou, and Tokoyami’s beak fell agape—guess that’s one way to shut someone up…

Mouth screwed up in tension, Bakugou continued, “We used to be best friends, and I told him that. I hurt him, both physically and emotionally, whenever I got the chance to because I wanted to set myself above him. It took me so long just to care that what I was doing was wrong—And despite all of that, he still calls me that stupid childhood nickname, and still wants to be around me, and goes out of his way to try to save me. I— I need to make it up to him. It’s not a want, it’s a need…”

Bakugou set his intense red gaze up at Shouji. “That’s why… nothing else matters. If you can think of something to say or do that will make me turn around and walk away, then try me. But my conviction is stronger than any argument you can offer. I won’t waver in this moment.”

The silence that rang between them was deafening. It ended when Shouji placed a large hand over his regular eyes and let out a strained, “Fuck.”
Tokoyami just crouched forward to hold his head in his hands. “No one talk to me for the next minute. I’m trying to keep Dark Shadow contained.”

…I think that means they can’t think of anything to convince you,” Shouto responded when it was clear neither of his other companions were in the proper state of mind to, “and neither can I. We’re wasting time– let’s just think of how we can track the villain down.”

Bakugou’s somber attitude finally broke. He gave a mean grin and pointed at himself with a thumb. “We’ve already got the bait, we just have to show it off so he sees it and tries to take it. That’s when we’ll get him!”

Shouto frowned at the mention of Bakugou being bait, but turned the idea over in his mind. “They said he headed into the middle of the forest, so if we cut through there he might find us. We can head towards the lodge pretending we’re trying to take you back.”

“This is such an awful idea…” Shouji sighed, removing his hand to show his tired eyes, “but I guess it’s exactly what we would be doing while actually taking Bakugou to the lodge, so might as well…”

“As long as both of you are at ready to use your quirks on Dark Shadow,” Tokoyami intoned, releasing his head from his hands, “he will be a formidable opponent to any villain we cross. I can’t promise he won’t try to get a hit in at Bakugou though…”

“That’s fine!” Bakugou yelled, “Let’s just go already! Creepy limbs takes the front since he’s got the extra eyes and ears, followed by half ‘n’ half, me, and edge bird at the end, so that he’s sandwiched between two powerhouses trying to get me.”

“…Creepy limbs? I mean, it’s not like you’re the first person to say I look creepy– but really?”

Shouto eyed Shouji’s mask in careful consideration. Maybe after all of this was over, he could cheer up Izuku by suggesting Shouji struggles from internalized prejudice against his appearance and that Izuku might be able to help with it?
I don’t have time to mess around with this girl, Ochako thought as she pinned down the crazed, knife welding villain to the ground, her jaw clenched and eyes narrowed in fury, Deku-kun needs help!

“Tsu-chan, is your tongue okay? Can you get her hands with them yet?”

From her spot pinned to the tree by her hair, Tsuyu showed off her bleeding tongue. “Give it a few more minutes, Ochako-chan.”

Below Ochako, a golden eye peered up at her from where the villain’s face was pressed against the dirt. “Ochako-chan… You’re a lovely one too! The smell you’ve got– could it be that you like someone? Or maybe there’s just someone you want to be like? Just like me.”

“Seeing all of that… It makes me want to be like him, to become a “prince” like him”

Shock jolted through Ochako’s body. The hands holding onto the girl unconsciously tightened.

The villain gave a twisted smile.

“Ah~ I knew it! There’s just no helping it, right? They’re so cool and so out of this world, it just makes you want to match that aura! You want to be loved and wanted like them! You change your style to match theirs, change your ideals to match theirs, and in the end you just want to literally become them!”

What is this girl saying?

“So what kind of guys do you think are cool, Ochako-chan? What kind of guys do you like? I like guys that are tattered and reeking of blood, ones that are in pain. That’s why I always carve people up in the end. It’s fun, right Ochako-chan?”

What is this girl?!
“Romance is so much fun—”

“Ah!” a cry escaped Ochako as a sharp pain erupted in her leg. She whipped her eyes down to see the villain had snuck a syringe into it.

“Ochako-chan!” Tsuyu gasped in worry.

Suddenly, a figure stumbled forward from the trees and bushes, and Ochako was shoved off of the villain, who swiftly got up and crept back.

“One on three’s no good, I’ll end up being the one killed…” the villain trailed off as her eyes focused intensely on the newcomer.

“Uraraka, Asui!” Shinsou shouted.

He looked horrible; his clothes dirty and tattered from what seemed to be an uncareful rush through the plants and trees. But even more than that, the distressed, lost look in his eyes that were still set with dark bags beneath them conveyed to Ochako more pain and vulnerability than Shinsou had ever let her see before. It was like the depth of his despair was so great, he couldn’t even spare the effort to contain it.

*Why does she have a bad feeling about this?*

A rustle in the bushes indicated that the villain had left. “Wait—”

“Careful!” Tsuyu stopped her. “We still don’t know what her quirk is!”

“But she might know where Deku-kun is!”

“Regardless, it looks like she’s already gone…” Shinsou huffed in frustration, grabbing his hair with one of his hands and looking away. “I was trying to chase after Iida, who was chasing the villain that caught Izuku, but the trail led into the gassed part of the forest. Even if I went any further I would’ve
just passed out. Iida must have been going so fast that he didn’t notice…”

More dread filled Ochako knowing that even more of her friends were in danger. “Iida-kun… and now no one’s tracking Deku-kun! How are we supposed to find him?”

Tsuyu’s large eyes gave Ochako a serious look as she said, “Kero, if we don’t have any leads there’s no point in wandering around aimlessly. We should regroup with other people for safety—maybe someone else will have more information we could use. But in terms of what we do know… we know they’re also after Bakugou.”

“Then we should meet up with Bakugou,” Shinsou replied firmly, “We’ll increase our numbers and his security at the same time.”

“Bakugou should be in a part of the forest farther away from the lodge though. I don’t think heading away from the safest location is a good idea, kero.”

“But we can’t just head back with nothing!” Ochako dissented. Shinsou echoed her feelings with an angry nod.

They argued for a few more moments, but ultimately the decision was taken out of their hands when Shouji—who was carrying someone from class B—and Todoroki burst through the trees. They looked over at their trio in surprise, and Shouji started, “Uraraka—”

“Fuck—!”

Todoroki and Shouji whipped their heads back behind them, and Todoroki cursed as he sent a spire of ice up a tree. Ochako saw a silhouette blur away from it. “Bakugou and Tokoyami have been taken!”

“That’s right!”

A man in a trench coat and smiling mask was standing in the upper branches of a nearby tree. He presented a gloved hand, which held three marbles between his fingers. “I’ve taken them with my magic! Bakugou’s not a resource that belongs on the heroes’ side. We’re going to put him on a stage where he can really shine—”
The villain was forced to cut himself off as he jumped away from an iceberg attempting to close around him. Todoroki screamed in fury that was matched by the almost crazed look in his eyes, “Give them back! Give Izuku back!”

“Give him back? What an odd thing to say; Midoriya Izuku doesn’t belong to anyone. He’s his own person, you egoist!”

“But how did you manage to do this without them noticing?!” Shinsou questioned, glare set on the villain.

It seemed like the man was about to respond, but he paused. The villain gained an air of dissatisfaction that suggested he wanted to monologue and was annoyed he couldn’t. Shinsou practically growled in irritation, and Todoroki grew an even larger spire of ice. “Give them back!”

The villain fell back to let the ice pass before him. Then he turned around and fled, jumping through the air.

“Fuck this!” Shinsou cursed as he and Todoroki charged after the villain, everyone else ran with them.

And Ochako wanted to curse at the villain too. She wanted to scream at him like Todoroki had, to let out all the fear and anger that burned inside of her. But she didn’t.

Two of our group have already lost their heads – Shinsou and Todoroki are so emotionally entrenched with Izuku and what was happening that it’s impossible for them to be as collected and steady as they usually are.

Ochako hates that Deku-kun was taken as well, but right now, the best way from her to support this makeshift rescue group was by removing herself from that hate to focus on what was going on. Both Shinsou and Todoroki are compromised, so she’ll help Tsu-chan and Shouji even them out.

Because understanding how one can best support their team in a fight is how heroes win
Shouta had followed his student’s trail all the way until he reached Iida where he was lying bleeding and unconscious on the ground. There were no other injuries to indicate how the boy had fallen unconscious. He carefully picked him up and leaned his body into his own.

This area must have had the gas Mandalay mentioned, looks like someone took care of the villain causing it…

Shouta did his best to move quickly while holding onto his fairly tall student. Without Iida’s trail, he didn’t have any other leads on where the villain had run off with Midoriya other than the fact they might head towards Bakugou next. He had to find a safe place to leave Iida so that he could continue his pursuit.

That’s when Shouta came across the sounds of a teenage boy screaming and chainsaws buzzing.

In a feat that showcased his hero training and physique, Shouta lifted both himself and his student into the tops of the trees leap through and find the obviously in danger student. He leaped closer and closer to the sound until he peered down to see Awase Yosetsu was dragging Yaoyorozu away from a Nomu with limbs made up of various hardware tools, including at least four chainsaws. The boy was able to just barely keep ahead with the use of rocket boots that Shouta had recognized Yaoyorozu based off of the Teddydrum’s rocket mechanism, but his poor handling and Yaoyorozu’s extra weight prevented him from fully utilizing them to fly away.

In a flash, his eye was red and the buzzing of the chainsaws stopped. Shouta set Iida down beside him on the branch he was standing on, then jumped off to wrap three of the Nomu’s limbs up in his capture gear. He tied the other end of the cloth to a different, thick tree, and dodged out of the way when the Nomu rushed at him.

“Aizawa-sensei, thank God!” Awase cried in relief.

“No time for that!” Shouta grabbed Iida out of the tree and put the boy on his back, he pulled at Awase, indicating he should run away with Yaoyorozu. He did his best to do all of this without letting his eye stray from the Nomu. “I give my capture gear maybe three minutes before that thing tears out of it like paper– we need to leave while we can.”
“Wait…” Yaoyorozu’s weak voice reached him, she pulled herself out of Awase’s grip “It stopped…”

Shouta paused as he considered that. True enough, the Nomu wasn’t making any moves to struggle out of the binding. But suddenly, it turned around and tried to walk away.

His eye widened in realization.

“They called it back… that means Bakugou–” He quickly handed off Iida to Awase and untied his capture gear from the Nomu and tree. “Both of you head back to the lodge, I’m following this thing to find the rest of villains.” And hopefully his two stolen students.

“Aizawa-sensei!” Yaoyorozu called to him, he looked at her to see her eyes were set with determination, “Please allow Awase-san to use his quirk to attach this to the Nomu first! Just in case.”

Just in case… Shouta lives by back-up plans. He knew there was a reason why Yaoyorozu was among his favored students.

“Permission granted. Do it.”

“We’ll never catch up this way…” Asui judged critically,. Her tone was heavy with the implication of what would happen if they couldn’t.

“Then we need to try something else!” Uraraka huffed, voice laced with exhaustion from their run.

“Fuck this!” Hitoshi doesn’t know how many times he’s repeated that phrase, but he feels like he
needed to repeat it a thousand times more to make up for this god-awful mess of a night. “Uraraka’s quirk is anti-gravity, right? Use it on me, Shouji, and Todoroki, then Asui can fling us into the sun—and by the sun I mean the villain! Release us when you think it’s right and maybe Todoroki can bullshit some propulsion mechanism with his fire if we need to go further!”

“Revising your plans to have Uraraka fling you into the sun for the purpose of villain pursuit, I see,” Todoroki retorted, “Izuku will appreciate that kind of idea recycling.”

But the ends of his mouth curled up slightly, showing that he was down for it.

Dabi was waiting at the meet up spot with Twice. He had called the Nomu back awhile ago, and had an awkward moment where he had made eye contact with a kid that was hiding in a bush nearby. But ultimately he decided to pretend like he hadn’t seen the student— they got what they came here for and had already terrorized enough children to make their point clear in his opinion. As long as they don’t get in the way, leaving them is fine.

When Toga showed up she was babbling about how she had “made a friend” and “met a boy she was into”—that poor, poor soul—and they were only waiting on Mr. Compress.

Then Mr. Compress fell ungracefully from the air and crashed landed in the clearing they were in with three UA students crushing him, one of which was Dabi’s little brother.

Why does life have to be such a bitch... “Compress!” He only gave one warning call before setting a jet of blue flames at the group, causing the already burnt skin at the bottom of his hand to sizzle slightly from the heat. Having lost feeling in that part of his skin a long time ago, he paid it no mind. Compress used his quirk on himself to avoid being hit, while the students predictable had the reflexes to dodge back from the fire.

Dabi wasn’t concerned when Twice made to engage Shouto. Twice was a slippery bastard who could evade Shouto’s attacks well enough, but he didn’t have any major attack power that could endanger the boy. The slightly more dangerous Toga was thankfully preoccupied with attacking the general education student Shinsou Hitoshi, who was apparently the poor soul Dabi had felt sympathy
for earlier. The many-armed student, Shouji Mezou, was helping to defend him from Toga’s attempts to bloody him up, using his arms and body as a shield.

“You’re Hitoshi, right? I know you’ve got the mind-control quirk so I’ll keep this quick; I’m Toga Himiko!” she cheerfully introduced herself while throwing a syringe at the wide-eyed Shinsou. Both he and Shouji jerked to the side to dodge it.

“That look in your eyes– you’re like me, right? You’re unwanted. A lot of the people on our team are like that, but they’ve all given up already. You look so upset that we took Midoriya Izuku, is it because he wants you? I can’t imagine how painful it must be to finally have someone that wants you only for them to disappear, because I’m still trying to find my own person like that. So how about you want me, Hitoshi-kun, and I’ll want you too?”

–Sometimes he can barely understand a word that girl says… What is she even talking about with this “wanted” and “unwanted” shit?–

Shouji just looked even more distressed. “This is not the kind of situation where I’m looking to try to find a girlfriend!”

“Ouch!” Compress reversed the effect of his quirk on himself and walked over to Dabi. “To think they’d chase me by air– what a flight of fancy!”

When he signed up for this evil super-villain organization, he did not sign up for bad puns in the middle of kidnapping operations. “Do you have Midoriya and Bakugou?”

“Naturally,” Compress said while rooting through his pocket.

He froze up in the way that everyone does when they try to find a thing in their pocket only to realize they’ve lost it.

“Let’s run!” Shouji called out to his classmates, before turning his head to glance at Compress and holding out a clenched hand with three marbles in it, “I wasn’t certain what your quirk was, but from the way you were showing these things off– Midoriya, Bakugou, and Tokoyami are inside them, right?”

“Hoho! Well done, as expected of someone with six hands!” Compress clapped in congratulations
“Izuku!” Shouto called out, he quickly ran away from his fight with Twice back towards the other two.

Displeasure turned in Dabi’s gut.

*He’s on a first-name basis with the target? That’ll make things more personal than Dabi would’ve wanted…*

“You idiot…” Dabi made to step forward, but Compress held out an arm to stop him. He looked at the man curiously.

“No, wait.”

The three ran towards the other side of the clearing, having to make an abrupt turn when the Nomu slowly crept out of the trees. They had to stop entirely as the shadowy blob of mist that was the villains’ getaway manifested before them.

The lights of Kurogiri’s eyes looked down at the group menacingly. Individual portals appeared next to Toga, Twice, the Nomu, and Dabi. “It’s been five minutes since the signal, Dabi, let’s be off…”

“Sorry, Hitoshi-kun! See you later!” Toga called out as she walked into the mist. Twice swam dived into his own.

“Hang on, the targets are—”

Compress chuckled a bit, “They looked so happy to cut and run, I wanted to give them a reward… It’s a bad habit of mine. One of the tenants of magic states that flaunting a particular object is inevitably part of the trick!”

The entertainer lifted up his top hat and removed his mask to reveal half of his face, which was partially covered by a black ski mask. Compress stuck his tongue out to present three marbles.
Two of the marbles in Shouji’s hand popped into large chunks of ice, the other was left as it was. The large student looked at it in despair as he exclaimed, “What?!”

“No!” both Shinsou and Shouto cried. Dabi did his best to ignore the look of obvious anguish on his little brother’s face.

Compress replaced his mask and hat, kidnapped students still safe inside his mouth. “That ice was the perfect chance to create a couple of decoys! You can keep Midoriya’s Teddydrum, but I’d rather not let it out if it’s alright with you–”

Suddenly, the man cut himself off and went silent.

“Give us the marbles in your mouth!” Shinsou ordered. Compress lifted his hand and removed his mask to follow through with it.

–Dabi fucking knew this fucker talked way too much! Fucking self-proclaimed brilliant mastermind can’t even shut up for five damn minutes!–

“Shit!” Dabi reached out to grab the hand that was moving towards Compress’s mouth to collect the targets, but from out of nowhere strips of white cloth shot at him and pulled back his arm.

His head whip back towards the trees by the Nomu to see Eraserhead’s single red eye glaring at him. “Nomu, attack!”

The sound of chainsaws reverberated through the air like dissonant background music. Though Eraserhead was forced to release him so that he could use his weapon against the creature, Compress had already thrown the three marbles towards the UA students. They spread out in three separate arcs, and the three students scattered to grab them.

Dabi lunged towards one. “Kurogiri!”

The one in the middle was taken easily by the six-armed student, whose strong legs and longer reach allowed him to speed to the marble before Kurogiri could form a portal for it. He looked at it in delight.
The one furthest from Dabi was swallowed up by a small portal of black mist that swirled in and out of existence ahead of the mind-control student. He looked at his empty hand in despair.

The one Dabi was after, Shouto was also trying to grab. But he was closer, so it was a simple thing to reach towards it and–

His hand involuntarily retracted as the burning pain of a sparkling blue laser grazed it, lighting up the dark of the night around them. Out of the corner of Dabi’s eye, he could see that the student he had ignored before was the boy with the naval laser quirk.

_No good deed goes unpunished, huh?_

Shouto’s hand grasped the marble. He looked like he was about to cry in relief.

Remembering that they had been told the mind-control quirk could be undone with pain, Dabi took the opportunity to slap Mr. Compress straight across his still unmasked face. _Hard_. The man regained his senses and held his face with a groan.

“No good deed goes unpunished, huh?”

“Release the ones still here, we need to see who we got.”

Compress snapped his fingers without a word, and all of the contents of the marbles in the field were released. Shouji and the bird head student, who popped up from the marble he just grabbed, were partially crushed under the giant teddy bear robot that popped up from the marble Shouji had been holding in a separate hand.

Midoriya Izuku popped into existence from Shouto’s marble. Kneeling on the ground, Shouto caught the other boy in his arms, and Midoriya blinked rapidly as he looked around the clearing disoriented.

Dabi made a step towards their top priority target, right hand blazing and intending to make a last-ditch effort to catch the boy despite their low odds. But then, Shouto turned his head up towards Dabi, cradling Midoriya in his arms.

And that position… that look on his face…
“Stop it, please! He’s only five years old!”

That look on his face was exactly the same as the desperate, despairing one Touya saw on his mother’s whenever she tried in vain to protect Shouto from his father.

Dabi only hesitated for a moment, but a moment was all Shouto needed.

“Survival Strategy!” Shouto yelled, still clutching onto Midoriya like his life depended on it.

The two of them vanished before Dabi’s eyes as soon as the words left his mouth. He stared in shock at the empty space they had once occupied. How was Shouto able to use Midoriya Izuku’s quirk?!

“That’s no good…” Compress stated in a low voice.

Face scrunching up in irritation, Dabi just sighed, “We’re just going to have to settle for second best… Nomu, disengage. We’re leaving.”

He stepped back into the portal behind him.

Eraserhead cursed and tried to get a hold of Dabi and Compress with his capture gear now that his attention was freed from the Nomu, but the mist was quick to swallow them whole. Dabi let a mean smirk grow on his ugly, scarred and stapled face.

He so enjoyed messing with these fake heroes.

Now in the bar that made up the League of Villain’s base, Dabi turned towards Shigaraki, who was holding out a marble pinched between two fingers.

“This Midoriya Izuku?”

Dabi frowned and replied, “No, we only got Bakugou Katsuki. A pro showed up and a couple of the
students grabbed him at the last minute.”

Shigaraki huffed in annoyance, drumming his fingers on the counter of the bar, “So we didn’t complete the side quest… Well, you managed to steal one of their students. That combined with the fear and doubt we’ll cause with this attack means we’ve won the battle still.”

Dabi nodded in agreement. He needed to keep his convictions in order.

—There was no time to think about the look he put on his little brother’s face—

When Mr. Compress released Bakugou Katsuki, he looked at them with an expression crafted from anger that couldn’t quite hide the fear that shone deep in his eyes. Dabi didn’t feel any sympathy for him in the slightest despite the fact that if things go wrong for the boy here, it could end it his death.

Because it was time to begin the revolution.

Chapter End Notes

Just so you know, there is a new chapter for Children of Absurdity. It's called "The Reason the Prince of the Crystal and Mr. Compress Weren’t Allowed to Meet", and I think I'll leave it at that ;)

References from this chapter:
Part of Toga’s dialogue with Uraraka and Compress’s dialogue with the students is from bnha
Believe in Miracles, and They Will Know Your Feelings

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When they arrived back outside the Crystal World, Izuku had removed himself from Shouto’s arms. He examined all of the clearing around him, looking for the mostly rotted Fruit inside of the masked villain and the totally burning Fruit with the lower half rotted inside of the scarred villain that he had caught a glimpse of as they disappeared into the darkness behind them.

But the only people there were from UA, with one noticeable exception…

“Everyone… where’s Kacchan?”

When Shouto’s eyebrows screwed up together and Hitoshi averted his eyes from Izuku’s with a deep-set grimace, Izuku had his answer.

A pang of despair tore through Izuku, and he had to bring his hand up to his eyes when tears started to leak through them. His body trembled, and Shouto tightened his grip where his hands were grasping Izuku’s right arm. Shouto held Izuku firmly to keep him from falling apart.

A hand placed itself on Izuku’s head. He looked up to see it belonged to Shouta-sensei. His teacher stared him down with his single, unwavering eye.

“We’ll get him back, Izuku. I swear it.”

In the end, rescue workers and firefighters came just a few minutes after the villains had left. The three villains that had been taken down –Muscular, Mustard, and Moonfish– were taken into custody while all of the students were transported to the hospital.
Of the 40 students, 16 were in critical condition due to the gas attack, with many of the affected being from class 1-B who had been stationed in the forest. Tenya was included in this number. 11 including Ochako, Tsuyu, Tokoyami, Shouji, Shouto, Yaoyorozu, and Hitoshi had other injuries of varying degree.

And of course, Kacchan was missing.

Of the pro heroes, Pixie-bob suffered from a serious head injury. Tiger, Mandalay, Eraserhead, and Vlad King were unharmed for the most part.

The last Pussy Cat, Ragdoll, was missing. All they found at her station at the midpoint was a blood-covered table.

And while Izuku was sure no one from the public would care, Teddydrum Black was also a causality. It was still in the middle of getting rebuilt and wouldn’t be done for quite some time. Teddydrum White waited vigilantly for it inside of the Workshop, much like Teddydrum Black had when the other robot was out of commission.

The only bright points about the whole situation were that no one besides Izuku’s robot had died, and that the villains had failed to capture Izuku.

Being one of the uninjured despite being the number one target, Izuku was free to leave the hospital after having given his statements to the police that very same night. He had gotten his stuff from the camp already, and miraculously the Penguindrum was untouched. So either the villains still weren’t confident they could steal it, or they didn’t know about it.

*He very much hoped for the latter*

His mother came to pick him up. They went without the usual hero watch that had been accompanying the Midoriyas’ as a safe guard against League kidnapping, as every hero UA had access to was much too busy dealing with the already kidnapped student situation to spare anyone.

During the car ride home, Mom had apprehensively confessed her doubt.
“Izuku…” Mom didn’t look at him as she spoke, “This… This is the second time this League has tried to take you. And even with the school on hand, they almost didn’t get you back.”

Izuku watched her hands tighten around the steering wheel.

“I know that being a hero is your dream. I know that Hisashi’s sacrifice gave us the miracle of not only bringing you back to me, but also giving you the chance to fulfill this dream. But I also know that he wouldn’t want your precious life to be so heavily endangered– you haven’t even started your career yet, and you’re already facing so much danger… That’s why I’m wondering, do you really need to go back to UA?”

Izuku flinched back at the question, but took it seriously. He had to give his mother’s love and concerns the consideration they deserved.

The answer he got was–

“Mom… the leader of the League is a Child of Fate. Someone that I think Momoka-san knows.”

She whipped her head back towards him in shock.

Izuku gave her a small, sorry smile. “Because of that, at this point… I think any conflict that I have with them must be fate. Me giving up on being a hero and changing schools wouldn’t do anything about that.”

“…So this is fate, I see.” Mom’s shock dissolved into discontent, and she glanced away to focus her narrowed eyes on the road ahead. “I suppose that’s what it always is, in the end. It always comes back to what’s meant to be and what isn’t. Can it not be satisfied with what it’s already taken from us?”

Brows furrowing in sorrow, Izuku placed his left hand on his mother’s arm, and tried to reassure her, “It’s alright, Mom, I won’t let fate take me away from you. Do you know why?”

His mother’s green eyes, so much like his own, looked back at him.
Izuku smiled again, and found the single flower hope that dwelled within the garden of despair that was growing in his chest. “It’s because I’m going to be a hero that changes fate, not only for other people, but also for myself. I won’t let my story end in a tragedy!”

Mom’s eyes widened slightly, before a melancholy smile grew on her face. “I’m going to hold you to that, okay?” A hand removed itself from the wheel to grasp Izuku’s on her arm, it warmed the back of his hand. “I love you, Izuku. Never forget that.”

“I won’t. I love you too.”

*He won’t let Katsuki’s story end in tragedy either…*

Mirio was frowning as he ended his call with Midoriya. Most people would find that to be uncharacteristic of him, but with the kind of news that had just breached the media late that night… Well, Mirio thought it was perfectly within his right to not be positive right now.

“Mirio…” He turned around to see his father looking in from the doorway of his room. He looked at Mirio with concern in his kind eyes that were the same blue as Mirio’s. “You were on the phone with your friend from 1-A right? How are they?”

Mirio’s frown unconsciously deepened. “It seemed like there was a scare where the villains almost succeeded in capturing him, but he can’t really feel thankful that he wasn’t taken right now. He was close to the student that got kidnapped.”

“I see. How unfortunate…” Dad matched his frown.

Then, he walked over to pull Mirio into a strong hug.
“I know that you’ve been doing you’re best to look after him, but don’t beat yourself up over this. There was nothing you could have done to help… I don’t think I’ve said this before, but I should have— your mother would’ve been so proud to see how close to your dream you’ve come.”

Mirio let his father’s love lighten his chest, and wrapped his arms around him to return the embrace. He pressed his face into his father’s strong shoulder despite being slightly taller than him.

“It seems like all these bad things keep happening to Midoriya and his class. It makes me worried he won’t be saved one day, or that another person from his class won’t be saved…” he softly confessed.

“I know…” Dad’s hand slowly rubbed his back. “You’ve always been such a kind child, I know seeing a young boy run into these kinds of troubles must weigh on you. But all you can do is just be there for him when you can, and I know you’re doing your best with that. You’re doing everything you need to do; take comfort in that.”

A small smile formed on Mirio’s face, still pressed against his father. “Thanks Dad …I love you.”

The arms around him tightened slightly.

“I love you too. Never forget that.”

“We established the training camp to prepare for the battle against the villains, and they attacked it. The irony of it is embarrassing,” Nedzu started the meeting with a steady but serious tone, “We took this “villain revival” too lightly— they’ve already begun their war to destroy our hero society.”

Midnight spoke next, “Even if we’d taken more precautions, could we have prevented these developments? Most organized crime has been eliminated since the rise of All Might, so all that’s left is the best of the worst…”
“Basically we got too complacent in this peaceful era, thinking we would have time to prepare,” Present Mic added on.

Leaning forward with his fingers pressing against his forehead, Toshinori sighed in a vastly more depressed tone, “I’m just mad about how useless I was. While they were out there fighting for their lives, I was taking a relaxing bath…”

“I reckon we can’t pretend to be undaunted any longer like how we were with the Sports Festival,” the last member of the meeting, Snipe, brought the discussion back on track, “Lettin’ a student get wrangled is a serious failure for UA. Along with Bakugou, the villains stole the public’s trust in us heroes!”

“And the media’s having a field day right now.” Nedzu helpfully presented headline newspaper articles criticizing them. “We can assume that Bakugou was their secondary target due to the crazed, violent image of him that was disseminated from the Sports Festival. If they actually managed to win him over, this institution would be finished! Thankfully, there have been no leaks about the disciplinary action we took with him concerning Midoriya, or else the media would have been even worse about it.”

“Something happened with him and Midoriya?” Midnight questioned in surprise. Snipe looked at them questioningly as well.

“More like something had previously happened with them, but everything’s been resolved for the most part –information on the matter is on a need-to-know basis,” Mic waved her off, “More importantly… I think something needs to be said.”

Present Mic leaned forward to look seriously at Toshinori and their fellow colleagues. “It’s absolutely clear at this point that we have a spy in our midst. Only we teachers and the Pussy Cats knew about the training location, but we have to consider other suspects. If a student used the GPS function on their phone, then–”

“Cut it out, Mic,” Midnight interrupted, eyes narrowed in discontent.

“Like hell I will! We have to take care of this as soon as possible!”

“Can you even cough up proof that you’re in the clear?” Snipe asked doubtfully, “We can’t even declare that one of us ain’t the traitor!”
At that, Present Mic leaned back in his seat with arms crossed. He spoke in a low voice that was slightly tinny from the distortion cause by his hero gear, “If we are willing to trust the word of Midoriya Izuku– then yes. We can prove none of us are the traitor.”

Midnight and Snipe looked at Mic in surprise, and shock jolted through Toshinori’s system.

He involuntarily gasped, “You… You want to use young Midoriya’s quirk?”

“His quirk?” Snipe was clearly confused, “How would his quirk help with that?”

Nedzu steepled his paws together and explained, “Midoriya’s quirk is not all it seems. There is indeed an aspect of it that essentially allows him to learn everything there is to know about the individual he is using it on. I would assume that it could inform him if someone was working with the villains. It is also very unlikely that he himself is the traitor due to the League’s attempts to kidnap him.”

“However…” Nedzu gestured a paw towards Mic. “Because of how extensive it is, this method is extremely invasive. I would be willing to mandate that the teachers undergo it as a form of inspection, but I see no way we would be able to get parental or legal permission for the students. And of course, Midoriya himself has to consent to aiding us in this way.”

Present Mic nodded acceptance. “As long as we know we can trust all of the faculty at least, that would put us on the right track.” From behind his sunglasses, Mic eyes averted from everyone else to frown at the table. “…I would rather not put something like this on the shoulders of our student, but Izuku’s quirk really is the best way we can tighten our security at this point.”

A pang of sympathy brewed in Toshinori’s gut, and he tried to reassure his co-worker with, “I’m sure Midoriya will understand. And you know him– he’ll be happy to get the chance to help.”

“But in the case where all of the teacher are cleared… Wouldn’t that increase the chance that one of the students is a spy?” Midnight asked hesitantly.

“It would indeed,” Nedzu replied easily, “But frankly speaking, the worst-case scenario is if a teacher is the spy, so it would be a relief if that weren’t the case. They have much more access to information than the students usually do.”
Mic cut in again at that, gesturing a hand out, “On that note– from what Shouta has said, the villains got a hold of some very specific information. Knowing the students’ quirks is one thing, but it seems like they also knew that Shinso Hitoshi – a general education student – would be on the trip, and that physical force could be used to undo his quirk. We do have that information in the school’s notes about his quirk due to Shouta training him, but it would be harder for a student to reach it than another teacher.”

“True, but our records are not the only source for that information,” Nedzu countered, “Some of the students are aware of that, and may have inadvertently informed the spy or was overheard by the spy. In that case a student being the spy would be just as likely. So let’s put aside that matter for right now… I have an idea I’ve been considering for a while now in an effort to more thoroughly protect the students– ”

“A phone call is here! You hear?!!”

Toshinori blushed in embarrassment. “Ah, sorry. I’ll just take this outside…”

As Toshinori closed the door behind him and got out his phone, he sighed. The sound of it echoed down the vast, abnormally empty UA hallway.

–What kind of Symbol of Peace can’t even save his own students?! Some hero I am–

“You put it all on yourself: their lives, their expectations, their deaths, their disappointments, without even thinking of delegating some of it to others. And you get yourself hurt carrying the weight of it all, and you go back to working as a hero despite being in pain and literally only being able to handle it for three hours of the day. When you do all of those things, it’s not just because you want to save people, it’s also because you want to know that you’re the one saving them”

“So many options, so many paths– But none of them happened. They were all just meaningless regrets and wishes for what “could have been”, in the end. Everything turned out like this instead. And that… That’s precisely what fate is. That’s precisely what fate means…”

Toshinori blinked as the Prince of the Crystal’s words rang through his mind. And he answered the phone.

It was Naomasa calling to say they had a lead on the League of Villains hideout, asking if All Might
could join the search-and-rescue operation.

“It’s okay to put others before yourself, but if you’re always putting yourself last… that’s not selflessness, that’s what it means to not love yourself”

...What is he doing?

What is he doing wasting time and energy with pointless regrets? With regrets he knows is poisoning his heart?

“I would rather not put something like this on the shoulders of our student”

As soon as Midoriya sees the mental hole Toshinori had thoroughly dug himself into, he’s going to waste his time and energy and tears trying to pull Toshinori out when he’s already undoubtably preoccupied with what happened to his childhood friend and what almost happened to him. Toshinori’s been burdening his student with his inability to move forward and reduce the self-hatred inside of him.

Young Bakugou—who has been trying so hard to improve his own faults— is waiting for rescue, and here Toshinori is wallowing in self-pity.

Even though he promised Midoriya he would do his best to improve his mind set, Toshinori has been slacking. Giving himself the excuse of running into one act of fate after another. But how long does he plan on doing this?

How much more time will he waste?

It’s been too hard for Toshinori to forgive himself—to love himself— when it was only his own well-being on the line. But now it’s not just about him anymore...

There is a person in need of saving, waiting for him to act.

Now, getting himself out of his funk is do or die
“When one shies away from love given by another, it leads to both people hurting. And when one shies away from love given by one’s own self, it leads to a miserable life and an early death”

“All Might?” Naomasa questioned, still waiting for his response.

Steam bellowed off of Toshinori’s body as it grew. “…You’re one hell of a friend. When we find those villains, when we find Shigaraki Tomura, I am going to say– ”

All Might gave a fierce grin. It was one that was meant to put fear in the hearts of villains rather than comfort the innocent.

“I am here… to fight back!”

Toshinori wants to save Shimura Tenko, but he needs to save Bakugou Katsuki. He won’t let his emotions get in the way of what he needs to do anymore.

He needs to keep his convictions in order.

“Don’t forget this as you go forward to the destination of your fate, wherever it may be, All Might…”

“Whenever you feel you’re past your limit, remember– for what purpose do you clench those fists… I will do well to no longer forget the advice you told me that day, Shimura-sensei.”

“You’re so weak… You couldn’t even stop a criminal organization from abducting your students”
Eijirou clenched his teeth and fist as that villain’s words and his own thoughts repeated indefinitely in his mind.

It was the second day after Bakugou had been taken when Eijirou found himself at the hospital Hagakure, Iida, Jirou, and Yaoyorozu were still being treated at. He didn’t really have any idea of what he wanted to do here, he just needed something to do. Something to distract himself from the fear and guilt inside of him.

“Kirishima-kun? What are you doing here?”

A voice snapped him out of absent-minded staring. When he turned around Eijirou saw that it was Midoriya who spoke to him. Uraraka, Todoroki, and Shinsou were all crowded by him in the spots they were sitting at in the waiting room. Asui, Tokoyami, Shouji, Kouda, Aoyama, and Ojiro were also in the waiting room.

Eijirou blinked at the gathering of his classmates. “What are all of you doing here?”

Uraraka spoke up first, stating in a worried tone, “Most of us wanted to see if Iida had woken up yet, but the doctors say he’s still unconscious… We were able to visit Yaoyorozu at least though.”

“Hagakure and Jirou are still unconscious too…” Ojiro continued, expression pinched in sadness, “I came here to see if Hagakure was okay and met up with the rest of them when I saw they were here too.”

Aoyama looked at Ojiro knowingly, and asked in a serious manner, “Are you going to confess to her when she wakes up? You like her don’t you?”

Ojiro sputtered in surprise for a bit, before he collected his nerves enough to say, “That– that’s none of your business. And in any case, putting something like that on her after she’s gone through an ordeal like this would be selfish of me…”

“You could at least try asking her out after she’s recovered and school has started again,” Shouji suggested.
“I don’t even know if she likes me back or not!”

“And if you never make the first step,” Midoriya intoned from his place further away in the room, looking at Ojiro with piercing eyes, “then you’ll never know.”

Those words were meant for Ojiro, but Eijirou found himself flinching back along with the other boy.

Midoriya then set his sight on Eijirou. It was hard to maintain eye contact with such an intense look boring into him, but he didn’t back down.

“Kirishima-kun… come with me for a moment. I want to talk to you.”

Didn’t Bakugou once tell Eijirou that if Midoriya ever wanted to talk to him, he should prepare for the hardest conversation he’s ever had in his life? He had thought Bakugou was joking at the time, but right now it really did not feel like a joke…

They ended up walking in silence while heading towards a vending machine to get some drinks. And as they passed by Yaoyorozu’s room, they were quickly distracted.

“I can’t believe To– All Might and detective Tsukauchi would be so careless as to leave the door open like that when discussing that sort of confidential information,” Midoriya complained, despite the fact that the other had shamelessly taken advantage of that carelessness to listen in on the conversation just like Eijirou had.

But Eijirou could hardly pay attention to what Midoriya was saying. His mind had blanked as soon as an idea crossed his mind.

Pulling Midoriya into a random empty patient room, Eijirou closed the door and whirled around to look at the boy that was obviously so important to Bakugou.

“Midoriya… If Yaoyorozu is willing to give us a copy of the tracker, we can get Bakugou!”
Midoriya examined him with a carefully neutral expression. It made Eijirou uncomfortable, like his soul was being inspected. And he found himself swallowing nervously before stuttering, “I– I know that that kind of thing is close to being illegal, but think about it; as long as we don’t fight any villains, we aren’t really breaking the law!”

Eijirou had to avert his eyes as he admitted guiltily, “I know that the villains were after you too, so it might be selfish of me to ask you to put yourself on the line like this to help me. But… with your quirk it would be so much easier to avoid fighting. Instead of having to find Bakugou, reach him, and then leave with him, all we would have to do is get to him and you can transport us out.”

Eijirou looked back up to Midoriya, who was still examining him carefully. “I don’t know exactly what your history is with Bakugou, but I know you’re both really important to each other. So will you help me with this?”

“…I have no problem with this plan, Kirishima, but there is one thing I want to know— It’s why I wanted to talk to you in the first place,” Midoriya responded, “How do you feel about Katsuki exactly? Why do you want to save him so badly that you would be willing to blur the line of the law?”

“I think you’re a manly, cool guy, and I admire how strong and confident you are. And even though you call yourself an asshole and you can be mean sometimes, you’re also sometimes really considerate towards others. I really—”

“…I really like him,” he finished what he had wanted to confess at that time, “As in, I want to be more than friends kind of like. And I– I was too scared to tell him that when I had the chance, because I couldn’t be sure that he even wanted to be friends.”

Eijirou tightened his fists, glaring down at the ground.

“He– He couldn’t even tell me if he thought of me as a friend, but I still want to tell him! I want to help him when he needs help! Even if I can’t match up to you—even if I can’t be as precious to him as you are– I still want to be by his side!”

He brought his voice down from its previous shouting to give a strained whisper, “That’s why… I need to try to save him. If I just stand by and do nothing while the person I love is in danger, then forget being a hero– I wouldn’t even be a man.”

There was a still moment of silence. Then, a hand landed on Eijirou’s shoulder.
He looked up to see Midoriya gently smiling at him with shining green eyes.

“I understand, Kirishima. That’s what it means to love after all.”

Midoriya glanced out the window to stare into the distance before continuing, “I wouldn’t worry about Katsuki not thinking of you as a friend. I think that he’s most likely just scared to admit that you are friends.”

Straightening up in shock, Eijirou asked incredulously, “Bakugou? Scared? Why would he be scared about something like that?!?”

“Because then it would hurt him more if you were to think badly of him,” Midoriya answered easily, “It’s not my place to say anything about what happened, but recently he’s had to face a lot of consequences where he disappointed and hurt people important to him. You’re the closest friend he has right now, so he doesn’t want to face your disappointment too.”

 “…I thought you were his closest friend.”

Midoriya frowned, still not looking at Kirishima, “I used to be a long time ago, but… our relationship has become very complicated. I don’t think I can be his closest friend anymore, because he’ll never want to rely on me. He’s stuck thinking that he has to become someone I can rely on, so he’ll see any emotional weight he places on me as burdening me. He doesn’t have that problem with you, I think.” Midoriya turned his gaze back to Eijirou.

“To be honest, I don’t think he’s given any thought to romance though. He’s only just started getting used to working with other people. He’ll need more time to get used to being your friend to move on to that kind of love. But even still… I think it would help him if you told him your feelings.”

A sad smile grew on Midoriya’s face as he explained, “Katsuki is still trying to learn how to love himself even when he loses. Other people loving you can’t replace self-love, but it might help you see what there is to love about yourself. The way I look up to Katsuki is too mixed in with the negative aspects of how we used to be, so even if I told him I still loved him as a friend it would just complicate things more.”

The hand on Eijirou’s shoulder tightened.
“That’s why I think you will be able to reach him in a way that I can’t, Kirishima. Someone once told me “believe in miracles, and they will know your feelings”– If you believe in the miracle of your bond with Katsuki, I’m certain your feelings will reach him… So will you help me with this?”

For the first time since that dreadful night Bakugou was taken, Eijirou was able to grin. Real hope bloomed into his chest.

“You don’t even need to ask!”

“That is such an awful idea,” Shouji protested with all six of his arms crossed over his chest, “What are you thinking bringing Midoriya to the villains’ doorstep?! Bakugou was captured while trying to go after Midoriya, and look what happened to him! You’ll just be repeating the same mistake!”

Both Izuku and Kirishima flinched back hard from that, and even though Shouji was technically right, Hitoshi found himself becoming irritated with the harshness of the other’s statement nonetheless–Izuku didn’t need to hear something like that now.

“Even if Izuku doesn’t go, I’ll join Kirishima,” Hitoshi found himself saying. All of the 1-A students in the waiting room whirled their heads around towards him in shock.

Kirishima was especially surprised, likely thinking of how Hitoshi wasn’t exactly the friendliest person when it came to Bakugou. “Wha– Really?! Not that I’m not glad for the help, but…?” he trailed off, likely not knowing how to phrase his question without seeming rude.

Hitoshi frowned, glancing at Izuku for a moment before averting his eyes towards the ground.

“Everyone… where’s Kacchan?”
“Despite everything, the quirk I was born with, the way people look at me, I want to be a hero. I want to prove I can be a hero, and yet— ” Hitoshi bit his lip as his rough voice started wavering. He was still glaring at the ground. “And yet when the moment came, I wasn’t able to save the person right in front of me!”

He wasn’t able to save Izuku from his tears and pain. The very first person who had chosen him had been counting on him, and he failed him.

And what did it say about Hitoshi that even though he felt guilty at the thought of what Bakugou could be going through because of Hitoshi failing him, that Hitoshi felt infinitely guiltier at the thought of how he failed Izuku?

What did it say about him that he was glad that Izuku was in the marble Todoroki was after and that Bakugou was in the one Hitoshi was after, because that meant he was saved from being taken instead of Bakugou? That Hitoshi had felt relieved that Bakugou was taken and that Izuku was the one still with them?

Can Hitoshi be a hero even when he thinks those kinds of selfish thoughts? He had told Izuku that not everyone could be a moral paragon like All Might, but surely he had to meet some standard of selflessness…

“Shinsou, it’s because of you that we got anyone back at all,” Todoroki stated in his usual blunt manner, “But I can understand how you feel…”

He glanced at Izuku before glancing back at Hitoshi, and Hitoshi was hit with the sudden realization that Todoroki must share Hitoshi’s complicated feelings on Bakugou being taken instead of Izuku felt —It would make sense that he would prefer his boyfriend to not be the one kidnapped after all—That helped alleviate some of the guilt Hitoshi felt.

Todoroki finished his opinion with, “So I’ll join Kirishima too.”

Shouji sighed and covered the eyes on his face with a large hand, “I understand your guys’ regrets. I regret it all too… but this is no time to let our emotions get the better of us.”

“I also have regrets, but we shouldn’t do anything rash,” Ojiro admitted with a furrowed brow. Hitoshi remembered that he was the one who first suggested they leave the Crystal World.
Kouda stayed silent, looking away from the prying eyes inquiring for his opinion. Hitoshi assumed his thoughts aligned with Shouji’s and Ojiro’s.

Aoyama pleaded with a nervous smile, “Let’s just leave it to All Might… Besides, we aren’t even allowed to fight anymore.”

“It’s just as Aoyama says, though I’m hardly one to talk after needing to be saved myself…” Tokoyami added in, “And no matter how you look at it, Midoriya being within close proximity to the League is an unnecessary risk to his safety when he’s a known target.”

“So we should join to make sure Midoriya-chan is safe!”

Tokoyami’s feathers bristled slightly, before he gazed down at Dark Shadow emerging from his shadow on the ground. “Dark Shadow, now’s not the time. We’ll talk later.”

Dark Shadow looked away with a sorrowful frown, likely thinking of how he had made things worse for Tokoyami in the forest, and retreated without a word.

Asui made her thoughts clear in a firm but calm tone “We’re all still in shock over Bakugou’s kidnapping, so we have to think about this calmly. It doesn’t matter how righteous our feelings are. If we start another fight… If we break the law… then we’re no better than the villains.”

Hitoshi glanced away from Asui, as did Todoroki and Kirishima, feeling the weight of her words and the actions they wanted to carry out. It made sense to think about it that way– the plan may be to avoid outright breaking the law, but there was a very good chance of them diving over the deep end with one wrong move.

However –like how he was like with most things in normal life– Izuku’s reaction was completely different. He just blinked at Asui in confusion.

“That… literally makes no sense at all? I’m sorry, but what?”

“Deku-kun, what do you mean?” Uraraka spoke up for the first time since Kirishima had brought up his idea, looking at Izuku questioningly.
“I mean– ” Izuku gave a wide gesture with his hand, trying to find the right words. “The important thing about why villains are wrong isn’t that they’re breaking the law, right? It’s their actions, the fact that they hurt people. If the law was all that mattered, then there would be no difference between a jaywalker and a murderer. They’re both breaking the law, but one is an annoyance that has the potential to accidentally injure themselves or other people, and the other is a murderer! The intent and action matters!”

Izuku frowned as he gazed at Asui. “I’m not saying that we’re in the right in this case, but the meaning of what is right and what is wrong isn’t something that can be generalized as just “following the law” and “not following the law”. There’s too much in between those two extremes for it to be that clear-cut…”

Silence reigned in response to those words. No one could find a way to dispute them, but the dissenters also still didn’t agree with their actions.

“…Midoriya-san?”

Everyone turned to see Mandalay’s nephew opening the door to the waiting room. Mandalay was behind him, giving the kid an encouraging smile.

“Kouta-kun!” Izuku called in delight, a smile finally showing on his face, “I’m glad to see you’re doing alright! What are you doing here?”

“I came with Tiger and Shino oba-san, they’re here to visit Pixie-bob.” Kouta looked away bashfully.

Mandalay continued for him, “I’m sorry to take you away for your friends at a time like this, Midoriya-kun, but do you think you have a moment to speak to Kouta-kun?”

“Of course!”

As if Izuku would ever turn away a kid in need, Hitoshi thought as Izuku walked out with the boy. His departure marked the abrupt ending to their tense discussion.
“Yaoyorozu said she’s going to decide whether or not to help us tomorrow night, we’ll have to act that same night. Anyone who wants to join can meet us in front of the hospital then,” Kirishima declared the last words.

Later, when Hitoshi and Todoroki met back up with Izuku, he was looking at two small pieces of paper.

Izuku had a sad smile on his face as he pointed at them and explained without prompting, “Kouta-kun made me a thank you note for saving him… And a thank you note for Teddydrum Black when it gets better.”

Izuku’s sadness was echoed in Hitoshi as he thought of how he had last seen the kind robot—lifeless and in pieces.

Todoroki gently took Izuku’s hand. “I’m sure it’ll be happy when it wakes up to find it.”

Green eyes looked back down to those small, seemingly insignificant pieces of paper. “I’m sure it will…”

That night, Izuku went into the Crystal World to check on Izu-pingu and Teddydrum Black. Izu-pingu had woken up the day after he was exposed to the gas—recovering much faster than Tenya—but was still on the mend.

Teddydrum Black was still in the middle of being rebuilt. When Izuku told Teddydrum White he might need him tomorrow night, he thought that the other robot looked a little too eager for action. Hopefully none of the villains would test its patience. He also put Toshi-pingu, Penguin Yagi, and the Champion of the Rose Bride on standby.

However, when he dropped by Momoka’s Mirror, the other gave a disturbing request…
“Little Izuku… when you go to rescue Bakugou Katsuki, *bring the Penguindrum with you.*”

“…Momoka-san, I’ve been thinking about this for a while, but—”

–The dahlia was discarded from Momoka’s hand to fall onto the wood floor shown in the mirror, “Believe in miracles, and they will know your feelings”–

He found himself repeating the rest of what Momoka had told him that day, “*But you must remember… All miracles in this world –whether it is the miracle of love, or the miracle of granting one’s wishes, or any other kind of miracle– are built atop someone’s sacrifice.* Those burgundy dahilas… You also once told me you hated those flowers, because on one hand they can stand for inner strength and change, but on the other– they can stand for *betrayal.*”

Izuku looked at his reflection in the mirror beseechingly. “What feeling were you trying to convey to me, Momoka? What miracle are you believing in?”

“…A miracle I have been believing in since before you were born.”

Momoka only partly answered one of his questions. Her pink eyes stared into his eyes and heart, but he couldn’t see into hers. “I’m sorry, Izuku.”

“…I’ll bring the Penguindrum,” he decided, “Because I am going to believe in the miracle of our bond, Momoka. I am going to trust in that miracle, so that you know my feelings– so that you know my *love* is unconditional.”

“…*Thank you, Izuku.*”
A golden book closed shut without the reader having read another word. She already knew this story; she didn’t want to read it.

When the Prince that Momoka had watched grow since he was just an infant the King of the Crystal held in a bundle in his arms had left, she allowed her gaze to settle on one of the penguin hats that were situated on the top corners of her mirror. Then the other, matching hat on the other corner.

She frowned at them in displeasure.

_They’ve never left those spots since they were placed there. Before when she foresaw this day– she had thought that she would be happy to see them be moved. That she would feel a sense of freedom, or accomplishment._

_But now that day upon her, and all she can wonder is if it will all be worth it. If the sacrifices she made –and the sacrifices she forced on others– will be worth the miracle she is going to bring about._

“They’ve never left those spots since they were placed there. Before when she foresaw this day– she had thought that she would be happy to see them be moved. That she would feel a sense of freedom, or accomplishment.

“But everything has already been set in motion, so even if I have regrets– there’s nothing to be done for them… Fate has already been changed.”

Chapter End Notes

 References from this chapter:
“Whenever you feel you’re past your limit, remember– for what purpose do you clench those fists?” is a line from Shimura Nana from bnha. A lot of the students dialogue together about going after Bakugou and a lot of the teachers dialogue is from bnha.

I’ve said before that “believe in miracles, and they will know your feelings” is from Revolutionary Girl Utena, but I feel like it’s also relevant to mention that the context of the quote in the show. Spoilers for one of the character arcs from that show… It was said to one of the major secondary characters (Arisugawa Juri) by a friend as a way for saying that if you believe in miracles, then your feelings will reach the person you love. But that friend later went on to betray Juri by hooking up with the guy she thought Juri was in love with, when in actuality Juri had been in love her the whole time. Because of this, Juri stopped believing in miracles.

Tldr basically, the quote is one that appears to mean something hopeful, but in context it’s meaning is bitter. At face value it seems like it’s about how people love and how their love can be conveyed between each other, and how this is a miracle. But in reality,
it’s proof that this love isn’t a guarantee, their feelings may never be understood, and sometimes the miracle never happens. I feel like this context is relevant for understanding what Momoka means when she says that line.
“The Number Three hero Hawks has been dealing with an emergency situation involving the revival of an old cult that has been performing acts of terrorism, so unfortunately he wasn’t in a position where he could join the rescue and take down operation. But I still think we got a strong turn-out of strong, top ranking heroes for this operation.”

Endeavor scoffed slightly as he complained, “Why do I have to clean up after UA’s mess… Hawks isn’t the only hero who’s busy you know!”

“Considering you are currently not dealing with a terrorist cult, I would assume that you are not as busy as he is at the moment,” Edgeshot commented in a deadpan tone.

When Endeavor visibly bristled at that, Best Jeanist let his exasperation out with a sigh, “Isn’t UA your alma mater? You should take more care in supporting them.”

He couldn’t help but feel annoyance at the fiery man’s usual blistering personality even with his only exposure to him being through a TV screen. On his side of the screen was Gang Orca, Tiger, and Mt. Lady, while the other end held Endeavor, Edgeshot, Kamui Woods, Gran Torino, and of course All Might.

The detective briefing them sighed as well, but he glared at Endeavor in a way that suggested he was hiding resentment for him. Not exactly uncommon when it came to the Number Two hero, but notable nevertheless. “Try to think about the big picture. This isn’t just UA you’re helping; the preservation of our entire hero society is on the line.”

“That’s right! My teammate Ragdoll’s life is in jeopardy as well!” Tiger growled like the animal he was named after, “This is personal for me!”

“Not to mention the life of a child is on the line,” Best Jeanist stressed the obvious, “I invited Bakugou to my agency in hopes of reforming his behavior, so I know from first hand experience how headstrong he is. We need to hurry if we want to protect him from any risk that may come about from him lashing out at the villains.”

“So you couldn’t do anything about his behavior, huh?” Gang Orca asked with slight amusement.
Best Jeanist straightened up at that. “In the end, my intervention was unnecessary. That boy was already on the path to change himself for the better, in a more productive way than I tried to go about it.”

“Why do you want to be a hero, Champion?”

“I want to be a hero that will win in the end no matter how many times I’m defeated, because I want to be a hero like All Might!”

He wants to see the kind of hero Champion will become

“We— used to be friends… but then I fucked everything up”

He doesn’t want to see a young boy’s regrets become permanent

That’s why he was here on this mission. The hearts of both the public and a child were in need of saving, and Best Jeanist would do whatever he could to help save them. That’s what it meant to be a hero, after all.

On the night the others had said they would meet to save Bakugou, Yaoyorozu joined them saying that she wanted to monitor them and keep them in line.

Then, Ochako allowed herself to be seen, and joined their group.

“O-Ochako-chan?” Deku-kun exclaimed in surprise, “I didn’t think you agreed with us…”
“I don’t really know anything about what’s right and what’s wrong when it comes to complicated situations, but I do know that I’m your friend,” Ochako admitted.

She gave Izuku a serious stare. “I was thinking, when you got captured and no one knew if they could get you back… when a prince is in need of saving, when a hero is in need of saving— who will save them? That’s why I’m joining you.”

Ochako pointed to herself with her thumb and declared, “If you need help, I’ll be there to tell you I am here!”

That’s the kind of knight she wants to be— a knight that might not be as flashy or magical as the prince, but is still there to save him and guarantee their happy end. A knight that protects, and won’t waver in her convictions.

Izuku stared at her with his mouth agape for a long minute, before he broke out into a dazzling smile with shining green eyes.

She’ll take over from here, Iida-kun. So rest easy.

Uravity will keep their precious friends –Izuku, Shinsou, Todoroki– safe for the both of them.

Come to think of it, after this she should ask them if she could call them by their first names. It was a little ridiculous that Deku-kun was the only one referring to all of them in a personal manner…

Once at Kamino Ward, everyone disguised themselves with ill-suited clothing. Izuku thought he looked vaguely like a gangster with his fake, small beard, sunglasses, hair pushed back, and creased forehead. But when Shouto jokingly asked if he was actually Present Mic’s secret love child, and Izuku realized that really he just looked like Hizashi-sensei with a beard swapped for his mustache.
Then when Hitoshi came out with his hair forcibly tamed to fall in waves over his face and around his ears—his dark bagged, glaring eyes peeking through his bangs—clothed entirely in black, Shouto seriously asked if he was the secret love child of Aizawa-sensei. Hitoshi sputtered in denial, but had a blush on his face like he found that idea pleasing.

Izuku decided to grant Shouta-sensei the mercy period that he deserved so that the man could deal with this kidnapping and press ordeal, but after that he has to talk to Hizashi and make a decision. At this point, Izuku was dying to drag Hitoshi home with him. He is not going to wait months for Shouta to get his shit together like he did for Toshinori. Waiting that long ended up being counter-productive anyway…

Ochako came out looking like a punk rocker. Ripped leather vest, fingerless gloves—great choice for her quirk—solid black sunglasses, and hair slicked back with fake, red-dyed extensions laced through. And Izuku realized that if the cute, friendly hero persona didn’t work out in the future, a punk astronaut aesthetic would be an excellent back up for her.

The plan was to make this a completely covert mission. If no one could figure out they were UA students running about doing almost-illegal activities, then the school wouldn’t be hurt by their actions.

Of course, nothing Izuku does could go exactly to plan. The first problem occurred when the UA press conference started, though it was a relatively minor one.

“We’ve increased surveillance of the surrounding areas and revamped our school’s security system. And we’ve explained to the parents that our strong stance against villainy will guarantee the students’ safety.”

“Huh? What are these fools even saying?”

“What a load of good that did!”

“Aren’t they just trying to cover for themselves?!”

“That’s disappointing, UA…”

Fury consumed Izuku upon hearing the harsh questioning of the media and the mutterings of the
What right did they have to act so righteous, when they were completely ignoring the fact that in the end everyone made it out alive in favor of acting like the worst possible outcome had happened for the sake of drama? What right do they have to look down upon Izuku’s teachers—the people Izuku knew would die for them and have died for them—when their concern for Izuku’s classmates is only slightly above complete apathy?

These people, the general body of society, didn’t care about the students of UA. They only cared about their own opinions.

Izuku discreetly slid away from his friends in order to lessen the chance that his stupid idea would blow their cover, then preceded with his stupid idea.

“Looks like we got ourselves a bunch of fellow citizens searching for the best way to secure the safety of the future generation!” Izuku shouted in what he hoped was a non-recognizable, low, and raspy gangster voice. Many of the immediate crowd surrounding him turned away from the screen to look at him. And between the bodies Izuku could see his friends stare at him in disbelieving exasperation. He sent them a mental apology.

He made a show of giving a crooked smile to the people around me while he asked, “So tell me, what are your guys’ plans for how we could help UA do that? I’m curious to hear about your ideas! Surely if you’re complaining about them so much you must have a better plan then what they’re talking about, right?”

A tense silence was his only response. Almost everyone that had turned to look at him looked away awkwardly like a kid that didn’t want to be called on by the teacher. They all lost the condescending expressions on their faces.

He feinted an expression of confusion. “You mean— not a single one of you people has a better idea than UA, and you’re still giving them shit? Have any of you even given a thought to it?” He crossed his arms and looked down at the ground while shaking his head.

“Well… that’s disappointing.”

With those last words, he turned his back and walked away through the crowd.
Once he was away from the busy area of the street, his friends rejoined him.

“I don’t know whether I should be upset with you for jeopardizing the mission for something relatively unimportant, or take satisfaction in how effectively you quieted them…” Yaoyorozu was the first to comment.

“For me it’s definitely the second,” Hitoshi admitted with a mean grin, he probably hadn’t liked his hero being bombarded like that, “I’ll remember the looks on their faces for at least the rest of my schooling career!”

“I never really thought about this before… but you’re very bad at holding back your words, Deku-kun,” Ochako sighed at him, shaking her head with fond exasperation.

“UA should just field all of their media criticisms through you, and no one would try discrediting them again. They’d be too afraid of being humiliated,” Shouto deadpanned in a stoic tone laced with amusement.

Kirishima declared, “That was a real manly thing to do, Midoriya, but let’s just get a move on now – Bakugou is waiting!”

The first problem – Izuku’s inability to go without monologuing – passed by without an issue. No one had recognized him, so their cover was still intact.

The second problem they would face that night was another matter entirely.

“Any lapse in his behavior is my failing. Still, the way he behaved at the Sports Festival was because he has such strong convictions and ideals. More than anyone, he pursues the title of top hero with everything he’s got. However, he’s not so inflexible that it’s impossible for him to recognize issues with his attitude and attempt to correct them in the pursuit of being a better person and hero. Therefore, if the villains saw his behavior and mistook that as a weakness, then their reasoning is
superficial at best.”

A sense of disbelieving awe filled Katsuki upon hearing those words, lightening some of the heavy pain that he had been carrying for quite some time. To hear his teacher, a man that had obviously been upset with him after learning how Katsuki had treated another –clearly treasured– student, say that he didn’t think for a second that Katsuki would ever fall into that sort of path despite all of that…

It helped Katsuki believe that he really was making progress. That he could be confident in the type of hero he would become.

*That he could force down his fear to stand strong and make it out of this alive.*

He let that confidence reflect in his words as he yelled, “There you have it– get it now shitheads?! I wouldn’t join your shitty League even if you were the last people on Earth!”

*They went through all that trouble to mount a huge attack, but because they failed to catch Deku all they got out of it was Katsuki. If they lose him, it’s their loss. He’s valuable enough that they won’t try to kill him for now at least. As long as he can fight off two or three and make it to the door–*

“Huh? Those are some strong words for someone who once engaged in *suicide-baiting* just to appease their sense of superiority. From what I overheard in the forest, you used to be quite the bully to Midoriya Izuku even though you used to consider him your “best friend”– How can you be so confident that you aren’t villain material?”

All of Katsuki’s usual fiery confidence blew out in a downpour of speechless shock. He whirled his face towards Mr. Compress just as fast as the rest of the League did.

“You overheard *what* in the forest? Seriously?!” Magne exclaimed, hand coming up to hold the top of her head, “Maybe it’s a good thing we didn’t get both of them then… We might have had to deal with a soap opera drama of major proportions!”

Shigaraki scratched at his neck while scoffing, “Does Eraserhead and UA even know about this? I bet if we tell them they’d kick you out for sure! If that happened you might as well join us.”

Katsuki’s irritation at the villains’ babbling was enough to for him to put aside his shock. “If you eavesdropped on that then don’t fucking cherry-pick, bastard! Didn’t you hear me say that I was
going to make up for that by kicking your ass and saving Izuku, or are you hard-of-hearing from the
deafening sound of your own fucking voice constantly yammering?!”

“Oh come now… changing yourself is not such an easy thing, you know!” Compress waved out his
hands in a grand manner. “You claimed that you would save Midoriya to “make it up to him”, but
weren’t you just doing it to appease your guilt? Would saving him in that single moment really have
made up for the pain you caused him? It sounded like it went on for a while, how many years did
you spend putting him down? As if one night would have replaced all that time!”

The more Compress spoke, the more Katsuki felt the weight of his words. But even still, he couldn’t
let himself show weakness in front of them. He did his best to clench his jaw and keep his
composure.

Even though this masked villain’s judging words felt like the truth to him

Didn’t Katsuki want to appease his guilt by saving Izuku? Exactly how will he ever be able to make
up for his actions when they’ve spanned over a decade? The course of the future and present can’t
change the past…

“Compress, are you even trying to convert the kid, or do you just want to shit talk him? Not that this
kid actually has a future as a true hero, but you aren’t doing much to make him want to be buddy-
buddy with us either,” Dabi snarked. His cold gaze slowly flitted back and forth from Katsuki and
the striped mask Compress was currently wearing.

Compress crossed his arms over his chest in offense before saying, “I’m not trying to turn him away,
I just want to make my point!”

“I’m pretty sure he’s just upset that we ended up with this kid instead of the other one,” Twice
judged, hand holding his chin in a thinking pose, “I remember him gushing about how much he liked
Midoriya’s speech– so Bakugou must be his favorite between them!”

“That’s right! He wouldn’t stop talking about it– it was so annoying! Haha!” Toga giggled, a hand
pressed to her mouth.

“I did not “gush over” Midoriya Izuku’s speech. It was absolutely wonderful; Crafted with brilliant
writing, delivered with marvelous showmanship, a piece truly worthy of a nation-wide audience that
was reinforced by his show-stopping performance during the festival itself– but I wouldn’t do
something as plebeian as *gush* over it… *It’s such a shame we couldn’t get the boy, he’s wasted on those heroes…”*

Dabi just stared at the gushing man with an incredulous expression. “…*Do you even hear yourself when you speak?*”

–*Great! Even the fucking villains preferred Deku over Katsuki! What the fuck?!*–

A knock on the door to the bar interrupted Katsuki’s thoughts, as well as the villains around him.

“*Hello, Kamino Pizza delivery.*”

...*The Fuck?*

The stone wall on a different side from the door erupted in a mess of flying rubble and dust. A muscled arm and body emerged from it.

“*SMASH!*”

Relief flooded into Katsuki’s system. *All Might was here!*

“*Kurogiri, warp us–*”

A web of branches spread out to wrap around each individual villain. “*Preemptive Binding: Lacquered Chain Prison!*”

“*Wood? Like this could hold–*”

A tiny figure blurred at Dabi to give an intense kick to the villain’s head. His eyes went wide and blank from the force, which knocked him out. “*Not so fast! You’re going to want to take it easy for your own sake!*”
Standing beside Katsuki, All Might smiled down at him and grasped his shoulder with a large, warm hand.

“It must have been scary… good job holding out! I’m sorry you had to go through this, but you’re okay now young Bakugou!”

The hand on his shoulder tightened gently, and All Might’s voice softened to match its comforting feel, “Young Midoriya will be pleased to see you’re well.”

“Are you alright, Kacchan? Can you stand okay?”

Katsuki felt his posture straighten as those words—which had once angered him like nothing else—rang through his mind once more.

That’s right...

How could Katsuki be so stupid as to let a villain decide whether Izuku would accept his attempts to make things better between them? Izuku would never turn any genuine show of compassion down as “not being good enough”. That’s just not who he is.

Even if Katsuki takes another decade to make it up to him, delivered in little gifts piece by piece, Izuku will accept it with a smile and thanks all the same.

Whether a villain thinks he’s worthy of that—whether Katsuki thinks he’s worthy of that—isn’t the thing that counts. Forgiveness is decided solely by the one giving it.

Izuku’s opinion is the only one that matters when it comes to that.

“I’m sorry, Shigaraki Tomura,” Kurogiri apologized, “but the Nomu set aside for us are gone!”

“Huh?!”

“Your League has taken things too lightly; this boy’s indominable spirit, the relentless police
investigation, as well as *our rage,*” All Might declared, but he wasn’t smiling as he gazed down at Shigaraki. He let go of Katsuki’s shoulder to step towards the villain. “It ends here…”

“All Might…” Spinner fell back from the intensity of the Number One hero’s presence. “This is the hero that Stain acknowledges…!”

Shigaraki sputtered in anger, “*It ends here?* Don’t be stupid; it’s only just started. “*Justice*, “*Peace*”… I’ll destroy this garbage heap that you put a lid on with such vague ideas! It was for that purpose I set All Might apart and started gathering people to my cause. Don’t be ridiculous.” Shigaraki shakily fought the branches wrapped around him to stand up and face All Might. “This is where it begins! Kurogiri– ”

Before the mist villain could make a move, something that looked similar to a red thread pierced him through his middle. Kurogiri’s eyes widened as he shouted in pain, but he soon went silent and lax from unconsciousness. The lights of his eyes disappeared.

“S-Scary! I couldn’t even see what that was! Did you kill him?!?” Magne exclaimed, shrinking back from Kurogiri’s body.

“No, I just messed around with his insides a bit to make him unconscious,” a stoic voice answered. The red thread unraveled to reveal the face of the Number Five hero Edgeshot. “*Ninpo: Thousand Sheet Pierce!* This guy causes the most trouble, so I’ll have him sleep for a bit.”

The elderly hero started speaking again, “It’s like I said, you’ll all be better off taking it easy… Hikiishi Kenji. Sako Atsuhiro. Iguchi Shuichi. Toga Himiko. Bubaigawara Jin. Working with little intel and even less time, the police worked through the night to find out your identities, get it? There’s nowhere left to run.”

The small man gazed at the leader of the League of Villain’s with striking intensity. “So let me ask you… where is your boss, *Shimura Tenko?* Though from what I’ve been told, you don’t actually remember that’s your name.”
“If you learn everything there is to know about Shimura Tenko, I’m sure you will be able to decide for yourself if you are truly breaking your box or not”

Ah, so that was the type of backstory I was given, Tomura thought to himself, Now that it’s been said directly, pieces are starting to appear and fit themselves into what I remember.

Based on what he had already known, he feels like he’s still missing pieces of the puzzle. But some of the pieces he already had are making more sense–

“No one came to save you... That must’ve hurt, right Shimura Tenko?”

—Tenko was sitting down in an alleyway staring at the dust stuck to the palms of his hands. He lifted his head to gaze up. A strong hand was offered to him by a well-dressed man–

“Everyone just passed by pretending not to see, thinking that some hero would save the day. Who decided to make the world this way?”

—A handsome face gave him a reassuring smile–

“It’s not your fault”

“This can’t be… This can’t be!” Tomura heard himself say. The usually grounding feeling of his father’s hand upon his face failed to calm him —and what happened to his father, exactly? He knows that he had a father and that he had loved his father, that his father had died because no one had come to save them. But he still can’t remember the man at all. He can’t even remember if his father had loved him.

“Defeated just like that...? You’ve got to be joking!”

All Might just stared down at him with a look that might be interpreted as sorrow, but Tomura assumed was pity. “Shimura... no– Shigaraki, where is he?”
“Go to hell!” Tomura screamed in outrage. *How dare he*— How dare this hero tell Tomura to betray that man when—

“You’ll be okay now… I am here for you”

Tomura felt his body shaking as he screamed at the top of his longs, “*Go away! I HATE YOU!*”

Perfectly in time with that declaration, inky pools of viscous black liquid appeared out of thin air. And with them, the Nomu arrived.

Relief flooded into Tomura’s system. *Sensei was here!*

Lined up in the narrow back-alleyway behind the abandoned warehouse Yaoyorozu had tracked as being the League of Villains’ hideout, everyone had been pleasantly surprised to see a group of heroes storm the place to take out the Nomu and retrieve Ragdoll. Izuku instantly recognized Best Jeanist as the leader of the squad, with Tiger and Gang Orca supporting him. As well as Mt. Lady, who had used her giant form to smash through the building with ease.

After overhearing that All Might was at a separate location where Kacchan was most likely at. Yaoyorozu sighed in relief and directed them all to leave, saying they could leave everything to the heroes. Izuku turned around just like everyone else to head back home.

But that was when fate struck.

What he had felt during the Vanguard Action Squad’s attack was nothing compared to the sensation that moved through his body. It was more than just the heavy weight that brought him to his knees and chilled him to the bone— Izuku could literally hear fate move into the air around them, so thick he almost suffocated on it.
It sounded like the forlorn ringing of a funeral bell.

“Izuku?! Izuku what’s wrong?!” Shouto was by his side in an instant, kneeling on the dirty concrete to be on Izuku’s level.

Hitoshi quickly joined him, and Ochako, Kirishima, and Yaoyorozu crowded around. “Izuku, are you okay?!”

But Izuku couldn’t concentrate enough to look at them. He could barely even hear them because–

“It’s not over,” a choked whimper was all he could get out, his hands came up in a vain attempt to block off the deafening ringing, “This night is… nowhere near over.”

–You sound like a man who has seen Death approaching for him, but do you really need to be so worried? Who is the one meant for tragedy tonight?–

A voice broke through between the ringing bell.

This voice is…

“Sorry Tiger, but I’ve had my eye on her quirk for a while. It was just too good –not to mention the perfect choice to complete a set I’ve been collecting– so I just had to have it. Ever since I was reduced to this, I haven’t been able to stock up as many as before…”

“Jeanist! What if he’s a civilian?!”

Izuku doesn’t see what they are talking about, but that’s no civilian

“Use your head, a moment’s hesitation could allow the enemy to turn the tables on us! We must not allow this villain to pull any tricks!”

The ringing subsided, replaced by the explosive sounds of the building and wall next to them being reduced to rubble, accompanied by its vibrations reverberating through the ground. In a split-second
decision, Shouto and Hitoshi both pulled Izuku away from the opening that appeared with the breaking of the wall to an area of cover. While Shouto and Hitoshi stayed low next to him, the others lined up with their back against the wall. All of them were trembling in fear, while Izuku’s own fear rendered his body completely still.

He never got to see the villain that he knew was standing mere meters away in the expansive space of what used to be a warehouse.

―That’s because it’s not time yet―

This voice is—

“Tomura’s only just learned to think for himself. So if possible, I’d like to keep anyone from interfering with that.”

Clapping rang out from behind the wall.

“That’s the Number Four hero for you, Best Jeanist! I was planning to blast them all away, but you grabbed them by their clothes and threw them aside just in time! Such quick thinking, such technique, such fast reflexes…”

A smaller blast rang out from behind the wall.

“Young strength is the product of endless training and immense experience. But I don’t need it—because your quirk is not one that would suit Tomura.”

―He says that like it’s the only reason, but the truth is that he himself doesn’t have the time to devote to training such a technically complicated quirk. He was always the type to say only half of the truth though, as well as the type to not like admitting his faults―

Coughing rang out from behind the wall. “Wha— What was that?!”

“My apologies, Bakugou-kun.” Kirishima jolted from his position, turning his head slightly towards where Kacchan was now at.
“You’ve failed again, Tomura. But don’t lose heart, there will be more chances. That’s why I’ve brought along your little band and the boy— because you determined that he is an important pawn. So try again. That’s what I’m here to help you do. *It’s all for you...*”

—What a misleading man. He’s probably only doing this so that Shimura Tenko acts against Snow White in a fully independent manner to make the fight crueler for the hero. He’s incredibly spiteful towards people he hates—

Suddenly, Yaoyorozu reached out to grab Kirishima, and Ochako leaned down to hold Shouto and Hitoshi by the shoulder to keep them in place. The looks on their faces said they refused to let them interfere and get killed.

Even though Izuku had come here intent on saving Katsuki, he didn’t even have the sanctity of mind to want to move right now.

Momoka-san... why are you—

“I knew you’d come... Here to kill me again, All Might?!”

“I won’t make the same mistake I made years ago, All for One!”

The sounds of clashing rang out from behind the wall as burst of shockwave induced wind battered them. Then, the sounds of Katsuki fighting merged with the noise, and Izuku was reminded of what he needed to do.

How can they get to him? They aren’t allowed to fight, but Izuku refuses to leave without him.

—Did you learn nothing from Icarus? The Prince of the Crystal isn’t a being that is confined to the ground, so neither is Prince Deku—

Oh Momoka. She’s giving him actual, understandable answers. This really must be the end of the world...
“Guys…” Izuku whispered from his place on the ground, a plan forming in his mind, “We can get Katsuki!”

“We can’t, Midoriya-san. This current situation isn’t one we can get involved in,” Yaoyorozu stated quietly but firmly. Even with her face paled and covered in nervous sweat, her eyes were narrowed in conviction. It was clear she wouldn’t allow any plan that risked their lives.

“We can, because we have a way to get to him without fighting through the villains. And we’ll all be able to escape at the same time.”

“Well if you have an idea, it’s now or never…” Hitoshi intoned, face turned towards where the fight was occurring. Shouto stayed silent but gave him an inquiring look. Kirishima looked to him with hope in his eyes.

Ochako glanced at the fight, then set her gaze on Izuku. “If you really have a way to do that without risking yourself, then I’m ready Deku-kun.”

“Then let me explain… Kirishima, remember what I said about you reaching Katsuki in a way that I can’t?”

Only a few moments later, a sled-like structure big enough to hold all of them was created by Yaoyorozu. Ochako used her quirk on everyone except herself and Izuku to lighten the load and increase their speed.

Then Izuku brought them all to the Crystal World, and when they reappeared he was on the back of Teddydrum White, who was carrying the sled with everyone on it. He easily rocketed through the remainder of the wall and into the air above the battlefield.

Kirishima leaned over the side with Hitoshi supporting his body and stuck his hand down towards the ground as he yelled, “Bakugou, come here!”

Izuku turned around to look down at where Kacchan was blasting himself up into the air, a sense of victory rushing through his veins.

But that sensation cut short as soon as he caught sight of the villains. As soon as he caught sight of All for One.
The first thing he noted was that his quirk had turned itself on. The body of Kurogiri lying on the ground unconscious showed him to not have a whole Fruit of Fate, or even a substantial part of it—all he had was a core that was darkened by a mix of purple poison and black rot.

The second—and last—thing that he noted was that All for One didn’t have a Fruit of Fate; *he had an entire tree of them*.

Countless cores—varying from pure gold to poisoned and frozen and burning and rotted and everything in between—merged at their stems and formed branches, which connected into a trunk that lead to a what could have been mistaken for a black hole if not for the red-orange inferno surrounding it. It could only be the most rotted Fruit Izuku had ever seen.

There were so many cores that they filled every available space in his body. If it wasn’t for the fact that the Fruit of Fate were purely metaphysical, Izuku would think that the man was about to burst apart at any moment.

The world around Izuku slowed to a halt. The unholy abomination before him made him so sick, he had to fight to not throw up.

*How many people... Just how many people had to die for him to make that thing?*

*And he said that he hadn’t stocked up as much as he had before— just how many lives has he ruined? How many fates did he change to the point where there was nothing left for those people anymore?*

*Izuku knew that this man stole people’s quirks, but he didn’t fully understand what that meant until this moment. It’s like he’s been stockpiling a collection of the corpses of people’s souls.*

—*You understand it, don’t you? The depth of that man’s sin—*

Momoka’s voice, which sounded like the high-pitched voice of a young girl instead of Izuku’s own voice, rang through his ears just as it had done so previously.

—*That man and his quirk are disturbing the order of fate to the point where the universe wishes to make him disappear, but it was supposed to be fate for him to still be here. For him to fight Snow*
White and his chosen successor until the very end. Even with everything he’s done, even with his unnatural quirk, it was still decided that he would live… –

–Do you agree with that fate, Izuku?–

Izuku didn’t even need to think twice about it. He found himself answering out loud, “No. I don’t.”

–Would you say that it’s fair for someone like him to be granted a lifespan that overshadows all other people? That in a world where children die young, a man as evil and selfish as him can live for over two centuries?–

“No. It’s not fair at all.”

–Would you agree that he is a person that deserves to die?–

“…Yes. If there’s anyone that deserves that type of punishment, then it’s him.”

–Would you agree that he is a person that deserves to disappear from this world?–

A chill of horror crawled through Izuku at that suggestion, because he could tell right off the bat that when Momoka spoke of “disappearing from this world”, she wasn’t referring to death. That the thing she was referring to was a horrible, horrible thing.

But even so…

“…Yes.”

–Then the culmination of your punishment is in effect. Accept your fate to be used as an Instrument of Fate–

The world restarted.
At the exact same moment Katsuki blasted up into the air and caught Kirishima’s hand, a penguin hat made of cloth fell down from the night sky and landed on Izuku’s head.

Everyone was a cacophony of comments and exclamations, still riding their emotional high from the success of rescuing Bakugou and turning the tide of All Might’s battle for the better. Everyone except Izuku, that is, who remained oddly silent throughout the flight. Shouto decided to question him about it once they reached the ground– it was too hard to hold a conversation with him when he was separated on the back of his robot.

Teddydrum White set the sled down in an empty street, and everyone disembarked. The feeling that something was wrong increased when Izuku walked up to both him and Shinsou –*since when had he put on that penguin hat?*– and brought them both into a strong hug.

He kissed Shouto on the crown of his forehead, and then did the same with Shinsou. And while Shinsou turned into a sputtering, blushing mess that Shouto would normally become after that type of display, Shouto felt himself pale with concern

“Izuku– Why are you…?” he didn’t know what he wanted to ask, he just knew that *something was wrong.*

Izuku let go of them, and turned around to walk back to his Teddydrum. He only answered once he was back in its harness.

“I’m sorry, Shouto… *but I’m not Izuku.* I just need to borrow his body for the night.”

Shouto’s stomach dropped down into his feet, and his eyes widened with dread. Everyone around him were instantly silenced. And that silence was broken by the starting of Teddydrum White’s rockets.

“What? Then who the fuck *are* you?!” Bakugou yelled in outrage, approaching the robot with
explosions at ready in his hands, “How the fuck did you get Izuku’s body?!”

The person using Izuku’s body finally looked down to face them. Everything about Izuku’s face was the same except for his eyes.

They were now a deep pink instead of green.

That’s–

“…M-Momoka?” Shinsou hesitantly asked what Shouto was thinking, “What– What are you doing?” He looked up at her in disbelief, conflict painting his expression. Shouto found he shared his sentiment.

“Momoka? Who’s Momoka?!” Ochako demanded, frightened at having no idea what had happened to her friend. She took a step towards the Teddydrum and Momoka, but they were already lifting off into the air.

Shinsou had a hard time answering that question, “I guess you could consider her a friend of Izuku? At the very least, she wouldn’t do anything to hurt him…”

“I’m sorry, Hitoshi,” Momoka repeated using Izuku’s voice, she had to project loudly to be heard over the engines, “but this is part of Izuku’s punishment, so it has to happen! Fate is being changed as we speak!”

Shouto’s stomach dropped further down into the Earth. His lungs had a hard time taking up air as panic set in.

“What the hell is this guy talking about?! You can’t just high-jack our friend’s body!” Kirishima yelled in anger.

“Stay calm!” Yaoyorozu ordered as she grabbed onto Bakugou before he could attempt to fly after Momoka, “We have no idea what this person is capable of!”

“What does that fucking matter when they’ve got Izuku! Let me go, dammit!”
“Where are you taking him?! What are you using him for?!” Shouto suddenly shouted. He needed to know.

Teddydrum White was flying off into the distance—Back towards where they had all just escaped from.

“I’m heading to the destination of my fate!” Momoka called back just before she was too far to hear properly, “Don’t worry, I’ll make sure Izuku doesn’t get a scratch on him!”

_How could Shouto possibly not worry in a situation like this, where someone is taking Izuku for a joyride like he’s a car?_

“What the fuck is even going on anymore?!”

For once, Shouto agreed completely with Bakugou’s feelings. He felt lost as to what plan fate had in store for them.

Safely away from Izuku’s friends and still in transit on Teddydrum White’s back—and how good it felt to ride it once again, to hold it once again. If only Teddydrum Black was here too—Momoka removed the Penguindrum from the protective bag Izuku had hidden on his back beneath his shirt. Nostalgia filled her as she idly flipped through its pages, despite all the pages being blank and unused.

She stopped flipping through to leave the book wide open on two empty pages, and stuck her right hand into the Penguindrum. When she pulled it out, her hand—Izuku’s hand—was holding a second penguin hat of the same make as the one on her head. It was only one part of her preparations though—_she’ll have to pop into the Crystal World to get everything before she arrives._
She pushed down her residual guilt with small talk, “I’m glad I had the chance to give Shouto and Hitoshi some affection, but it’s too bad Takahiro couldn’t be here as well. I’ll never get that chance with him… though I suppose it’s for the best. There’s no way you’d be capable of out flying him.”

Teddydrum White hung its head in shame, and Momoka shifted her grip around it into a hug. “Oh, don’t be sad about that, my child –you haven’t disappointed me in the slightest! You’re an excellent flyer, it’s simply that Icarus is even better than excellent. There’s no shame in losing to an expert.”

The robot regained some of its confidence. It was glad that it hadn’t failed its beloved creator.

Her relationship with her creations was a complicated one. Because she made them, she considered them to be her children, but she also had made most of them with the intention for them to take care of her, as though she were their child instead. She had only been a child when she had made them, after all.

However, after her life had ended that relationship became less complicated. She was no longer a child they had to care for, and she had mental matured over the course of time. Now she was like a mother that watched her children play from the distance enforced by her mirror.

She drunk in the sensations; the warm metal of her Teddydrum beneath Izuku’s skin, the cold wind of the air as she flew through the night. It had been so long since she’s felt anything at all, it was almost overwhelming.

But she diligently took it all in anyway, because this would be the last time she would feel again. The one and only time her soul could be freed. She wanted to savor it.

“I wonder… Do you think this counts as being alive?” Momoka muttered to herself. She lifted the hand grasping the hat to stare at it. “No– It’d be more accurate to consider me a vengeful ghost, I think.”

“Even if it was for just one night, the Princess of the Crystal has entered the stage.”

Chapter End Notes

References from this chapter:
The Princess of the Crystal possessing characters using a penguin hat is one of the basic
plot points of Mawaru Penguindrum. The terrorist cult mentioned at the beginning is a reference to the terrorist cult that is heavily featured in Mawaru Penguindrum. Most of the dialogue between the heroes during their meeting, Shigaraki’s flashback, the heroes and the League, and the heroes and All for One is from bnha.
The First Act Tells the Tale of the Predecessors

Chapter Notes

From this point onward, some of the references to Mawaru Penguindrum will be spoilers for the show, but I think I'm throwing so much stuff together for this fic that it should be hard to tell what's a spoiler and what I'm just making up, so... if you don't want to be spoiled, don't read the references at the bottom within the ( ) that's been crossed out ^_(-ツ)_/¯ (I learned how to cross out text with html for this...)

Some more excellent fanart of the Prince of the Crystal by Scinn ;D
https://scinn-tilly.tumblr.com/post/182801235395/hi-hello-luckywaters-i-have-come-to-fulfill-my

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was somewhat surprising when the children hiding behind the warehouse’s wall flew through the air using what his Infrared Ray quirk made out to be a large bear shaped object. All for One most likely would have been more confused about that if he hadn’t already seen what those Teddydrums looked like—though admittedly it had been quite a long time ago since he had last seen one.

It was somewhat concerning that Bakugou Katsuki had successfully managed to take off to join those children. All for One tried to stop this attempt—whether by grabbing Bakugou or grabbing Midoriya Izuku, either would have been fine— but All Might at least had enough power in him to stop that.

It was clear that he hadn’t yet passed on One for All, but his frail body was a huge hindrance to the proper functioning of his quirk. While he was also not at his best, All for One still believed his condition was superior to All Might’s, and that he would come out of this battle as the winner.

But if he doesn’t, that would be acceptable as well. They’ve made enough of a commotion that news helicopters were approaching, and it would look bad for All Might if he outright killed a villain on television. Spending some time in prison wouldn’t hinder his plans much since Tomura was available to carry them out during the time that he was gone.

And All for One was certain that no prison could hold him indefinitely.

All for One was a man of many plans—He’s planned for how to proceed if he wins. He’s planned for how to proceed if he loses. All that matters for those plans to continue is that either him or Tomura is left free.
Tomura’s gang made a last-ditch effort to go after Bakugou that failed when Sako Atsuhiro slammed into Mt. Lady’s head, knocking her enlarged body down and setting her out of the fight once more, but also preventing him from reaching Bakugou. Gran Torino rushed in just in time to keep them from doing a second attempt.

But truthfully, at that point All for One was hardly paying attention to such meager happens. He even had to remind himself to not be distracted away from All Might’s form.

Because that was when something had fallen out of the sky to land on Midoriya Izuku’s head. It had a very distinctive shape; something that seemed like a hat, but had a strange beak-like shape sticking out of the front of it, as well as two trailing pieces of cloth that were attached at the sides of the hat.

He immediately recognized it as something that should have been long lost, and that was when he felt wary.

Could it be…? It seems insane, but All for One knows that that child had been incredible. And he never did figure out the circumstances of her disappearance.

It’s not too much of a stretch to think she might reappear.

But if that was the case, plans needed to be changed. Even though she had just been a child, that girl had been frightening smart, and frighteningly willful –It’s why All for One had gotten along with her so well– That combined with her power would make her a formidable foe. One that Tomura was entirely unprepared for.

The boy knew not to underestimate All Might, but the same couldn’t be said for someone he had never even known existed.

–Is she even a child anymore? It’s been so long, so if she had been alive she should have grown up and died already. When he had searched for her, he hadn’t found a single trace left. What on Earth happened to her?–

All Might strengthened his stance. With Bakugou out of the way, he would start fighting seriously.
All for One sighed, “Foiled by a single move, how the tables have turned!” Cord-like structures extended from his fingers to pierce Hikiishi Kenji’s chest much like they had with Kurogiri previously.

While he could no longer see it, he knew they were reaching into the very center of Hikiishi’s being to reach the core of the golden apple that hid there—though perhaps Hikiishi’s had that blackened rot on it that All for One had used to see on many apples of villainous people. Once All for One felt contact was made, he forced the woman’s quirk to activate. Toga Himiko became magnetized and attracted Tomura’s League towards Kurogiri’s warp gate, which he had set to send them to an alternate hideout location that was in an area of Japan not in Kamino.

All for One did not magnetize Tomura to send him with them. Instead, he turned off Kurogiri’s warp gate, then used another quirk on Kurogiri that should wake him from unconsciousness. It worked similarly to how one of the previous One for All user’s quirk had, but was much less effective. It worked using a gradual process so it wasn’t able to awaken people immediately, and the beginning stages of it would leave Kurogiri extremely disoriented. However, it would be sufficient as long as Kurogiri awakened and reoriented himself in time to warp Tomura away if All for One himself became indisposed.

It’s a risk to stay when an unknown threat is approaching, and it’s a risk to keep Tomura here as well. But it was absolutely vital that they get information on the capabilities of this new enemy as well as the story behind Midoriya Izuku’s quirk; leaving that for later would mean their downfall. And if All for One is imprisoned after this there would be no way for him to communicate that information to Tomura, so the boy has to see it for himself.

But he knows that if that girl is coming, she likely won’t stop with just his imprisonment. Therefore, he needs to make sure to not get caught in her world.

After blocking All Might’s punch by transporting Gran Torino in front of him to use as a shield, All for One had the chance to call out, “Shigaraki Tomura! I believe a new, dangerous threat is on its way— you must take care to keep out of the fight as much as possible and observe what goes on tonight! Knowing the enemy could mean the difference between failure and success for our revolution!”

“Yes, Sensei!”

“New enemy? What are you on about now, All for One?” All Might glared at him, angry he had been tricked into hurting his mentor. The hero didn’t wait for his question to be answered, but even as he pulled Gran Torino aside to throw another punch, All for One easily met him with a multi-quirk reinforced fist.
“Ah, you don’t know what I’m referring to?” He tilted his head to the side as though he was confused, knowing it would aggravate All Might further. “Admittedly I’m working purely off of guess work right now so I hardly know anything concrete, but Midoriya Izuku is clearly involved with this new threat. Perhaps you don’t know the boy as well as I thought you did…”

All Might briefly froze in surprise, and his shadowed eyes widened. “Young Midoriya– ?! ”

A monstrous-looking arm cut off the hero with a punch to the side, right where All for One had previously wounded him. All Might flew back and released a pained shout.

“Don’t think you have the privilege to get distracted now, All Might. I do so despise you after all.”

“You crushed all of my comrades with those fists, and the world sang praises for the “Symbol of Peace”. The view you see standing atop your mound of dead must surely be nice!”

All Might grit his teeth as he wound up another punch. All for One countered it just as he had the last one, the villain’s punch sending out a destructive shockwave behind All Might.

“I won’t let you fight as freely as you’d like. Heroes always have so many things that need protecting–”

“Shut up,” All Might cut him off while grabbing his arm painfully tight, “That’s how you always toy with others! You destroy them! And rob them! Use them and dominate them! All the while sneering down at those who are trying to live their day to day lives! That’s why you’re using Shimura Tenko, isn’t it?!”

Using All for One’s arm as leverage, he slammed the villain down into the concrete hard enough to break it. A powerful punch crushed the helmet covering All for One’s head, breaking it apart into
many pieces of metal.

“I will never, ever allow such evil!”

Steam bellowed off of All Might, and he felt half of his body return to his true form.

*S*hit… *He’s at his limit.*

“How awfully sentimental, All Might. But truth be told, I’ve heard more or less the same thing from the mouth of Shimura Nana.”

“Listen up! Saving people means, first and foremost, fearing for their safety. However, a true hero saves not only people’s lives, but also their hearts. That’s what I believe. No matter how scary things get, give them a smile, as if to say, “I’m okay!”. The people in this world who can smile are always the strongest!”

Looking up at All Might was a face devoid of eyes, all that was left being a mess of scars that covered the upper-half of All for One’s head. It was unsettling to know that All for One could still somehow manage to see him even without eyes.

“She was a wretch of a women who was only concerned with her ideals, devoid of any and all talent! As the progenitor who birthed One for All, I feel ashamed– The way she met her end was truly pathetic. Where should I even begin?”

Toshinori felt something inside of him snap, and he screamed, “ENOUGH– !”

That was the moment All for One pushed him away so hard he flew into the air. The injured Gran Torino had to jump up and grab him before he rammed into the news helicopter that lurked above.

“You’re just repeating what happened six years ago!” his mentor exclaimed, “Calm down, you let him provoke you like that back then too! That’s how you ended up failing to capture him and how you got that hole in your stomach!”

Bracing them from their crash landing, Gran Torino shouted, “That’s always been your problem!
Quit trading words with that bastard!"

“…Yes sir.” Gran Torino is right. Toshinori trying to best All for One in a battle of words would be like him trying to best young Midoriya in a battle of words; he had a 0% chance of winning.

Gran Torino continued with, “Both his battle tactics and the quirks he’s using are totally different compared to last time. You won’t be able to get a good hit head on– you’ve got no choice but to be tricky!"

Easier said than done…

Unfortunately, his new resolve to ignore All for One’s words couldn’t stop the man from actually talking.

“Tomura worked hard to erode the public’s faith in heroes, but perhaps it’s acceptable for me to deal the final blow…” the faceless villain spread out his hands in a grand manner as he jeered, “But you do realize that I hate you just as much as you hate me, All Might. Certainly I killed your master, but you robbed me of all that I worked to amass. That’s why I want you to die the most savage, ugly death possible!”

All for One’s arm bugled from its multiple quirks to prepare another blow, but just as All Might was about to dodge, the villain spoke once more, “Are you sure you want to dodge?”

When he realized a civilian woman was trapped in the rubble behind him, All Might braced himself to take the hit. The last of his All Might form was used up by the fist he used to block the area behind him from the devastating power, and even then, the force of the attack left deep cervices in the earth on either side of him.

“I shall snatch away all the things you’ve been protecting– starting with your pride! Show the world how pitiful their Symbol of Peace is!”

Toshinori tried his best to ignore the feeling of the news camera’s stare above. But even if he couldn’t see it for himself, he could still feel the stares of millions of eyes upon his frail, lean back.

He knew that the image he cut now was nothing like the reassuring presence All Might was supposed to present.
How could he reassure the hearts of the people with a body like this?

But even with that doubt…

“However much my body may be withering away… However much that’s been exposed for all to see…”

Clenching his bloody fist, Toshinori announced, “My heart is still the heart of the Symbol of Peace, and that is something you could never take away!”

“Ah… still so stubborn, even after that?” All for One huffed, tapping his finger on where his chin would be under the remainder of his mask, “It’s too bad I can’t surprise you about Shimura Tenko anymore. Though, there’s something I’ve been wondering… did you find Shigaraki Tomura’s true identity and then tell Midoriya Izuku, or did Midoriya tell you?”

Toshinori grit his teeth, refusing to respond. However, his tensed body must have been enough of an answer for All for One.

“So it was him that found it out! How mysterious, that girl was never able to divine information such as that before…”

That girl…

“You– You know of All for One?! And you knew All for One was the Witch?! Why didn’t you mention anything before?!”

The realization hit all at once. Toshinori’s breath rushed out of his lungs from shock. Just barely, he managed to gasp out, “You don’t mean– ?!”

“What on Earth?!” Gran Torino’s shocked yell cut off Toshinori and brought his attention back to his mentor, only to find him staring up above.
Looking up, Toshinori was greeted with the same sight of the helicopter he had been so conscientious about, but it was filled to the brim with bright red flowers. The blades slowly died down, and Teddydrum White was gently lowering it to the ground manually, placing it quite a distance away from the battlefield.

“The moment of truth has arrived…” All for One averted part of his attention from Toshinori to gaze at the scene without eyes.

Ringing out from where Teddydrum White was, a familiar voice could barely be heard, “If I had a world of my own, everything would be nonsense…”

A shining trail from the direction of the voice rushed towards the ruins of the warehouse they stood in within seconds, replacing the grimy, dark concrete beneath Toshinori’s feet.

“What is that child doing now…” Toshinori heard All for One mutter. The villain’s attention was still focused on the robot in the distance and the voice, he seemed to not pay any mind to the changed ground. Whatever quirk he was using to “see” apparently wasn’t detailed enough that he could tell the flooring had changed.

“Nothing would be what it is, because everything would be what it isn't…”

Looking down, Toshinori saw his own reflection staring back at him. The floor was now a mirror.

“And contrary wise, what is, it wouldn't be. And what it wouldn't be, it would. You see?”

But the mirror didn’t reflect the dim sky Toshinori knew was above him. Instead, it reflected a familiar looking crystal ceiling.

“That world is my Survival Strategy!”

With an ear-shattering crack, the mirror shattered. Glass shards flew up towards Toshinori. He reflexively brought his arms up to cover his face, but they seemed to pass right through him as though they had never existed in the first place.
The incoming roar of engines suggested that Teddydrum White was on its way over, but Toshinori was too busy blinking rapidly at the sight before him. Everything was the same; the cityscape and night sky, the ruined walls of the warehouse, the rubble of the surrounding destroyed buildings, even All for One was in the same spot as he had been before.

The only difference was that the ground had been replaced with familiar looking white tiles, and just outside one broken wall stood the massive Crystal Palace.

“This is also new… I’m learning so much today,” contrary to the usually positive statement, All for One sounded downright annoyed to have this new information thrust upon him. In fact, it seemed he was moving to retreat now, and who wouldn’t want to retreat after the entire battlefield was changed in favor of the opposing side? But just as he started levitating himself to rush away—

“Through the Looking Glass!”

What could easily count up to hundreds of large mirrors with silver frames materialized in a tile formation, creating a dome that caged the castle, the warehouse, and their immediate surroundings. Now that they were cut off from the outside world, Toshinori felt like he was right back in the Crystal World despite the lack of the rest of the pocket dimension.

All for One turned his face towards the now arrived Teddydrum White, and Toshinori followed the movement just in time to see the robot was following a trail of white tiles that had replaced the shining trail of glass.

“What in the name of all that is good and holy is your student doing here again?!” Gran Torino screamed in outrage, also having been trapped in the dome of mirrors. He was shaking his fist like the old man he was at Teddydrum White and the person now revealed to be riding it. “And what the hell is he wearing?!”

Toshinori knew that normally that phrase was paired with Midoriya’s Prince of the Crystal uniform. Currently though, the boy was wearing a very different, but still recognizable outfit.

It was the dress Toshinori had seen from Momoka’s portrait.

“Midoriya” strut towards them slowly, not on the ground but in the air as though there was some invisible floor above them that supported the boy, angled downward towards them like a long staircase. His shirt was fairly similar with the exception that it was in the form of a corset that started
just under his collarbone, leaving the shoulders and neck completely bare. The black gloves featured white puffs at the top and ended at the back of the boy’s hand, not covering his palm or fingers. Flaring from his waist, the skirt of the dress trailed behind him in the form of graceful black waves. It lacked any material in the front, showing off the white leotard bottom, thigh-high black boots, and the deep red inside of the dress that made them look like the red curtains of a stage.

On his head, “Midoriya” wore a penguin hat that Toshinori recognized as one of the ones that rested on Momoka’s Mirror. Resting in a sheath at his waist was the familiar black handle of the Sword of Dios. And when the boy was only a few meters away from Toshinori, a face featuring piercing, half-lidded pink eyes looked down upon him and All for One with a judging expression.

As though answering a que, the tall doors of the Crystal Palace opened to reveal the Champion of the Rose Bride. It rushed through the doorway and across the distance to stand beneath where the Prince–no, the Princess of the Crystal was entering, much like how a royal knight would guard her princess.

“I… don’t think that’s Midoriya…” Toshinori muttered softly to Gran Torino. He wasn’t sure if the elderly man could hear him from how far away he was, but it didn’t feel right for him to speak louder.

*It was clear that he was an intruder for this reunion.*

“As I thought…” All for One began in a wistful tone, completely facing the new arrival now, “It’s been so long since we parted, but I get the sense that I shouldn’t consider meeting you once more to be a positive thing. How is it that you are using Midoriya Izuku’s body, little Momoka?”

Momoka gave an unimpressed look that Toshinori found to be ill-fitting for Midoriya’s face, and deadpanned, “That’s a secret, *All for One*—gah, that’s so weird to say. You really gave yourself the lamest name while I was gone. If I have to call you that, then you have to call me the Princess of the Crystal!”

All for One held his hands in a parody of surrender. “Still indulging in your fairytale fantasies, I see. I’m only asking because I’m trying to figure out if you’ve actually been alive this entire time, or if you came back from the grave to haunt me. Also, considering I named myself after my quirk, I don’t think “lame” is the right descriptor. Children are always so eager to tease.”

Tilting her head to the side to fake consideration, Momoka responded, “Hmm~ Something in between those two would be the most accurate way to describe it. But how I came to be here isn’t what’s important right now, is it?”
The tone of the conversation became more menacing with that segue. All for One responded to it in kind with a dark, “No, I suppose not.”

Black and red tendrils erupted from All for One heading towards Momoka at frightening speeds, and Toshinori was still only Toshinori—not All Might—he didn’t have a way to help defend—

As though to punish the villain’s impudence, the heavens struck down the tendrils with a wide and powerful bolt of lightning. The ends disintegrated on spot, but All for One merely huffed with irritation instead of giving off a sign of pain.

“Please give me more credit than that at least,” Momoka sighed, she sided-eyed him in a way that suggested she was talking to both of them now. “As long as we’re in this area, I have the same abilities Izuku has in the Crystal World. The Survival Strategy: Wonderland spell basically brings a piece of the Crystal World out to the real world for that purpose.”

“And I’m guessing the purpose of the barrier is to make sure we can’t leave your so-called Wonderland,” All for One proposed, waving a hand towards the mirrors surrounding them.

Momoka showed off an insincere smile. “That’s correct!”

Deciding that their reunion had been given a sufficient length of respectful privacy, Toshinori interrupted with a very disrespectful, “Momoka, what do you think you’re doing here? In Midoriya’s body?”

“Momoka?! That’s the girl who created that so-called Penguindrum, right?” Gran Torino exclaimed, “Why does she know All for One?! And how is she possessing Midoriya?!!”

Momoka ignored Gran Torino’s completely valid request for information, and the answer she gave Toshinori wasn’t a reassuring one.

“Me using his body right now is what Izuku’s punishment was leading up to. Right now, he’s being used as an Instrument of Fate to accomplish a task the world—and myself—wishes to be completed.”

Dread punched the remainder of Toshinori’s stomach in, but he didn’t have anytime to ask what she
meant by that because All for One cut in with a haughty, “Do you really think I’m going to just stand around and let you converse to your liking?” Even though that was literally what Toshinori had done for the man and Momoka five seconds ago.

“Yes!” Momoka chimed with a cheerful but condescending smile, like the little shit she was. However, instead of continuing the conversation, she just threw a black and white object at Toshinori. “Happy Un-Birthday, Snow White!”

He caught it on reflex alone. It was a penguin hat that looked exactly the same as the one on Midoriya’s head.

Toshinori moved to throw the hat away from him—out paranoia that being near it would lead to Toshinori also getting possessed by Momoka, despite the fact he had no proof the penguin hat was the actual cause of that— but a surge of power inside himself made him pause.

It flowed through his veins freely, like a high-pressure water pipe that had gone from a trickle to full blast. It was a familiar feeling that Toshinori thought he would never get the chance to fully experience ever again.

The full power of One for All

Unconsciously, he glanced down at his hands, one of which still held the penguin hat in its grasp, amazed that his quirk had suddenly come to life. It was only then that he saw that he was still in his Toshinori form.

And that he was now wearing a full suit armor, complete with a long sword in a sheath at his waist. Both were a brilliant pure white, like freshly fallen snow.

The delicate voice of a young girl sounded in Toshinori’s head. He assumed it was Momoka’s true voice.

—Congratulations! You have temporarily become the co-owner of the Penguindrum; the Knight of the Crystal!—

...What?
Fate is on your side tonight, because the “quirk enhancement” that was bestowed upon you by the Penguindrum made it so that the condition of your body is irrelevant when it comes to using your quirk. How convenient! Please feel free to pound that annoying man into the ground now, and keep him occupied properly so that he is unable to attack me while I’m taking care of some business—

“How…?” he didn’t know how to end his question, he was just so confused.

Ownership of the Penguindrum is passed by possession of the book, because the book has my soul sealed into it in the form of these two penguin hats. So that hat you’re holding is half of my soul; absolutely do not leave this wonderland until you give it back to Izuku, or it will be very bad for me. And for the love of Izuku, don’t let All for One or the Huntsman get it. That would be beyond horrible—

“Half of your soul— ?!” Toshinori exclaimed with blood spurting from his mouth –she really wasn’t kidding when she said his physical condition was irrelevant now… His head whipped up towards Momoka, who stared down at him with an extremely unimpressed expression.

“…I see, so your “soul” is divided between those two hats, and is what is aiding All Might currently. How did such a thing come about, though?”

…Shit. All for One heard that. No wonder she was pissed at him.

“All Might… Please,” Gran Torino’s confusion was so great now, that he was officially reduced to begging, “Tell me what’s going on. A least a little of it? Something? Anything?! At least tell me why you changed outfits like a magical girl and now look like a knight!”

“…I’m the Knight of the Crystal now?” his response was more of a question than a statement.

“What does that even mean?!”

Toshinori was about to reply that he honestly had no idea, when a memory that wasn’t his flashed through his mind the same way Momoka’s foreign thoughts had intruded.

“This uniform signifies that I am the owner of this world. In other words– it is a symbol of my
“It means…”

“Whenever you feel you’re past your limit, remember— for what purpose do you clench those fists? Just think back to your origin! That’s what will take you just a little bit farther than your limit!”

“I want to make the world a place where everyone can smile and live in peace!”

Toshinori looked down at his hands once more, clenching them into fists and feeling the cool metal encasing them. His hands were still feeble and bony— the hands of Toshinori and not All Might, the hands he had hated because they showed his lack of power— but One for All rushed through them just the same as it had in his prime.

And the reason why he could tap into the power once again was because—

That hat you are holding is half of my soul…

“You literally made yourself the Symbol of Peace, the sole pillar holding up the entirety of society’s order, even though there are plenty of other pro heroes who could help support your burden. But you chose to not seek their help… Do you know why that is, Toshinori-san?”

“It means,” Toshinori restarted his answer with new confidence, lifting his head to glare at All for One, “that the power of One for All no longer relies on my body; It relies on my origin. It relies on heart.”

Not just his heart, but also Momoka’s

While he still doesn’t know why she’s here or what fate has in store, it’s clear that she has invested her heart into this war. She’s not here to support him personally, she has her own goals and reasons that Toshinori can’t trust in, but—

“All Might…”
A quiet voice from behind him whispered in awe. Even though his body wasn’t All Might’s, and was weak and covered in blood and bruises, the battered civilian woman he had protected just before gazed up at him in wide-eyed, hopeful wonder.

Like he was a knight in shining armor.

—she is helping him carry his burden, nonetheless.

“And that’s all I need…” He prepared himself to continue the fight, bringing his fists up in a guard. “…to defeat you with all my might!”

A smile befitting All Might’s face beamed at All for One, because Toshinori is, and has always been, All Might. Toshinori is the Number One hero and Symbol of Peace not because of All Might’s power, but because of Toshinori’s heart.

And though that heart may be tainted with poisonous self-hatred, he will make it shine brighter than any sun in this moment, so that he can save these people.

So that he can win

“Gran Torino, I need you to keep this safe!” Toshinori held out the penguin hat. Since Gran Torino wasn’t a Child of Fate, giving it to the man shouldn’t transfer ownership away from Toshinori.

Tendrils appeared from All for One’s fingers once more to capture the hat, but Gran Torino was faster. The elderly hero had already burst over and away from Toshinori, clutching the hat with both hands. He grouched, “How was it even possible for things to become this complicated…”

“Tomura,” All for One called out, “continue staying out of the fight, but see if you can take that hat and bring it to me! Make sure you don’t destroy it!”

“Yes, Sensei!”
Shigaraki Tomura started to creep away from his hiding spot towards Gran Torino, but the hero just scoffed at him, “As if you could ever beat my speed, you brat!”

He made to jump off the junction between two mirrors to spring towards another direction, but instead Gran Torino ending up passing through them. He came out from two mirrors near the top of the dome, and had to use a burst of air to redirect himself when he started falling with gravity. “Huh?!”

“Oh sorry, I should have warned you,” Momoka stated casually, “All of the mirrors here are like that.”

“This is why you young folk have to tell people things!”

*No, Gran Torino– that’s a Momoka problem, not a “young folk” problem…*

Gran Torino fell into one of the upper towers of the tall castle beside them, and Shigaraki let out a curse as he ran into to the palace to chase after him.

Despite the pandemonium going on, All for One didn’t let himself lose focus. He seemed to sense the change in Toshinori’s power, because he regarded Toshinori much more warily than he had All Might.

The villain floated into the air, his arm bulged in preparation for an attack. “As soon as I thought it might be you, I knew you would cause trouble, little Momoka. I suppose that’s what I get for breaking so many of my promises to you, though…”
The world was in a state of panic.

A villain on par with the revered Number One hero All Might had leveled part of a city, and said Number One hero had been seen on live-TV to actually be incredibly sickly-looking and weak, obviously in no condition to fight the villain that had pushed him so far. For the first time since he had established his place in the world of heroes, people were worried that All Might might actually lose.

And then the news coverage of this once-in-a-lifetime historical event was mysteriously and abruptly cut short. The last thing that was seen were flowers appearing somewhere off screen, covering up the camera before the feed stopped completely. All attempts to reestablish connection had failed.

The lack of information and suspicious circumstances had the public quaking in fear. People close to the scene were trying to get information from the police, only for them to be told that the police didn’t have any information either. The restless crowds of people could easily turn into panicking mobs at any moment.

For all the fuss he put up earlier, Endeavor understood the gravity of this situation. And so he had finished cleaning up the white Nomu as fast as possible so that him and the rest of the rescue team could rejoin All Might at the warehouse. There was no guarantee as to how much they could assist him in terms of the real fight, but even Endeavor could understand that this wasn’t the time to try to steal the spotlight from his rival. He was practical enough when it came to his work to accept that it was likely that he just wasn’t strong enough to beat this villain.

–Because even after all these years, he still wasn’t at All Might’s level, and how it burned him to know that–

So Endeavor was expecting for them to show up, assist All Might in a support role, and for the Number One hero to hopefully not lose the fight. He was not expecting for them to show up and find a giant silver-colored dome covering the place.

“Is this the work of that villain, the shadow leader of the League the police briefed us on?” Kamui Woods glared at the obstruction in consideration, crossing his arms over his chest.

“That is a possibility, but it could also be possible that a third-party is interfering,” Edgeshot responded in a thoughtful tone, “The news camera was focused on both All Might and the villain during the time it went it went out of commission, and it hadn’t seemed like the villain was the one to do something to it. Perhaps both that incident and this structure were by the work of someone else.”
The last thing they needed was for another villain to take advantage of this shitstorm—“I agree with that assessment. And if the style of this alleged person is consistent, then that would mean they are probably the type to work in the background and avoid direct confrontation,” Endeavor growled. He moved up to the dome to slam a palm against it, preparing to fire a direct shot to blast a whole through it. “That means they’re weaker in comparison to the other villain! One of us being the one to take them out should be fine!”

—And by “one of us”, Endeavor of course meant himself—

Edgeshot interrupted his actions, “Calm down. Rushing in without thinking won’t help anyone, we need to be careful about this.”

His building frustration made Endeavor want to dissent to that practical thinking, but Kamui Woods put his ear next to the dome and reported, “…It doesn’t seem like the barrier is particularly thick, in fact it seems to be thin. I hear speaking and the sound of battle. For sure, one of the voices is All Might. But along with a couple of other voices, I hear the voice of a boy… not too young, but not a man. A teenager maybe?”

“A teenager got himself involved with a fight of this level?! What kid would even have the guts to do something so outrageous?!” Endeavor exclaimed in exasperation.

Then, a chill ran down his spin as he thought back to the teenager that had once professed—

“I promise you that one day, you’re going to look around yourself to find that everything important—everything you value and hold dear in your life—has been burned and reduced to irrecoverable ashes. And the only two things I hope for are that you don’t drag your family down with you, and that I get to see the look on your face when it happens”

If it was that kid, Endeavor would believe him capable of doing a stunt of this caliber. It wouldn’t have been possible for him to say that kind of thing to the Number Two hero’s face without the guts to back it up…

Edgeshot, who had been feeling the seams that appeared in a tile patter throughout the dome, gave some more constructive input, “Even though the area it covers is large, this wall isn’t without fault. It’s not airtight, so I should be able to slip through to covertly gather more information on what’s going on inside. Depending on what I find, we’ll decide how we want to approach our entrance from there.”
Annoyance rose in him at the Number Five hero being the one to call the shots, but he couldn’t exactly contest his co-worker’s decision when it was the one he would go with himself.

So instead, Endeavor huffed, “Fine. Make sure you’re quick about it.”

A stoic nod was his only response. The hero went to work right away, folding in on himself until he was merely the width of a string. He seemed to pass through the seams easily enough, now it was just a waiting game for the rest of them.

Endeavor’s relationship with patience was a complicated thing. On one hand, he had the patience to dedicate years of his life to a seemingly impossible goal. On the other, being forced to wait for results had always made him **angry**.

And he was already angry—**already in despair**—from the sight of All Might’s skeleton form that he had caught sight of on TV.

*Is this how it ends? With the Number One hero falling from his pedestal not because Enji beat him, but because he just wasn’t well enough to work anymore? Because it was time for him to retire like some old man?* How could Enji ever be satisfied with that kind of win?

“I don’t know what Izuku told you Endeavor-san, but whatever it was—you should take it seriously. His words aren’t the kind you should take lightly”

*Could this be what Midoriya Izuku was referring to?*

*No— that doesn’t feel right. Even if Enji doesn’t get the win he wanted in that scenario, he would still get the title he had coveted all these years. A person who held that much hatred for him wouldn’t be content with that kind of punishment. He wouldn’t enjoy watching Endeavor take up All Might’s mantle.*

—So that means there must be more to come than even this—

That thought weighed heavily on his mind. Ever since Endeavor had heard that the Midoriya kid had somehow foretold what happened in Hosu City, the words the unnerving boy had told him the day
of the Sports Festival invaded his mind occasionally. It made him think of what might happen, of what he might lose…

“Don’t drag your family down with you”

“Stop it, please! He’s only five years old!”

–Could it be that he’s already lost something?–

Endeavor pushed that thought out of his head. There was no time right now to worry about something as vague as prophecies or fate. He had to be prepared to deal with anything that was going on inside that dome.

When Edgeshot reappeared, a disturbed and confused expression pinched the upper part of his face that wasn’t covered by his mask. It made for such a great contrast to his usual demeanor that Endeavor was half-way dreading to hear him report that All Might had actually keeled over or something.

“…Apparently the dome is a structure that is made of mirrors, which was created by Midoriya Izuku– except he’s not actually Midoriya Izuku, but a person referred to as Momoka, who is also referred to as the Princess of the Crystal. It seems she’s supporting All Might because she has an antagonistic relationship with the villain. Also All Might is a knight now. Frankly speaking, I have no idea what’s going on.”

…Is this better or worse news than All Might keeling over?

Endeavor attempted to clarify the situation, “What do you mean that this… “Princess of the Crystal” person is acting as Midoriya Izuku?”

Edgeshot’s expression became more disturbed. “I mean that, for all intents and purposes, it seems like a girl –who may or may not be a dead spirit– is possessing Midoriya Izuku’s body. And also that you were completely wrong when you judged that the person who made this barrier is weak.”

“Wha– why is a possibly-a-ghost possessing a UA student?!” Kamui Woods questioned, bringing his hand up to grasp the sides of his head.
“I don’t know. When she saw me, she just smiled and said she was here to change fate.”

*Worse, Enji decided, This is even worse news than All Might dying. At least All Might dying was an understandable outcome – this was nowhere even near the realm of what Enji had considered to be possible.*

Chapter End Notes

A reference for Momoka wearing her Princess of the Crystal outfit in Izuku's body, because it was too good to pass up drawing him in it: https://luckywaters.tumblr.com/post/182953622447/midoriya-izuku-wearing-the-princess-of-the

References from this chapter:
“*If I had a world of my own, everything would be nonsense. Nothing would be what it is, because everything would be what it isn't. And contrary wise, what is, it wouldn't be. And what it wouldn't be, it would. You see?*” is from Alice in Wonderland.
The majority of the dialogue between All for One, All Might, and Gran Torino is from bnha.
“Listen up! Saving people means, first and foremost, fearing for their safety. However, a true hero saves not only people’s lives, but also their hearts. That’s what I believe. No matter how scary things get, give them a smile, as if to say, “I’m okay!”’. The people in this world who can smile are always the strongest!” and “Whenever you feel you’re past your limit, remember– for what purpose do you clench those fists? Just think back to your origin! That’s what will take you just a little bit farther than your limit!” were both said by Shimura Nana in bnha.
“I want to make the world a place where everyone can smile and live in peace!” was said by young All Might from bnha.

Mawaru Penguindrum spoiler references:
(Momoka's soul being split in half into the two penguin hats is from Mawaru Penguindrum)
From the very outset of the second portion of Toshinori’s fight with All for One, it was clear that the battle conditions had shifted entirely in his favor.

All for One was no longer gloatingly attacking Toshinori with singular maxed-out quirk punches. Instead, he was cautious; making sure to dodge as many of Toshinori’s strikes as he could by anticipating his movements, while occasionally attempts to land his own hits. The villain could no longer count on Toshinori’s body to fail on him.

It wasn’t that Toshinori wasn’t straining his body to fight—on the contrary, he was pretty sure his right arm had broken at this point at the very least— but no more how much damage his body took, One for All’s power wasn’t affected in the slightest. Even with a broken arm, he could send out full-powered punches without backlash from the quirk itself.

There was going to be hell for his body to pay after this fight ended though…

So compared to the state he was in previously, where it was impossible for his quirk to work past the limit his body had set for it, it was like they were fighting a completely different fight. Now All for One was the one on defense.

The villain tried to improve his standing with his usual attempts at mental manipulation and frustration, but now Toshinori could honestly ignore that for the most part.

It was better to leave tricky things to experts after all.

“First princesses and now knights, what a fantasy this tale has become. Even with all that though, doesn’t it burn you to know that you couldn’t take vengeance for your master by your own power,
“If you don’t think this is his power, All for One, then you’ve gone senile in your old age. He is obviously using his quirk to fight you. Don’t you think this would be a good time to retire into the nice, little nursing home referred to as prison?”

A punch given to All for One’s head was blocked, just as the return punch that was sent Toshinori’s way was. Shockwaves rang out through the air from the impact of both as the two were sent flying apart.

“The adults are talking little Momoka…”

“Really? To me it just looked like you were talking to yourself– I responded because I felt pity for you.”

All for One just sighed in annoyance as he steadied himself from the pushback.

_Toshinori doesn’t know why it took him so long to figure out that these two know each other, the condescending and vague way Momoka spoke fit with All for One perfectly. It was like watching a pair of siblings bicker…_

Pressing a strong offense, Toshinori sent a punch-made shockwave towards All for One in an attempt to knock him out of the air. When the villain predictably deflected it, Toshinori was already in his face to deliver a downwards blow that sent All for One crashing to the ground.

Even so, All for One rose from the crater he formed with relative ease.

“Oh good, at least one of the heroes here is still able to move –little Izuku quite likes you too. Can you go and collect more of the people here? When that Number Five hero comes back in you can evacuate with him. And who do you have there, my Champion– oh dear. The Number Four hero looks like he’s on the verge of death with that hole in his gut.”

Just before rushing at All for One for a second go, Toshinori glanced down to catch sight of Tiger walking towards the remaining rubble surrounding the warehouse and Momoka holding Best Jeanist in a bridal carry. The weightlessness of his body made Toshinori suspect that she was also using that other ability Izuku had to support the man’s weight.
“Such a golden Fruit of Fate he has… he must be very pure of heart indeed. It won’t do Icarus or Snow White any good if their next in line falls before them. Please use your stalwart heart to support them to the best of your ability, Brave Little Tailor. Behold the Gift of God.”

A small trickle of relief appeared in Toshinori at knowing that Momoka was taking care of his wounded co-workers. He didn’t have any time to enjoy it though, as All for One managed to clip the side of his chest with his quirk-enhanced punch. The armor took some of the damage, but it was powerful enough that most of its force still transferred to Toshinori’s body.

He returned the favor by slamming down the arm that was now in his reach. Even with the coiled muscle surrounding it, One for All broke through the bone with a loud crack.

All for One ignored the pain he surely felt from his arm to watch Toshinori carefully with his eyeless face. “Surely you must be joking about encouraging me to go to prison though, little Momoka. You’re not someone that aims low when it comes to goals outside of enjoying everyday life. You’re here to kill me, aren’t you?”

“That’s correct. Though to be honest, just killing you is still aiming too low.”

Alarm shot through Toshinori’s system at the same moment that All for One sprung upon him. The villain aborted his movement when Toshinori motioned to go low to aim a punch at his gut. He could practically hear the smirk in Momoka –young Midoriya’s– voice, “What was it that you said just before? I want you to die the most savage, ugly death possible? That sounds more accurate– I’m going to banish you from this world.”

All for One flew back in a retreat as he gave a sarcastic retort, “How electrifying. How are you going to do that?”

“I made a special spell just for you. If I cast it, it will blow you out into oblivion.”

Toshinori continued his pursuit even through the disturbing discussion. All for One forced a mass of rubble towards him as a delay tactic, but Toshinori bat it aside in mere seconds.

The feeling of dread continued to grow within him…
“What a sad thing to hear… I’m still quite fond of you, you know. But I’ve always known that despite my brother being favored by you for being the one to decide to take you in, you have always been much more like me than you have been like him. And you did warn me that you might come to hate me…”

Once Toshinori had gotten close, All for One sent a fist towards his stomach. He blurred to the right to avoid it while still approaching the villain’s space. “Did you hear her, All Might? That girl is going to use your precious student’s body to commit murder! Are you sure you’re okay with sinking that low?”

Don’t respond to him, Toshinori thought with clenched teeth, You can win this for sure, as long as you keep focus! Deal with Momoka later…

“You’re the one that must be joking now, because you’re the one that ruined everything! And you were planning to harvest my quirk from me, weren’t you!”

Toshinori, now close to All for One, gave another punch. All for One swerved around that punch as he confessed, “Only after you had lived out your full life, I was going to be patient about it. I wouldn’t have been so cruel as to take it from you before your time was up or kill you for it. And I wasn’t the only one to make mistakes… What you’re really upset about is the fact that my brother left to come after me, isn’t it?”

“Oh– because you waiting to steal my quirk makes everything better, yes. And in the end, everything fell apart because of your decisions; if you hadn’t been so selfish, maybe our story wouldn’t have ended in tragedy!”

Even with the conversation occurring, All for One was able to keep up with Toshinori’s movements. Fists were dodged, blows were blocked– the villain was being too careful of Toshinori’s actions now that he was at full power, he needed to think of a way to get around that…

“My actions are my own, it was my foolish brother that decided to act upon that instead of enjoying the life he could have had! If he had just left things be, all of us could have gotten what we wanted!” All for One was beginning to sound angry now. As though he was releasing a lifetime’s worth of frustration at the things that could have been, but had never happened.

Toshinori leapt towards him with a punch, but the villain evaded him. All for One also made sure to keep away from the mirrors that surrounded them, most likely cautious of a trap that could be had from them.
Then, All for One’s voice turned chilling cold, “And it’s not like you would have been using your quirk in death. Or at least, I assumed you wouldn’t be able to. With that in mind, there wouldn’t have been any point in letting it pass with you besides unnecessary sentiment.”

Momoka glared down at All for One from where the unconscious heroes and obviously confused civilian woman gathered beside her in the air. “If you truly believe that, then it’s no wonder you can’t understand… There was no way for us to get what we wanted with you hurting innocent people. And there was no way for us to get what we wanted if you weren’t there as well! That whole time you were only thinking of yourself!”

*What on Earth happened between these two?*

“Not only that, but you–”

Momoka’s sentence was cut off by the abrupt shattering of a couple of the mirrors nearby where she had positioned herself that was mixed with a powerful burst of fire. From the now open section of the dome, a group of heroes rushed in with Endeavor in the lead.

All for One tried to take advantage of Toshinori’s momentary distraction, but Endeavor was quick to shoot some fire at the villain to force him to deflect the flames instead.

“All Might! What’s with that form of yours?!“ Endeavor shouted at him. He gave a bewildered once-over of Toshinori’s current state before continuing with, “That armor may be covering it up, but your back as become pitiful! Even though I trained hard in so many ways to surpass you!” – *Is that really the thing he should be focusing on right now?*

The hole in the dome was replaced with more mirrors by another *Through the Looking Glass*. Narrowing her eyes at the Number Two hero, Momoka huffed, “What a brute of a man… Some of the people who need to be taken away are here–” She gestured to the figures beside her, which consisted of Ragdoll, the civilian, and Best Jeanist. “–and some are being collected by Byakko and my Champion. Why don’t you just take them all and leave this place? Though, you should probably keep Brave Little Tailor here; my spell is healing him right now.”

Endeavor blinked up at Momoka in angry confusion. “Spell? Who the hell are the people you are talking about?! And what the hell are you wearing?! *Are you seriously some ghost possessing Midoriya Izuku?!*”
“I believe Byakko refers to me, and Brave Little Tailor refers to Best Jeanist,” Tiger answered from where he was dragging Gang Orca over, “I have many questions as well, but we really don’t have the luxury to be questioning things right now–”

As though to prove Tiger’s point, All for One punched a shockwave Momoka and the rescuees.

Heart beating wildly in panic, Toshinori swiftly rushed over and used his own punch to disrupt the shockwave. The wind rumbled between them as a sign of their clash.

“Ah… there was no need for that. They are within my circle of protection, so the Divine Protection spell would have blocked it for us.”

Toshinori ignored her to yell at All for One, “I thought this was between you and me! …And Momoka, I guess! Keep the uninvolved people out of it!”

All for One merely shrugged. “I was just trying to prove to those other heroes why they should hurry along. It’s so annoying when flies buzz around your head…”

That, of course, set off another attack from Endeavor, that was again easily swat away. “Who are you calling a fly, villain! I may not be All Might, but I earned my spot as the Number Two hero!”

Momoka cut in with a condescending tone worthy of All for One, “Earning prestige still isn’t a replacement for a personality or morals.” –Not helping, Momoka! Why do you even dislike Endeavor when this is your first meeting?!

Edgeshot flew past All for One, his folded, spiraling hand cutting through the space where All for One’s head once was as the villain leaned forward to avoid it. “If we can support All Might’s victory by acting as distracting insects, then I will do so gladly!”

“I’ve got Mt. Lady, and I didn’t see anyone else around other than an unconscious Kurogiri!” Kamui Woods reported, he leaped over to where the others were with Mt. Lady held in his branches.

Endeavor, who had been simmering in offense in the meantime, responded with a curt, “Good. You and Tiger evacuate, I’ll stay to act as support!”
“I will also be staying,” Edgeshot added in with much left emotional inflection to his voice compared to Endeavor’s angry declaration. To emphasize their point, the two of them traded shots once more with All for One, who seemed to be glowering at them in exasperation. *They were leaving Toshinori free to protect the evacuation process.*

“Didn’t you hear me? I said you need to leave! You aren’t needed anyway– Snow White as he is can handle it.”

“Did you hear her, All Might? That girl is going to use your precious student’s body to commit murder!”

“No,” Toshinori decided, “They can stay!” *You won’t be able to do as you like with three of the top five heroes around.*

–If that’s what you truly believe, then you underestimate the kind of power my successor possesses, All Might. As well as the what that power can do in the hands of the person that knows everything about it–

Toshinori tried to ignore the cold feeling that came from hearing a child’s voice say such ominous words, as well as the thought that Momoka sounded very similar to All for One in that moment.

“If that’s what you want, Knight of the Crystal. You’ll be the one that has to explain everything to them later. And I suppose there are some benefits I get if they stay…” Momoka put the matter aside, vanishing some of the mirrors behind her to allow Kamui Woods and Tiger through, before closing it up with more mirrors.

Then, she brought out the Penguindrum to float before her, and the book opened to rapidly flip through its pages.

“I see… Of course, your power must still be connected to your diary,” All for One mused –*once again proving that he knew at least a hundred times the amount of information Toshinori knew about this whole mess*– “But if you’re getting serious, then I don’t have time to deal with these pests–”

A mass of power seemed to burst forth from All for One’s chest, enveloping the immediate area in an explosion. It forced back Endeavor and Edgeshot, and Toshinori had to cross his arms over his face
to shield it from the heat. The kinetic energy tried to dislodge his stance, but his legs held firm with One for All running through them.

All for One’s energy was met by a blindly bright wall of lightening before it could reach Momoka, its deafening thunder ringing in Toshinori’s ears. It successfully defended against the attack, so the lightening must be imbued with additional force that natural lightening wouldn’t possess.

“In many a tale, both new and old, people tell the story of the holy versus the sinful. The righteous versus the unjust. The Good versus the Evil…”

All for One seemed to be outright ignoring Momoka now. Instead the villain rattled off a long list of quirks that he was compiling into his right arm, transforming it into an unnatural conglomerate of limbs, flesh, metal, and countless other features.

All for One’s voice gained a serious firmness to it that had been missing in his previous jeering, “I’m sorry, All Might, but I don’t have the time to draw out your end now. If that child says she plans to wipe me off the face of this Earth, then she fully means it– that’s the sort of girl she is! That means you need to die now so that I can deal with her!”

Momoka continued speaking despite this, “That is the type of tale that fate had meant to tell this night. But is that really okay? After all, how many things in this world can be fully defined as “Good” or “Evil”? No matter how one looks at it, in reality there is much more “In-between” than either of those things…”

“This… is this an incantation? What sort of spell is she casting? How can Toshinori stop it?

He didn’t have time to think of answers to those questions. All for One fell towards him from the sky, preparing to use his countless harvest of quirks to destroy Toshinori. But now that he’s in a rush to finish this…

“You won’t be able to get a good hit head on– you’ve got no choice but to be tricky!”

Toshinori let One for All retract from his arms and wound up his own punch.

“That’s right, the three of us were like that as well– Like the three side of the same triangle, we were always connected but never aligned with each other. Three sides fated to oppose each other even
when that wasn’t our intention. Even till the very end, our feelings failed to be fully understood. Our miracle ended. And everything ended up like this instead…”

His weak right hand met the mass that used to be All for One’s right hand, the bones of his fingers and forearm snapping beneath the white gauntlet of his armor. The villain seemed surprised by Toshinori’s lack of force, and he took advantage of that to send a half-powered punch with his left fist.

It only pushed All for One back slightly. He moved forward towards Toshinori once more. “Was that all?”

“That’s because I wasn’t putting my back into it—”

“The Evil that you created was too great. You attempted to make yourself the enemy of this world, and you succeeded. And you discarded your love in the pursuit of that greatness— That’s why I am here…”

Toshinori transferred all of One for All’s power into his broken right arm, and plowed it into All for One’s face.

“UNITED STATES OF SMASH!”

The white tiles beneath them shattered from the force of Toshinori smashing All for One’s head into the ground.

When the dust settled and the white shards finished raining down around them, he could see the villain’s body twitching slightly in a way that suggested he was still conscious.

But he didn’t get up again.
An incessant ringing had been going through All for One’s head since little Momoka started her “incantation”, and he was forcibly reminded of a saying that she had used to be fond of…

“The sound of fate is rings like a funeral bell”

“Imagine! A world that is at least a little better than the one we are a part of now!”

This isn’t good. He took the promises he made to her too lightly. He took All Might too lightly. He never imagined that this sort of outcome could occur. It wasn’t supposed to be like this–

The shriveled, knightly form of All Might kept his eyes squared on All for One, but spoke to the person behind him, “Momoka, that’s enough now. There’s no need to use Midoriya– ”

“A world that is at least a little safer for the children that play in it!” she paid him no mind, continuing her words.

It wasn’t supposed to be like this! He was supposed to take apart the world that had tried to force him to stay in his little box until the day he died and turn it into a place where he was free! He was supposed to build something that would last for eternity, persisting even after his death, so that he could fulfill his full potential!

But the fruit in his chest could feel that this was the end for him. The bell was tolling for him.

All Might turned his body slightly more towards Momoka, but refused to fully turn away from All for One or move away from him since the hero was still wary of his enemy. He’ll be the death of All for One too with that sort of half-hearted attitude.

“Momoka, stop– ”

“A world where at least a little of my regrets are satisfied!”
Shigaraki Tomura –Shimura Tenko– came running up from the castle, but Momoka’s mannequin blurred in between the two of them. It pointed a silver sword at Tomura to prevent him from advancing.

But right on the ground next to Tomura was Kurogiri, and All for One could sense that he was beginning to stir.

No... not yet. This doesn’t have to be the end.

Because while little Momoka is like All for One, she is also like his brother; she is loving to those in need and those who belong to her. And he has already collected a piece that she can’t fight against.

He always did tell her that love was a weakness, but she could never accept that.

All Might, still wavering on whether he needed to prioritize the mostly-defeated villain or the ghost that was inhabiting his student’s body, decided on a compromise. He stood firm in front of All for One, but turned to deliver a shockwave at the Princess of the Crystal that would interrupt her chant. His attempt failed miserably when her lightening shield took the blow for her. He must not know how it works either, that girl had always been so good at keeping her cards to her chest– All for One would have felt proud if it wouldn’t have condemned him even further.

“Imagine… A world where you do not exist…”

He couldn’t imagine such a thing. And he knew there had been a time where little Momoka couldn’t imagine that either. However, he also knew there was no use in trying to appeal to her with that.

His brother had been the one that first chose her, and All for One had murdered him when it had been clear there was no other end for them. There would be neither mercy nor love granted to him.

Momoka looked down at him with her steady pink eyes and they gained a soft sort of sadness that made it seem like she was sorry to see him go, but he knew that wasn’t the case. She wouldn’t have she reappeared out of nowhere after two centuries in order to kill him if she had felt bad about it.
She must be mourning the man he used to be, then. The man he was before he became All for One, before he had killed his beloved brother, before he had chosen his ambitions over his love—

This wasn’t what All for One had wanted to do, but leaving everything to a successor was better than leaving nothing behind in this world at all. His will can still survive after death—

For the first time during that whole chant, Momoka’s tone was somber as she said—

“Goodbye, Sanetoshi nii-san…”

At that same moment, All for One gathered his quirk, a handful of other quirks—the complementary set should suffice, there’s no time for more than that— and one last message, then sent them off in a flurry of tendrils towards Tomura. They pierced right through the mannequin, destroying it in the process, and plunged right into the rotted apple that lay in Tomura’s chest.

And at that same moment, pain erupted from the entirety of All for One’s body, including his fruit and the many cores that were connected to it. His world transformed into a raging inferno.

When Kurogiri had drearily awoken, the sounds surrounding him and sight before him startled him through the fog in his mind.

Shigaraki Tomura was screaming in pain caused by All for One’s quirk acting on him. He convulsed on the ground next to Kurogiri.

Even more concerning than that, though, was that his master was screaming as well. All for One was in the center of a blazing fire, the flames so thick that Kurogiri couldn’t even see the man through them. He only knew that was where he was because that was where the screaming was coming from. Thick black smoke mixed with the scent of burning flesh wafted through the air above their heads.
“Momoka– what are you doing?!” All Might stumbled away from his burning enemy in shock.

Above them was the altered form of Midoriya Izuku—or who was supposed to be Midoriya Izuku but must be this Momoka person instead, the outfit and name suggested they were female—put away the pink book that had been floating in front of them and answered, “What does it look like? I’m burning the Witch. He is being erased from existence. Now that the spell has been cast, there’s nothing you can do anymore, Snow White.”

All Might’s shallow face paled drastically. “Erased from existence?! How– how could you do such a thing?! That man may have been evil, I had even tried to kill him myself once, but to do something like that… to use young Midoriya for something like that–”

But Kurogiri could only barely hear the two speak with each other. His ears were enveloped in with the sound of his master’s screams as he burned to death like a witch at the stake.

There was a mix of reds, oranges, yellows, and blues that cast its light on everything, being absorbed into the blackhole that made up Kurogiri’s body. The pyre was the sun setting upon the end of the world—the end of Kurogiri’s world.

How… His creator was so strong, how could he be defeated to that extent? How was that sort of thing even possible?!

Kurogiri could feel it in his chest though– that person was not exaggerating. This was the end for All for One, and there was nothing Kurogiri could do to save him from that end.

What was Kurogiri supposed to do in a world where that man—who might as well be his god—no longer existed?

“But more importantly…” The so-called Momoka blurred away from their spot in the air to reappear next to the tendrils that connected Tomura and All for One. Pulling the black sword out if the scabbard at her side, she sliced through it with ease. The light of the flames cast a shadow upon eerie pink eyes as they stared into the chest of Shigaraki Tomura, whose body had stilled now that the pain left himS.

“The transfer of that man’s horrible quirk has already been completed!”
...So that’s the sort of situation this is, his master had to fall back on his last-ditch-effort plan. In that case, Kurogiri has already been given orders on what to do from here on out.

Even though he knew what he needed to do, he could hardly even think properly at the moment, let alone use his quirk to take himself and Tomura to safety. He could feel his fingers twitch uselessly beside him.

“Sensei… Sensei…” Tomura called out weakly in a heart-broken tone. He was so weak from the quirk transfer, that all he could do was get up on his hands and knees to try to crawl towards his teacher. “You can’t… It wasn’t time for me to succeed you yet… No—”

Kurogiri forced his hand up to weakly hold onto his new master’s ankle.

Tomura glanced back down at him. “Kurogiri… why?”

“Shigaraki Tomura…” Kurogiri forced his scratchy voice to work, “There’s nothing we can do for him now… We have to leave so that you can continue to work in his place– ”

Tomura reacted to Kurogiri’s words the same way he reacted to most things he disliked; with anger. A kick to the face by the leg Kurogiri wasn’t holding cut off his sentence. The pain surprised him, but he refused to release his grip. If Tomura leaves his side, Kurogiri won’t be able to protect him.

“Shut the hell up! This isn’t the end for Sensei! This can’t be the end for Sensei! I can’t accept a world where he’s not there anymore!”

The eerie stare focused on Tomura turned into a judging glare. “It’s understandable that you’re upset with your teacher’s fate, but are you truly so inept at controlling your anger that you would take it out on a person who is loyal to you?”

“Who cares about any of that shit! Kurogiri may be an important piece, but in the end he’s only a pawn for Sensei to use! None of them are worth anything outside the value they give to Sensei and me, I was the only one Sensei chose! And to give up on Sensei so easily– he deserves my anger!” Tomura screamed in rage at the mysterious person before them.
The screaming from their leader had finally subsided, but the fire continued to burn bright.

“But you… you deserve my anger even more than that, you murderer! Hiding in the shell of a UA student won’t save you from my wrath—”

Tomura tried to crawl forward once more, and Kurogiri tightened his grip. The kick he received this time was harder than the last, but still he didn’t release his master. “I told you to stop that! Let go of me!”

“I can’t follow any order you give that would lead to your death…” Now that you’ve taken up All for One’s mantle, at least. It would have been a different story before when All for One was still Kurogiri’s master. Tomura was misguided about it, but Kurogiri knew very well that All for One had seen all of his subordinates as disposable.

Momoka narrowed her eyes as she declared, “I see… so you’ve decided to fully follow in that man’s footsteps. In that case, my job here as the Princess of the Crystal is not yet finished–”

Before panic could settle in Kurogiri’s mind, a shining white knight placed himself between Momoka and Tomura.

“I refuse!” All Might answered Momoka’s declaration by brandishing a fist towards her, “I will not allow you to use Izuku anymore than you already have, and I will not let you kill Shimura Tenko when there’s still a chance that he may be saved!”

Momoka turned her glare on the Number One hero. “Did you not hear him? He’ll try to murder Izuku with his cursed power at this rate, and he will continue to try and destroy this world! I don’t like giving up on children who are forgotten and unwanted, but we need to get rid of him before he becomes a problem!”

“I said I refuse! It’s not too late for him! All we have to do is bring him into police custody, killing him is unnecessary!”

“If that’s how you’re going to be… well, it doesn’t really matter. Because you are the successor of my other brother, we were never truly on the same side in the first place.”

The Princess of the Crystal punctuated her point by swinging her sword not towards All Might, but
at the newly arrived Gran Torino who was off to the side. The elderly hero yelped as he dashed away to avoid the force it created, which slashed through the air and ground. The Number One hero was quick to rush at his new opponent in response. He yelled in outrage, “How dare you– !”

“Divine Protection.”

A bolt of lightning struck down from the top of the mirrored dome enclosing them, the hit caused All Might to falter and give a pained shout. Another incantation, Will of the Crystal Princess, led to the hero being captured in a chuck of the glittering crystal that was so much like the shell Kurogiri had once emerged from. All Might groaned and he tried and failed to break through it from the inside.

The skirt of her black dress floated around her as Momoka gently raised into the air. Looking down at the Symbol of Peace, she drawled, “Please think things through more, Knight of the Crystal. There was no way a hero as mobile as your teacher would have allowed himself to be hit, I was simply targeting him to provoke you. It’s no wonder you had such a hard time with Sanetoshi nii-san…”

…Eh? Sanetoshi nii-san? Is Sanetoshi All for One’s true name? And his murderer is his sibling?! How much did Kurogiri miss while he was unconscious?!

“I still have no idea what’s going on, but if the Number One hero is having difficulties in his battle, then it is our duty to support him!” the voice of the Number Five hero sounded out as he and Endeavor arrived back from where they had been blown away.

The Number Two hero ignited his hands in preparation as he growled, “You better stand down now, Princess Whatever-The-Hell-You-Call-Yourself, before the body of kid you’re in gets roughed up!”

Foreseeing that they had been bought some time due to the heroes’ infighting, Kurogiri whispered to Tomura, “Shigaraki Tomura, once I’m able to warp us, we should leave while they’re distracted– ”

“Are you joking?!” Tomura quietly growled at him, “We aren’t leaving until I take vengeance for Sensei!”

The piercing scowl Momoka gave to Endeavor in response to that was a frightening thing when combined with the shadows that the dying fire cast upon Midoriya Izuku’s face. It seemed like there wasn’t even ash left from the cremation.
“That’s funny. A person like you trying for an appeal based on the safety of a child? Did you know that you’re the type of person that I hate most, Evil Queen?”

Endeavor, Edgeshot, and Gran Torino involuntarily stepped back from the menacing smirk that came onto Momoka’s face—Kurogiri thinks that he’s starting to see the familial resemblance...

Holding her hand out slightly, the white robot that had been hovering beside her came closer so that she could press her palm to its arm. And Momoka giggled a bit as she admitted, “You know… If there’s one good thing about me not being on Snow White’s side, its that in this moment I’m also not on your side either, Evil Queen. I don’t believe it would be good to kill you; Dear Takahiro would be devastated, and dear Shouto isn’t the type of child that would take joy in that. But, well…”

Grin stretching to show too much teeth, Momoka brought her hand up to cover her mouth as though she were about to deliver a piece of juicy gossip. “You already have one of your children out for your blood, so you shouldn’t take Shouto’s stance on that matter for granted.”

The Flame Hero stilled unnaturally as his eyes widened behind his flaming mask. He took another involuntary step back.

All Might, Edgeshot, and Gran Torino both side-eyed the hero in alarmed confusion.

“You… you can’t be talking about–!” the Number Two hero started, but it seemed like he couldn’t bring himself to finish is sentence.

While this was certainly an interesting conversation, Kurogiri didn’t have the time to enjoy it. “Please reconsider that stance. You know that All for One wouldn’t want you to risk your plans by doing anything rash–”

Tomura was so annoyed with him that another kick was delivered to his face. Kurogiri had to fight to keep himself from releasing an equally annoyed sigh of frustration. “Don’t try to preach to me about what Sensei would want!”

“Well… Why would one of Endeavor’s children be trying to kill him? What are you talking about?” All Might, still trying to free himself, voiced the question on everyone’s mind.

“It’s very simple, Snow White…” Momoka let the fake smile fall from Midoriya Izuku’s face to give
Endeavor, who was shocked into silence, a condescending look. “You see— the type of people that I hate most in this world are *parents who hurt their own children.*”

From the way Endeavor’s face paled in stark contrast to the fire around his eyes, that incredibly damning implication could be taken as nothing but the truth. The heroes that could only stare at their comrade in shock could surely see that as well.

And that was when Endeavor gave a startled gasp of pain as he doubled over the bloody silver blade that was sticking out of his abdomen. A pink-haired mannequin standing behind Endeavor had been the one to pierce the sword through the Number Two hero.

At the same time, Momoka reappeared with the robot behind Edgeshot while he had been staring in disbelief at Endeavor. The robot grabbed onto the Number Five hero just as Endeavor directed his fire towards the mannequin behind him, causing it to go up in flames much like his son had during the Sports Festival. Edgeshot folded the arm the part of his torso that the robot had grabbed and seemed like he was about to retreat, however…

“Will of the Crystal Princess!”

The Princes of the Crystal had already simultaneously captured both the bleeding Number Two hero and the distracted Number Five hero in prisons of crystal. The one holding Endeavor was similar to the one holding All Might, trapping his limbs but leaving his face open. But the one holding Edgeshot encased the hero entirely, leaving only a hollow sphere in the middle where Edgeshot was forced to curl up. He used his quirk to lash out at his prison to no success.

The only hero to successfully evade Momoka had been the seasoned and speedy Gran Torino, who had moved so that he was now standing beside All Might.

“Sit tight for a bit Evil Queen. I’ll make sure you don’t die, but bleeding out a little won’t do you any major harm. At least your family drama makes for a superb distraction topic!” Momoka glanced over her handy work in consideration. “Now we really need to speed things up, though. The Ninja’s got such a tricky quirk that I had to make the crystal air-tight, so we need to finish before he runs out of air.”

“You’ve gone *insane*!” All Might cried out, straining against the crystal. Momoka ignored him.

*This girl fights dirty. Kurogiri is definitely seeing the familial resemblance now…*
“Do you really think that you’re prepared to fight that person, Tomura? You don’t even know how to use what you’re received yet,” Kurogiri whispered as he nodded towards the now captured heroes — who were all part of the top five rankings — to demonstrate his point. This time Tomura stayed silent, most likely because even in his overly emotional state he knew that the answer to that question was a resounding no.

Gran Torino just showed a deep-set frown as he carefully watched the Princess of the Crystal for signs of movement. She gave an amused smile as she said, “What a conundrum you’re in, Dwarf. You’re the last one standing, but you can’t attack me because of my Divine Protection. On the other hand, you’re too quick on your feet and too sharp for me to catch— so it seems we’ve reached a stalemate.”

“It’s a stalemate that won’t last long, though,” Gran Torino replied, not looking away from Momoka, “I’m just waiting for my idiotic student to realize that you’ve already given him the answer on what he should do!”

All Might blinked at that for a moment, before he let out a sound of realization. A second later the crystal holding him disappeared, and he reentered his fight stance. “That’s right— if being the owner of the Penguindrum is what gives Midoriya his abilities as the Prince of the Crystal, then currently I can use those very same abilities as well!”

Despite the Number One hero escaping, the Princess of the Crystal didn’t look very off-put by it. “That’s true, but you can’t really do much until you learn how to do everything. But wow… that took you so long to figure out. Little Izuku once tried to argue that you were, in fact, smarter than a penguin, but I truly believe now that he needs to rethink that stance.”

All Might’s eye twitched. However, he evidently saw the bait for what it was, since he announced, “I won’t fall for your tricks anymore! Listening to your words just gives you the advantage— I won’t let you pull me along as you please!”

Momoka continued to smile. “Easier said than done, All Might… Sword of Dios: grant me 1,000 swords of justice.”

High above them and surrounding them on all sides, countless white swords appeared in the air, ready to strike down upon whoever the Princess directed them to. Kurogiri had no problem believing that there were literally a thousand of them.
This is bad… The way things are going, even the heroes won't be able to save Shigaraki. Kurogiri could feel his senses coming back to him and his body could move now, he just needed a little more time–

“Now let’s see– Heroes always have so many things that need protecting, out of everyone on the side of “Good”, who would I have the least problem with potentially killing if things go wrong? The answer to that is obvious!”

With a wave of the Princess of the Crystal’s hand towards the Number Two hero, a mass of swords from every direction shot forward rain down upon the immobilized Endeavor, who could only look up in fear at what awaited him. All Might cursed as he ran to stand beside Endeavor so that he could send out sweeping shockwaves to throw them off course.

But of course, her goal had not been to actually kill Endeavor. Kurogiri watched closely to see that a smaller collection shot at Gran Torino to force the hero to dodge away from Momoka’s true target. He also saw that there were a large collection of swords heading towards Tomura instead, who was much weak to evade them quick enough.

–If it’s like this, then there’s no other choice. Even if he can just buy Shigaraki Tomura a little more time, he has to protect him as much as he could in his current state. Even if his life becomes a causality in the process–

“What is the reason for your existence? To serve me”

Using all of his strength, Kurogiri used the grip he still had on Tomura’s ankle to swiftly pull Tomura down and move himself up to be on top of the boy with his back facing up. He only had a second to position his larger frame to insure he was covering all of his master and force his body to stay corporal, before he braced himself for the pain.

After a moment of stillness, the pain never came.

Cautiously, he turned his head to look around him. A countless number of swords were barely a meter away from them, but they had stopped in their tracks. Completely frozen in place. Why…

“Kurogiri…”
He froze slightly as he realized the Princess of the Crystal was addressing him now, he turned his head further to see her staring at him in shock. Midoriya Izuku’s voice was filled with confusion as she asked, “Do you really love that person to the point that you would sacrifice yourself for him?”

When a few seconds of silence had past, he realized that she was waiting for his response. He hesitantly replied, “…No, it’s simply my duty to sacrifice myself for him. To serve him—to serve All for One—is to fulfill the purpose of my existence.”

An incredibly amount of grief clouded her expression as she exclaimed, “What– How could he tell you such a horrible thing?! That wasn’t the reason for why you were born at all! And your soul is in such poor condition, what has that man been forcing you to do for him??”

—Why does this person care about any of that? And what was that about his soul?—

“Kurogiri— Ah!” Momoka startled as All Might placed an armored hand on her bare shoulder. She whirled around to look at the hero, who gazed down at her in consideration. The robot looked back and forth from where the hero had made it past it to float beside Momoka, to where he used to be in panicked confusion.

Much calmer than he had been previously, All Might explained, “I remember young Midoriya saying something about how that spell your using requires intent on the part of the aggressor, and I’m still here.”

Just in time, Kurogiri felt his mind steady enough to reconnect with his quirk. He used it to concentrate on a location and open a warp gate beneath Tomura and himself.

“Wait!” Momoka called out with a hand reached out towards them, “Teddydrum White, take back Kurogiri from Shigaraki Tomura!”

—Why is she refusing to cut him down when he’s in her way?—

But the answer to that question will have to be sot after another time. He had already lost one master today, he wasn’t about to lose another. The two of them smoothly fell through his black mist and away from danger.

After closing his gate, Kurogiri stood up from where he had been leaning over Tomura and gave a
sigh of relief. This absolutely horrible night had been two seconds away becoming even worse. A glance around showed that the rest of the League hadn’t been warped to this particular hideout, so once they regained their strength they would have to–

“Kurogiri…?” Tomura’s voice interrupted his thoughts.

Kurogiri looked down at where his new master was still on the floor to see Tomura looking up at him through the gaps between the fingers of the hand covering his face. From what he could make out, the expression on Tomura’s face made it seem like this was the first time he had ever truly seen Kurogiri.

“Kurogiri… why– Why would you go so far to save me? I heard what you said to that Momoka just now about “duty”, but… why would you care so much about that kind of thing that you would waste your life like that?”

“It wouldn’t have been a waste,” Kurogiri defended his position adamantly, “You probably have a hard time understanding because you desire freedom from control above everything else, but I am content in feeling like I am living up to the reason why I am here, even if that reason binds me into servitude.”

“That wasn’t the reason for why you were born at all!”

He tried to ignore that echo in his mind as he continued, “Ideally, my sacrifice would have allowed you to live. And if it had happened that you had died in that moment, I would have been lost– you’re my number one priority now. So it wouldn’t have been a waste at all.”

Tomura stared at Kurogiri for an extended moment before he softly asked, “…Do you really care so much about whether I’m still here or not?”

“Of course. That’s the thing that I care about most now,” Kurogiri answered without a hint of doubt.

“Oh…” Tomura sounded like he didn’t know what to do with that answer. He averted his eyes from Kurogiri to glance down at his chest in deep thought. It was clear that Kurogiri wouldn’t get anything else about the matter out of him, as he needed to mentally process it.

After tonight, there were a lot of things the two of them needed time to think about though…
Toshinori watched in silence as the Teddydrum failed to make it in time to stop the villains from escaping. He also watched as Momoka realized that the robot wouldn’t make it in time, but still didn’t send the ready-and-waiting swords at the duo.

Momoka scowled down at where the villains used to be, not looking up at him as she accused, “You let them get away.”

“I decided that it would be better for Shimura Tenko to escape with his life than die by Izuku’s hand,” Toshinori responded honestly, “But you also let them get away, just now…”

Momoka’s frown deepened as she admitted, “…I couldn’t get him with Kurogiri in the way.”

That much was obvious, but it didn’t answer the true question. “Why is that?”

With a wave of her hand, all of the swords disappeared. There was no point in continuing the fight when the objective was gone. And she still wouldn’t look at Toshinori as she explained, “It’s like I already told you– the type of people that I hate most in this world are parents who hurt their own children.”

A hand gestured towards the empty spot the warping villain had once been. “I created Kurogiri like how I created my Teddydrums and my Champion, so… even though this was the first time we’ve met properly, I couldn’t bring myself to hurt him. And I would never even consider killing him.”

*What a hell of a first meeting to have…*

If Toshinori had heard this just an hour ago, he would have been shocked. But after hearing that Momoka was apparently All for One’s sister, and seeing how helpless she had been to act against Kurogiri even after brutally taking down every hero in her path using whatever mind-games
necessary, he found that he wasn’t surprised at all by this revelation.

“That’s not a bad thing. Actually, it’s good that something stopped you from killing another person,” Toshinori tried to reassure her while condemning her previous actions.

She finally turned her pink eyes up to give him a displeased look. “You say that now, but when the Huntsman comes for Izuku I’m sure that opinion will change. If you’re still around when that occurs, that is…”

Brows furrowing in confusion, Toshinori asked, “What exactly do you mean by that?”

“…You’re too much like your first predecessor, Shouma nii-san. And the person who came before you was like that too, right? The truth is, I actually despise you a little bit because of that.” Momoka glanced away to look back to where the villains had left.

“Everything you do is for the betterment of society, so you don’t think about the pain your “good” brings to the people close to you. You don’t think about how you’re choosing the rest of the world over the people close to you…”

Momoka pointed a finger at him as she asserted, “You’re probably thinking about how you can move forward to save society from the threat the Huntsman will become. That would require you to give up on teaching at UA to focus your time on pursuing the League, or any other villain that may come along, really. You’ll probably get yourself killed in the process. That means that one day… you will leave Izuku behind, just like how that Shimura Nana left Shimura Tenko’s father behind. And if that happens, I’ll have to be the one to pick up the pieces of Izuku’s heart.”

Toshinori leaned away from Momoka in surprise as he exclaimed, “Eh?! Is that really what you’ve been thinking I would do all this time? That’s definitely not going to happen!”

Momoka moved her eyes back toward Toshinori to glare at him. “You say that so easily now, but in the end there’s no way to believe in those words! You’ll promise that you’ll stay by Izuku’s side forever, only to leave when you think you need to perform some noble duty for the greater good because it’s “the right thing to do”! That’s why there’s no way to believe in that type of promise when it comes from someone like you!”

“What you’re really upset about is the fact that my brother left to come after me, isn’t it?”

Clarity struck Toshinori. He realized that this wasn’t really about him and Izuku— this was about
“Shouma nii-san” and Momoka. This was about a child who was never able to accept that someone they loved had left them behind, and feared that the same fate would befall their own precious people.

With that in mind, Toshinori tried to give Momoka a kind smile as he explained, “You don’t need to believe in any promises, what I’m saying is a fact.” His non-broken left hand pointed at his chest with his thumb where he knew his Fruit of Fate was. “I can already tell that after the way I exerted my body today, the time I’ll be able to use my quirk will go down drastically. The likelihood that I won’t be retiring to pass on One for All as soon as possible is extremely low. Because of that, I’m going to be focusing all my energy on teaching my students and potentially my successor.”

Momoka’s eyes widened in surprise. “You… You’re actually planning on retiring? Just like that? I thought you believed you couldn’t leave your position since people were relying on you to be the Symbol of Peace…”

“That was my opinion before, yes. But now that it’s come to this, I think this is the best time to trust in my fellow heroes to carry that burden until the next generation is ready – Izuku was the one to teach me that.”

“So… there’s no chance that you’re going to leave then.”

“That’s right.”

“I see…” Momoka’s words trailed off, and she gazed down at the Fruit in Izuku’s chest, “…That’s good. I’m glad.”

This girl must have the most extreme abandonment issues that Toshinori has ever witnessed. But as nice as it was that Toshinori had come to an understanding with Momoka, there was still a mess to clean up…

Raising an eyebrow, Toshinori pointed down at the two heroes he had freed before sneaking up on the Princess of the Crystal. “Do you think you can patch Endeavor up now? I would rather not risk his heath by trying my hand at that spell for the first time.”

Momoka raised her own eyebrow at him. “No comment on what I said about that man?”
“Oh– there will be many comments, about both Endeavor and what you did today. But we don’t have time for that right now; the rest of the world is probably waiting on us to know the outcome of the fight.”

“They certainly missed the fight of the century, but it would have been bad if people saw what seemed to be my Prince killing a man. Avoiding the cameras was a necessity.” And yeah, Toshinori can’t argue with that logic…

When Toshinori returned back to the ground with Momoka by his side, Gran Torino, Edgeshot, and especially Endeavor were all watching her as though she might snap and run a sword through their guts at any moment—and Toshinori couldn’t blame them for that when she had literally already done so to Endeavor– but he personally wasn’t too worried about her anymore now that the murderous rage was out of her system. He wasn’t going to let her refuse answering his many questions anymore, and dear God did she really wipe out All for One from existence? But he couldn’t focus on that right now.

His job as the Symbol of Peace wasn’t finished yet.

“The clock is going to strike twelve soon, Snow White. The Brave Little Tailor hasn’t finished healing yet, so him and the Evil Queen need to be transferred to a hospital after I break the spell on this area.” The Princess of the Crystal held out her hand expectantly. “Can you transfer ownership of the other hat back to my Prince now?”

Toshinori looked to his mentor, who somehow managed to convey an entire wordless argument about how Toshinori was stupid for trusting Momoka enough to give up such a major advantage, but what was he supposed to do? Withhold half of her soul from her? That was something right out of All for One’s book, which meant that Toshinori refused to touch the idea with a 3-meter mental pole.

Gran Torino grumbled a bit as he passed the penguin hat back to Toshinori, and Toshinori passed it back to Momoka without a word. The armor he was wearing shattered, falling off of him and disappearing. Momoka gave him a pleased little smile befitting of Izuku’s face.

She brought the Penguindrum out once more to place the hat inside of it. “When I leave with the Penguindrum the spell will automatically break. Me leaving will also mean that Izuku isn’t seen, so there won’t be any misunderstandings about him being here. To the heroes I just recently met today… well– I’d say it was nice meeting you, but you probably don’t share that sentiment. And for one of you it would be an outright lie.” She gave an obvious glance at Endeavor with her last sentence.
“Is there any more awful news you want to tell me while you still have the chance?” Endeavor snarked rhetorically, glaring at Momoka.

But of course, since the question was *rhetorical* Momoka decided to actually answer it. With a sharp grin, she exclaimed, “Yes! Your son Shouto and my little Izuku are dating! Which means that if Shouto doesn’t disown himself from you, that practically makes us *in-laws*!”

“Oh God–” Endeavor lowered his head down into his hands in a sign of intense grief. “I didn’t want you to tell me anything else! *Why did I tempt you like that?* Dammit!”

“You literally asked for it…” Edgeshot showed the Number Two hero no sympathy, so he was probably a safe bet for Toshinori to keep in the loop for the up-coming investigation into Endeavor’s familial situation.

*At least Toshinori can feel a little satisfaction in knowing that for once, he isn’t the person with the most unresolved issues in the room. And based on what Momoka implied earlier, if anyone deserves to suffer through having Momoka as an in-law, it’s Endeavor.*

Momoka hopped onto Teddydrum White and created a large mirror for the robot to fly through. Once the robot had fully passed through, all the mirrors and tiles surrounding them burst into intangible shards. After they were cleared away, every sign of the Crystal World were gone— all that was left was the rubble, the breaking of dawn on the horizon, and the new helicopter with a news camera that hovered over them.

*On one hand, he defeated All for One and Momoka did not use his student’s body to murder Shigaraki. But on the other, Momoka still managed to use Izuku to erase a person from existence— how will the boy feel about that? Not only that, but he let Shigaraki escape even knowing that the villain now held the All for One quirk.*

*Did this fight end in All Might’s win or not? The end result is too muddled for him to personally feel like it’s a complete victory, but he can’t let that show right now. He needs to reassure the hearts of everyone watching…*

When he allowed One for All to enlarge his body for one last hurrah as he raised his broken right fist into the air, Toshinori could almost hear the relieved cheers of the people who had been diligently waiting for him to emerge.
And even without the white armor, even with the uneasiness he felt at what had occurred that night, Toshinori still thought of how he had finally, truly defeated the man that had murdered his precious teacher. He thought of how it seemed like he had definitively avoided the fate thatNighteye had foreseen for him, where he was put down by a villain of great caliber—who would have been very likely to be All for One. And so in that moment, Toshinori still felt very much like a shining knight in that moment.

Toshinori still felt like he truly was All Might, the Symbol of Peace.

Chapter End Notes

References from this chapter:
Sanetoshi is the name of the main antagonist of Mawaru Penguindrum, and Shouma is the name of one of the main characters (the second brother of the Takakura family). Just to clarify, AfO and the first OfA user aren't literally the same Sanetoshi and Shouma from the show like Momoka is supposed to be the same Momoka (though CoF!Momoka is still very very different than canon Momoka because her backstory is very different), their names are just a reference to how their roles in the story are similar to those Mawaru Penguindrum characters. AfO's role is like the combination of Sanetoshi's and another main character Kanba (the first brother of the Takakura family). Momoka's role is also a combination between the canon Mawaru Penguindrum Momoka and another main character Himari (the third child/younger sister of the Takakura Family).

The Penguindrum being Momoka's diary is from Mawaru Penguindrum.

“I'm going to banish you from this world.”/“How electrifying. How are you going to do that?”/“...If I cast it, it will blow you out into oblivion.” Is actual dialogue from Mawaru Penguindrum that was said between Momoka and Sanetoshi.
The First Station: Arrival

Chapter Notes

So this chapter and the next one are really meant to be one chapter, but by the time I finished them they were way too long to post as one chapter, so instead you'll have to wait for next week to see the conclusion of the flashback ¯\_(ツ)_/¯

After next chapter I will be slowing down updates (probably to about once every two weeks) because the average length of these chapters keeps going up. And also because I want to slow down a bit to see how much of the current bnha arc I can fit into this story since I really want one major arc after the pro hero arc before getting into the final arc I have planned, and also because I feel like this villain's ideology will fit in well thematically with this fic.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*Once upon a time, there lived the very first Children of Fate–*

*The first Child of Fate was born with the power to remove an essential part of people’s souls; he became the Witch.*

*The second Child of Fate was born with the power to pass his own power down to future generations; he became the Knight.*

*The fourth Child of Fate was born with the power to act as the god of her own little world; she became the Princess.*

*The Witch and the Knight were brothers, and were the only two left in their family. However, one day the kind Knight met the Princess, who had been abandoned by her own family due to their rejection of her power, and was so moved by her plight that he invited her to join his family. Usually the unkind Witch was not a man that cared for other people besides his brother, but he found himself impressed with the Princess over time, and came to accept her as family as well. And of course, the Princess loved the two people that had chosen her and allowed her to no longer be alone in the world anymore. For a while, the three of them were a happy little family.*

*It was just too bad that it was impossible for their happiness to last for eternity, for the three of them were fated to oppose each other.*
Fate isn’t kind to these Children who break the natural order. Perhaps that was why they all ended up causing each other’s deaths…

That fateful day where she had first discovered her power should have been one of happiness, so the Princess supposed it was only fitting that it was the start of her despair. Why is it that there are parents in this world who can’t love their children unconditionally? Don’t they know that if it’s not unconditional, there’s no meaning to it?

The third Child of Fate was born with the power to grant themselves one wish at the cost of their soul. As an infant they were abandoned by their parents for some unknown reason, but they believed they were abandoned because there was a part of them that was unlovable. Because of this, they unconsciously used their power to turn their soul into a machine that would remove the parts of unloved people that weren’t desired by society, so that those people could become a person that was loved; they became the Child Broiler.

Perhaps if all children were born into this world being loved unconditionally, such a thing would have never been created…

Oginome Momoka was born during the age where quirks were just beginning to appear. It was a time of unease for society, as the quirkless majority was wary of these superpowered people that were born intrinsically different from them.

She had previously been very happy with her parents and had been very loved by them. They saw how precocious Momoka was, and praised her for this intelligence. They also saw how good of a child she was, and praised her for this goodness.

–But of course, those were aspects of Momoka that they benefited from. Why wouldn’t they praise her for them?–

Like most quirked children, Momoka was four when her quirk developed. During the time it sparked
to life she had been practicing her writing using the new diary that her parents had bought her. Because of that, her quirk latched onto it as a focal point, creating a pocket dimension that was connected to the diary. The next thing she knew, she had entered an empty world that was made of nothing but white tiles and a crystal dome. No special spell or incantation needed, she just wordlessly willed herself to another world on accident. In this world was also a copy of her beloved diary.

While Momoka was confused at first, she accepted the change easily once she realized what she could do there. By writing wishes in her diary that applied to that world, her mysterious power would grant those wishes. And while those wishes were being granted, a shiny golden apple with a golden stem would appear in her chest.

She had spent hours creating new things to fill that world—from normal things like bookshelves, to fantastical things like a castle made entirely of crystal stone. Penguins were her favorite kind of animal, so the last thing she created during that first trip was a penguin made in her image. It was brought to life by her diary featuring a beautiful crown and pink eyes that match Momoka’s. She decided to give it a cute name; Himari-chan.

When she transported herself back to her home, she found that her parents had been worried sick about her sudden disappearance. She tried her best to reassure them and cheer them up by showing them her new world.

However, they had not found the world to be a wonderful surprise like she had…

“This… how is something like this even possible? An entire dimension appearing out of nowhere is just too strange!” her father had fret. He glanced around the place with fear and uncertainty in his eyes.

“Could it be– I heard stories of children suddenly showing signs of having supernatural abilities, is our Momoka like that?” her mother questioned, glancing down at Momoka with concern in her eyes, “But that’s…”

_Unnatural_, they had thought, _Humanity isn’t supposed to be capable of these kinds of things. This is too unnatural._

Momoka had been dismayed to find that her parents were displeased with her new abilities. But despite that, she hadn’t stopped visiting her world. Perhaps if she had been alone there she would have, but Himari-chan loved to see her and she couldn’t bare to leave the penguin that she had created alone just because of her parents’ will. That’s why she kept using her abilities in secret. She had thought that everything would be fine if things could keep going like that forever.
A couple of weeks later, Momoka happened to overhear a conversation her parents were having.

“I reached out to the friend I told you about who found out his son could do weird thingsp he said that he took his son to a place that was able to remove that ability from him,” her father explained.

“Does such a place really exist? How is it able to do such a thing?” her mother asked.

“He says that he found it by following a few rumors. The people running it don’t know exactly how it works, all they have to do is put the children through a machine and when they come out the other end they can’t do anything supernatural anymore. It’s actually been seen that it can improve other things about the child too, like bad behavior or lack of capability when it comes to studying. Momoka doesn’t need any of that extra stuff, but at least it helps show that it’s effective in other ways.”

“Are the children harmed in the process though? That sounds like it’s too good to be true.”

“Not at all! I met my friend’s son, actually, and he said he was happier now that he was normal again, and that he didn’t come to any harm.”

“That’s good. What a relief, we have a way to fix our child now…”

*Why do I need to be fixed at all? Is my world really such a horrible thing?* Momoka thought to herself. When she posed the question to Himari-chan, the penguin answered her by writing on a piece of paper.

*Your parents are wrong. There’s nothing about you that needs to be fixed, because there’s nothing about you that’s wrong. Being born different doesn’t mean that you’re born wrong, because everyone is perfect in their own way. The problem comes from when people claim that certain things they don’t like are “imperfect”, and therefore need to be “fixed”.*

“Is that so… But then why do Mama and Papa think that way about me? They’re Mama and Papa, so they should be able to tell if there’s something about me that needs to be fixed or not, shouldn’t
they? They love me, so if there’s something about me that’s making them not love me anymore, I should get rid of it …Right?”

That’s not a good way to think! If you keep taking out the parts of yourself that people dislike, you’ll have nothing left by the end! Your parents are supposed to love you, aren’t they? So why do you need to change yourself for them just to make yourself loved? If there was something about them you disliked, you wouldn’t stop loving them. So how did they stop loving you?

“I don’t know!” Momoka cried in dismay, tears dripping from her eyes, “If there’s nothing that’s wrong with me, then I don’t know how something like that could happen! I thought they would love me forever!”

Himari-chan allowed Momoka to cuddle her into her chest. And after her tears had run dry, the penguin gave her one final message.

Don’t go to this place to be “fixed”, my dear creator. There’s no way the children that come out of it are truly happy. You will definitely regret it if you let your parents have their way.

A week later, her parents tried to take her to a place that they said would “fix” her.

When she told them there was nothing that need to be fixed, they told her that she was wrong. That she would be much happier if she was “normal”. Even when she started crying, they insisted that everything would be fine if she just did as she was told.

She ran away from them to the nearby park when they tried to force her to get in the car, and when they caught up to her, she used the diary that she had taken with her to disappear to her world.

She stayed in her world for a whole two weeks, scared to face her parents again. But when she found the courage to go back to her home, she found that her parents weren’t there. They had abandoned the place and moved away.

–They were embarrassed to have unexplainably lost their child in such a way, so they had moved on without her–

When Momoka went back to her world, she made herself a bedroom in the castle. What was the point in trying to live in a world where there was nothing there for her? Where people who were
supposed to love her told her that she was born “wrong” and left her when she didn’t want to be “fixed”?

She would much rather live by herself in her own little world, forever.

It could only be fate that they happened to meet that day, two strangers who had no business being part of each other’s world. The Princess had become skeptical of people, but the Knight was determined to save her, and thus persisted in trying to prove to her his worth and the worth of the real world. The Knight’s love was so great that it resonated with the Princess’s heart, and she decided to believe in him.

It was such a fragile but genuine belief– perhaps that is why it was so cruel that it had been crushed in the end…

Momoka lived alone in her world –which she had decided to name the Crystal World– for a full year. It was during this time that she made most of her living creations –her children– so that she could feel a little less lonely. Her fifth birthday passed by her in the middle of that year.

Her second creation was a mannequin made in the image of a princess who had decided to become a prince from a story that she loved to read. She decided to give it a grand name; the Champion of the Rose Bride.

Her third and fourth creations were made together, she made them in the image of the two stuffed bears that she had always used to sleep with but no longer had. She decided to give them matching names; Teddydrum White and Teddydrum Black.

It was also during this time that she made more things to fill up her world; a Workshop for her Teddydrums, a Dueling Arena for her Champion, a Penguin Exhibit for her constant companion. She made a ballroom to dance in, a kitchen with mannequin chefs that could feed her, a treasury where she could keep whatever random things she decided to make.
She wasn’t able to content herself with solely staying within the Crystal World, so she occasionally ventured back to the real world. During that time, she met with other children like her, both young and old, whose parents had stopped loving them for various things they found “wrong” with them. They warned her of the awful adults of the world that would try to steal her away to use as they pleased. And they warned her of the place her parents had wanted to take her, saying that children who end up there are no longer themselves when they leave. That’s why it was said that going to that place made them “invisible”.

No one knew what the adults called it, but among the forgotten and unwanted children it was referred to as the Child Broiler– it was a place to be feared.

The entire world was a place to be feared, for a child who held no power in it.

But there were still somethings in it that Momoka wanted to see. One of those things was an aquarium that she had never been to before with her parents. One day, she saw them advertise that they had a new penguin exhibit that she very much wanted to see, but she knew they wouldn’t let her purchase her own ticket or go in by herself. So instead, she sulked outside the aquarium on a nearby bench.

“Are you okay, child? Where are your parents?” a whispery voice asked her. Momoka looked at the teenage boy that she had noticed coming near her. His blond bangs were abnormally long, covering his eyes, and his shoulders were crouched forward from poor posture.

Momoka narrowed her eyes at him and leaned away, suspicion was clear in her tone as she replied, “My parents told me to not talk to strangers.” –Not that she actually listened to what they had told her anymore.

“Oh… That– That makes sense…” The boy seemed to glance away awkwardly, before he turned back to her with a small smile. “Then how about I introduce myself so that I’m not a stranger anymore! My name is Takakura Shouma, can you tell me your name?”

“…Momoka.”
“Just Momoka?” When she nodded, Takakura nodded back in understanding. “That name suits you— you know, because your hair and eyes are pink like a peach?”

“…”

“Never mind, I’m sure you already knew that. I’ll stop talking now…”

His attempt at conversation was so horrendously awkward that Momoka decided to grant him some pity. She pointed at the other end of the bench she was using and said, “You can sit here too if you want.”

Takakura’s blushing face lit up at her invitation. He made sure to seat himself so that he wasn’t too close to her, and he wasn’t old enough to be an adult yet, so Momoka decided it would be fine to humor him for a bit.

—How long had it been since she talked to another person? Her talks with wandering children had been few and far between—

“What are you sitting out here for, Momoka-chan?”

Momoka let her eyes wander to back to the aquarium as she explained, “I wanted to see the penguins, but I can’t go by myself…”

“…Do you not have anyone that can take you?”

Most people wouldn’t make the leap to her having no parents so early, so she figured that this boy must have some level of understanding when it came to such things. Because of that, she answered truthfully with a nod.

Takakura’s smile gained a soft sadness to it. “In that case, how about you let me take you? You don’t have to go anywhere else with me!” He preemptive cut off her distrusting dissent, “We’ll just be together when we’re inside the aquarium, that’s all!”

However, Momoka still wasn’t convinced. “People have told me that other people will try to gain my
trust by doing nice stuff, so that they can use me later.”

The smile fell off of Takakura’s face as he looked down into his lap from under his bangs. “I– I don’t know how to prove to you that I’m not like that. I’m sorry…”

“Why are you saying that you’re sorry?” Momoka furrowed her brows in confusion. “It wasn’t your job to take me in there or prove that kind of thing to me in the first place.”

He gazed back up at her as he brought his hand to his chest and insisted, “Because you deserve to have a person that can take you and that you can trust in! But since I’m too stupid to think of a way to prove that I’m trustworthy, I can’t help you with that now.”

“Something like that doesn’t make you stupid, silly. No one has a good way of proving that. That’s why trusting in someone is such a big thing to do.”

Takakura sighed as he admitted, “My brother would probably be able to think of a way to do that, he’s super smart! That’s why I feel dumb in comparison…”

“Has your brother ever said that you’re stupid before?”

“Of course not! He’s always saying stuff about how I’m smarter than him when it comes to the things I’m better at.”

“Then why would you think you’re stupid?!” Momoka huffed, crossing her arms over her chest, “If your brother is smarter than you, then you should believe him when he says you’re smart too, shouldn’t you? Since if he really is smarter then he would be able to tell that kind of thing better than you would be able to.”

Takakura had to pause for a moment to think about that. “Oh… That makes a lot of sense, actually… How old are you? You don’t look nearly old enough to be as smart as you are.”

Momoka gave an annoyed sigh as she got off the bench and started walking away, “Just because you’re older doesn’t make you smarter!”
“H-Hey! Where are you going?”

“I’m going home! There’s no point staying out here when I’m not going in!”

“Okay, but… I’ll be back here tomorrow too, if you want to go in together. Or if you want to chat—either is fine! I’ll wait here at the same time for about an hour before I have to go back home! I’ll be here the day after that too!”

*What is he talking about? There’s no way he’ll come back just to talk to a random kid he met…*

But Momoka had always been a curious child, so she decided to test him. She purposely didn’t go the next day, but went at the very end of the promised hour the day after that.

She was surprised to find Takakura waiting at the bench, just as he said he would. He looked absolutely ecstatic to see her.

“Why did you bother showing up today when I didn’t even come the day before? Were you really here for a whole hour? You should have just left once it was clear I wasn’t coming!”

“But you were coming!” Takakura insisted, pointing at her, “You’re here now, aren’t you? That means that you were coming. It would’ve been awful for you if you came here and I wasn’t here like I promised I would be– that’s why I had to stay until the very end! I was even going to come for the rest of the week just in case you changed your mind later.”

“But why would even bother with all of this anyway? I never asked you to do it, and I never asked to meet with you again– there’s no need for you to waste your time like that.”

“It wouldn’t have been a waste of time! It would be time spent trying to help someone, that could never be a waste.”

Takakura went down on one knee to make eye contact with her as he stated, “As for why I’m doing this, well… It makes me sad to think about how a child like you is out here all alone, and that you don’t have anyone to go to. That’s why I want to help you by being here for you, and by being able to tell you that I am here!”
He punctuated that declaration with a big smile, pointing at himself with his thumb. And although he still had that same ragged hair cut and unimpressive stature, the air that he projected made him seem like a radiant spark of light.

“There’s a saying I like to think of, when I’m trying to genuinely convey my feelings to people—Believe in miracles, and they will know your feelings. I believe in the miracle of our meeting, and I believe in the miracle that a bond can form between us. That’s why I’m certain that someday, you will be able to believe in my feelings, and you will be able to believe in those miracles as well.”

Despite her doubt, Momoka couldn’t help but find the boy to be dazzling in that moment. She couldn’t help but find his pretty words and promises to be dazzling.

But she still tried to remain skeptical; she didn’t want to be fooled. “…How would you even be able to do that? It’s not like you can meet me here for the rest of your life.”

“But I could try!” Takakura insisted. Then, he rubbed his head sheepishly as he admitted, “I was sort of thinking that you could just come home with me though…”

“That’s not a suspicious invitation at all,” she couldn’t help but snort at it.

“I know, I know! Just give me a chance, please!”

In the end, Momoka let Takakura take her to see the penguins that very same day. She continued to meet him at that same spot for a while, and learned more about him; like how his brother worked in an office and had been his sole caretaker for years after an incident had occurred with their parents, and how he was in his second year of high school. And after she had decided that there’s no way a boy this stupidly good-hearted is planning on luring her to his house to murder or rape her or anything along those lines, she agreed to follow him home.

And at that home, Momoka learned that Takakura hadn’t even asked his brother whether or not it was okay for her to live there, because “Sanetoshi nii-san can be pretty uncaring towards others so it had been very likely that he would’ve said no– but don’t worry, I’ll figure out a way to convince him!”

*She shouldn’t have argued with him so hard before about whether or not he was stupid, because clearly he is indeed very, very stupid.*
She didn’t say that out loud to Takakura, but from the way he winced at her look, it seemed that the message was still delivered.

For all the nervous energy Takakura had expended over the matter though, the issue was resolved without complications. His adult brother—who had well-kept brown hair, a handsome physique, but extremely cold eyes—took one look at Momoka, and agreed to let her stay with them.

“…Huh? Really?! Not that I’m not happy, but you don’t even let me bring home stray animals! Why are okay with this?”

The elder Takakura’s expression never changed from neutral as he said, “If you had just brought home some random child, of course I would have turned you down. But that child… it looks like she’s special.” The man leaned down slightly as he smiled at her and asked, “Tell me, Momoka-chan, do you know anything about the golden apple that is found inside of people?”

The man went on to explain how he could see inside of everyone the apple that she only saw inside herself, and how that ability was connected to his power—his quirk, All for One. He explained that most people only had brown stems—including other quirked people—but he, his brother, and Momoka all had golden stems instead, and that made them “special”.

“It’s my personal belief that little Shouma and I are different from everyone else in this way because we were chosen to be so. You are the only other person that I have seen besides us with this feature, and the only one other than me that’s able to see these apples, so it would make sense if we were connected in some way, wouldn’t it? Perhaps this was meant to be.”

“Sanetoshi nii-san, there’s nothing “special” about me. Isn’t the quirk you saw in my apple useless by itself? After all, I can only use it to pass it down, it doesn’t do anything else.”

“Not this again, Shouma… You’re not thinking outside of your box! You have the potential to create a legacy that persists past your death, and could even last for generations—what more could a human being achieve in this world than that?”

“But there’s nothing about it worth making a “legacy” for anyway!”

It was obvious that the two of them had had this argument many times before, and Momoka would later find out that they would continue to have it many times more in the future.
“From this day forward we’re family now, little Momoka!” Takakura announced with his hands on his hips. The way he changed how he referred to her was a blatant reference to how his brother referred to him. “So you can call me “Shouma nii-san”, and Sanetoshi nii-san will be “Sanetoshi nii-san”! How does that sound?”

“Ah, there’s no need for that; Just Sanetoshi is fine,” the man interrupted, “We may not end up having that type of bond…”

“Sanetoshi!” Shouma nii-san sounded scandalized as he glared at what was supposed to be his beloved older brother.

“I don’t mean that in a cruel way, it’s just not a guarantee. I have no problem with her living her or financially supporting her along with you, but just because you’ve chosen her as a sibling doesn’t mean that automatically translates to my own feelings on the matter.”

The way Sanetoshi looked down at her didn’t seem to be a mean expression, but one of apathy. “It would be crueler to set up her expectations for that sort of thing, only for them to never come to fruition. The kind thing to do is to be honest right off the bat and not try to play pretend.”

Shouma still looked displeased, but Momoka nodded her head in satisfaction. “He’s right. It is kinder that way.”

All Shouma could do in response was hang his head and sigh, “Sometimes you guys are way too similar. It’s sort of creepy…”

Needless to say, her first day as a Takakura had been an interesting one.

*The Witch had never expected for that bond to come to fruition, for the only person in the world that he loved was his brother. Everyone else were simply pieces on the board that he could collect and maneuver accordingly. However, the Princess was truly the link between the opposing ideals the two*
brothers had, and from this link grew the Witch’s fondness. There was so much that she shared with
his beloved brother, and so much she shared with himself– how could he not grow fond of her?

Perhaps it was only fitting that it was those very same features that he had loved about his chosen 
sister that lead to her bringing about his end…

Oginome Momoka became Takakura Momoka and started living with Shouma and Sanetoshi. She 
had already had her suspicions when it came to Sanetoshi’s character right from their first meeting,
but the ease with which he was able to change her name and get her enrolled in school confirmed
these suspicions. Shouma didn’t seem to think much on it, but Momoka had heard how complicated 
the legal system could be with these sorts of things. If Sanetoshi had been following the letter of the 
law, there was no way this transition could have occurred without any hassle as it had, especially 
since it seemed like there was no attempt to contact her parents.

Therefore, the man had most likely used a shady method to speed the process up.

–But of course, Momoka wasn’t going to call him out on that. She had no proof, and there was 
obviously a greater benefit for her to go along with it than make a fuss. So she didn’t mention it to 
Shouma nii-san, who had no idea that his new little sister was most likely adopted into his family by 
illegal means–

A little after their new beginning, Momoka showed the two her Crystal World, and was pleased to 
find they were both suitably impressed by it. Shouma even compared her to a princess with her own 
kingdom. She like the idea of that, so she made herself a trendy idol inspired princess dress, and 
crowned herself as the Princess of the Crystal.

On the other hand, Sanetoshi compared her to God of all things, saying that the way she formed her 
world and the sentient beings inside of it from nothing was reminiscent of how God was said to have 
created the universe in the Book of Genesis. Both Momoka and Shouma found that to be an extreme 
comparison, but he wasn’t exactly wrong either…

Sanetoshi’s appreciation for her world was different than his brother’s –who looked at it as one 
would look at a child-like fantasy wonderland– he examined her world like a scientist who was in 
awe with his new findings. He asked a lot of questions on the limits of her quirk, on what she could and could not make. Most of those questions she was able to answer –like the fact that she had failed to make any human beings– but some she had never tried herself –like making another, self-
contained world within the Crystal World.
She was also curious about these things, so she didn’t mind talking about them. She had even tried out his suggestion of making a world within her world, and found her attempt to be a success. She created a beautiful world with its own animals, plants, and sky, and set it up so that she could change everything from the passing of the seasons to the passing of time to be to her liking.

Momoka found Sanetoshi’s comparison to be more accurate after that, and so she decided to give that place a name that suited a creation of God; the Garden of Eden. She also decided to give her mysterious power which she now knew to be a “quirk” a name that reflected the importance she gave to creating her world; *Genesis*.

Besides these particular abnormalities, Momoka lived an average, everyday life with the Takakuras, and loved every minute of it.

However, as another year passed and her sixth birthday came and went in a flurry of celebration instigated by Shouma, she found herself feeling discontent.

–Because while she now had the chance to experience a happy life filled with love, she still knew that there were many children who didn’t have that chance. That there were many children that were being hurt by the world and the adults that lived in it. She knew that there were many children whose “selves” were being mutilated in that place her parents had tried to send her to. And when she thought of those things, all she could feel was grief–

Realistically, there was nothing she could do about the first. But when it came to the second… all she needed to do for that was get rid of one machine, right? If she was truly as “special” as Sanetoshi had suggested, then surely she could do that much.

That’s why she spent some time tracking where those other children had told her the Child Broiler was located at. And when she found it, she freed the children currently there by getting rid of the machine.

Shouma and Sanetoshi hadn’t noticed anything abnormal that day she came back from her self-appointed task. But the very next day, Sanetoshi looked at her differently than he had previously and asked if they could speak in private about “an event that occurred the day before”.

“It’s being passed around in certain circles that a little girl somehow managed to make the entire “Child Broiler” disappear.”
“Is that so– and what circles do those happen to be? Are they the same ones you used to add me to your family register?”

Sanetoshi didn’t look upset to have been found out. If anything, he looked pleased. “So you did figure that out… Are you going to tell Shouma? And can I take your lack of response to my question as a confirmation?”

“If I was going to tell him, I would have told him a year ago. And I’m serious about learning where you’re hearing these rumors. If the wrong person hears them, I could be in danger.”

“You have nothing to worry about– I’ll take care of any potential issues. More importantly… do you have any idea as to the gravity of what you’ve done?”

The way Sanetoshi looked down at her for once didn’t imply that she was below him like usual. Instead, for the first time he looked at her like he was taking her seriously as a person, like she was someone that might be considered his equal the same way his brother was. His eyes were shining slightly, instead of being dulled from apathy.

“You changed the way our society runs. You changed the way the world works. For years since it’s appeared people have discovered the truth of that Child Broiler, despaired over how horrendous it was, and then failed to change anything because it was a convenience for society. Everyone has said that it just “couldn’t be done”, that it was “necessary”– but here you are!”

Sanetoshi raised his hand up towards her as though he was grandly presenting her. “A child not even seven years of age has managed to single-handedly and permanently remove this aspect of the world, revolutionizing society! It’s honestly awe-inspiring! How did you even manage it?”

“I just brought it to my world. I was going to destroy it here, but something about it seems to be making hard to break. So instead, I sealed it underneath the tile with crystal. It didn’t require that much work outside of finding it, really. But I understand what you’re talking about. Actually being able to change the way things are is… incredible.”

Momoka was somewhat caught off-guard by his praise. He had freely complimented her intelligence before, but he had never been nearly as impressed by any of her other actions before now. “Sanetoshi-san, do you want to change the world as well?”

“Of course,” he answered without hesitation, “I am a person who strives to reach my full potential,
but this society is one that forces the people who live in it into “boxes” so that it can maintain its current order. And in their boxes, people forget who they are and what they can accomplish– I hate the thought of me being one of these people.”

Sanetoshi lost the shine in his eyes as their coldness crept back into them. “You’re a smart child, so I’m sure that you’ve noticed that the people who are familiar with me and my brother are generally very curt with us. The reason for that is because of our parents. Have you heard anything about the Kiga Group? I know it was a bit before your time…”

The name struck a vague memory in her mind. “They were the cult that bombed a train station in 1995, about two years before I was born I think. I’ve heard about it because people still talk about how horrible it was, and all the people that died in it. Were your parents connected to them?”

“That’s correct. You see, our parents were the leaders of that group, and after that infamous terrorist attack, they abandoned little Shouma and me so that they could go on the run. We only realized what they were up to after the police came to our home, and they never came back.”

Sanetoshi’s tone turned bitter as he crossed his arms and looked away from Momoka to glare into the air in remembrance, “Despite our innocence in the matter, people despised us for their actions. Even my brother—who wants nothing more than to do good and help people— was seen as a potential “bad egg”, and none of our living relatives wanted to admit their association to us. I was only just graduating high school at the time, but I couldn’t pursue a degree in higher education like I had wished because I had to support the two of us on my own.”

“But of course, how could a teenager earn enough money to support a dependent in a society that caters to adults?” Sanetoshi gave a spiteful smirk as he shrugged his shoulders. “I found it too difficult to for the both of us to survive with lawful earnings and refused to abandon my brother, and so I dipped into the unlawful side of society where making a profit is much easier. I became the “bad egg” those people said I would. But I don’t regret it. Because in the end, I got to stay with little Shouma, and I found my calling in life. I found a way that I can revolutionize society to my liking.”

“That sounds a lot like what I remember the Kiga Group’s goal was. They claimed everything they did was to change society because we live in a frozen world. A world where society is too cold to the people who live in it.”

Sanetoshi turned his glare on her at that. “Don’t compare my ambitions to those people; they deluded themselves into thinking they were actually performing justice for the betterment of everyone, while I know that my actions are only for the sake of myself. Because that’s the way it should be. Caring for others just burdens you, and makes it harder to survive on your own.”
“There’s no way that’s the way things should be,” she had to object to that idea, “In the end, you never left Shouma nii-san behind despite it making things harder for you– Isn’t that proof you don’t really believe that?”

“He is my only exception to that rule, because I love him. But love is such an illogical thing, when you think about it. Biologically speaking, the goal of living beings is to continue living on, but for love people will ignore that instinct. If it’s true love, they might throw away their lives and everything they’ve worked for just for the sake of someone who one day may come to no longer love them back…” A pensive frown overcame Sanetoshi’s face, and his eyes glanced upwards towards where the heavens would be.

“If that's the case, animals that adhere to the survival strategies programmed in their DNA are far more elegant and simple,” he continued thoughtfully, “If there really is an existence worthy of being called a God, I want to ask him just one thing: Is there really fate in the universe? If a man ignored fate, and ignored his instincts and DNA to love someone else... is he really human? After all, humans are just supposed to be another type of animal, and yet they’ll go against their programming for the sake of this concept called “love” they themselves created. Doesn’t that mean the people who give up their lives for it are failing their purpose as living creatures?”

Momoka raised an eyebrow at him. “That’s a really weird way to think, Sanetoshi-san. Human beings being capable of love is what most people would think makes us human, not the other way around! And what’s even the point of having a life if you can’t enjoy it? Love helps make humans want to live longer, so that they could be with the people they love forever.”

Sanetoshi pointed a finger at her in a jerky movement as he explained, “But that’s the thing– Nothing lasts for eternity! The people you love, the love shared between you, the joy you once shared; they all end at some point. And what happens if you are the one who happens to get left behind, with none of those people and no love to hang onto? You end up falling too, you end up dying alone– that’s why it’s better to support yourself with things that can persist for longer than you can, like the ideas and lasting changes you make to the world that are left behind. Love and people are ephemeral, that’s why relying on love and on others makes people weak…”

He narrowed his eye as he looked over Momoka in careful consideration.

“I’m surprised you don’t agree with that, you ended up on the streets because whoever was taking care of you before left you, didn’t they?”

Scowling at that reminder, Momoka defensively claimed, “The only reason why that happened is because it wasn’t true love. You shouldn’t believe in promises of true love easily, but if you manage to find it, you should treasure it! It’s because it’s not something easily found that it’s so valuable– that’s why it’s stupid to give up on the idea of it all together.”
“So you think that what little Shouma has to offer you is “true love” then…?” Sanetoshi gazed at her in consideration, before he lost his displeased expression. Instead, he gave her a small, but meaningful smile. “That’s good, he would be happy to hear that. He’s such a kind boy, so I’m glad you are coming to believe in his efforts.”

Then, smile turned into something bittersweet, and he glanced away from her.

“Later, the day may come where it’s time for me to follow the path that leads to the destination of my fate. I had always thought I would need to take him with me, even if I had to force him, because he so hates being alone. But if he has you… I can feel secure knowing that little Shouma can still have the life filled with familial happiness that he wants, while I pursue the life I want. That’s why I’m thankful you are here with us.”

“You plan to leave him behind so that you can “revolutionize the world”, as you put it?”

“I would gladly let him join me – and let you join me – if that’s what the two of you would like, but… like I said, he’s a good child. I don’t believe he’d like the sort of life I’m living, and the things I plan on doing to achieve my goals. But at the same time, I won’t let love stop me from following my ambitions. That’s just the kind of person I am.”

“…Do you know why I took care of the Child Broiler, Sanetoshi-san?”

Looking intrigued by her change in topic, Sanetoshi replied, “I assumed it was because you hated that thing, because you hated that society used it. I also thought that way of it.”

“That’s correct, but it’s also not all of my reason.” Her eyes glanced away as she gave a sad smile. “My parents were going to take me to that place to “fix” me by getting rid of my quirk. But while I was able to avoid this fate, there were many children who weren’t, and many more to come. I hated that thought– that those adults could take apart those children just for their own convenience. That there were so many children and people in this world that people refused to love unconditionally.”

She spread out her arms as though to encompass the whole world, and twirled around in a circle on the balls of her feet.

Her tone became wistful as she continued with, “That’s why I changed their fates and changed the world in the hope that, one day, they could find someone to tell them “I love you” to their true
selves. My wish is for those children to find true love, just like I had.” She brought her hands in to cover the place over her chest where her heart was, and stopped twirling. “To me, nothing is more important than being loved. That’s why…”

A dark seed formed in the apple of her eye as she warned, “If your love for Shouma nii-san ever becomes meaningless, or if you ever hurt him because you chose your ambition over your love for him. Or if you ever become one of those adults that take advantage of children and hurt them… don’t blame me if I come to hate you for that.”

Sanetoshi actually looked a bit shocked by her words before he huffed, “I understand, I don’t want Shouma to come to harm either. But you gave me a bit of whiplash just now– That whole preface you were saying things that our brother would probably say, but you ended up sounding like me instead.”

“Is that a bad thing?” Momoka inquired, tilting her head to the side.

“Not at all. It’s like looking in a mirror that reflects the best qualities from both of us, or at least I would interpret them to be our best qualities.”

Sanetoshi’s lips formed another smile, and his eyes filled with a fondness that Momoka had only seen when he looked at Shouma.

“You really are an incredible girl, little Momoka. I don’t know whether or not a thing such as fate exists, but if there’s one thing I’m certain of now… it’s that you were meant to be here with us.”

The next day was a Saturday. Momoka and Shouma revisited the aquarium, and Shouma bought her a penguin hat she had wanted. She was delighted by it and loved the way it looked with her princess dress, but only realized then that she also wanted one for Himari-chan to wear so that they would be matching.

When she spoke about it over breakfast the day after, Shouma promised that they would get another one the next time that they went back to the aquarium, but sadly admitted that he was too busy with his preparations for leaving high school to go back again soon.

“That’s alright, little Shouma, just focus your efforts on where they need to be right now. I’ll take little Momoka to the aquarium today instead,” Sanetoshi casually interrupted while flipping through the morning paper.
Shouma froze up for a moment, before a huge grin split his face. Peeking out of his bangs, Momoka could see one of his eyes shining. “I knew it. I knew you would like her! It sure took you long enough to admit it!”

Sanetoshi sighed in an almost defensive manner, “I haven’t chosen her because you chose her, still. It’s just because Momoka is Momoka.”

Hearing that… while Sanetoshi was still a shady individual, with goals that Momoka was wary of, Momoka still felt a pleasant warmth sprout in her chest in response. Because while Shouma loved her, he also loved humanity in general. He didn’t take her in because she was Momoka, he would have wished to rescue any child in need that he had happened to find that fateful day outside the aquarium.

But Sanetoshi loved Momoka specifically because of who she was, and that seemed to make his fondness for her even more significant. She felt like she had won something great.

Later that day, she and Sanetoshi saw the penguins together, and he bought her a second hat.

Momoka smiled as she accepted the hat and teased, “What happened to that rule of yours, Sanetoshi nii-san?”

Ruffling her hair using one hand, her new brother admitted, “Having two exceptions isn’t very different from having one.”

Chapter End Notes

I hope you’re prepared because this backstory is basically where most of the “Mawaru Penguindrum” part of this AU went lol. Spoilers for Mawaru are still (shown like this).

References from this chapter:
“If that's the case, animals that adhere to the survival strategies programmed in their DNA are far more elegant and simple. If there really is an existence worthy of being called a God, I want to ask him just one thing: Is there really fate in the universe? If a man ignored fate, and ignored his instincts and DNA to love someone else... is he really human?” is a partial quote from Mawaru.

“Nothing lasts for eternity” is a partial quote from Utena, and the general theme of “finding something eternal” is from Utena.
To clarify what I said in the previous references last chapter, the main characters of Mawaru were the three siblings of the Takakura family. The premise of the origin story of AfO/OfA/the Penguindrum in this fic is that All for One, the first One for All user, and Momoka are basically taking the places of the Takakura siblings (though none of the actual Mawaru plot happens with them)

All for One is like the eldest child Kanba, (who, spoiler, ended up falling into the main antagonist Sanetoshi’s terrorist organization for the sake of making money for his younger sister. All for One’s backstory mirrors that, except he also has Sanetoshi’s ideology, so he also ended up making his own evil organization. Sanetoshi was the top leader of the Kiga Group.) The partial Mawaru quote he says in this chapter was said by Kanba. One for All is like the second brother Shouma, (who tries to stop his brother from doing evil things and tries to bring him back to the family, and who was also the one to save their younger sister and bring her into the family). And Momoka is like the original Oginome Momoka, in that she is kind and tries to save “forgotten and unwanted children” using her diary (she uses the magic “fate transferring” spell from her diary, “Let us share the fruit of fate”) but she is also like the youngest sibling Himari (in that Himari was not a Takakura biologically, but was a girl that had been abandoned by her mother and befriended Shouma. She was sent to the Child Broiler and Shouma rescued her, and after that she became a Takakura.)

(On that note, the Child Broiler is an actual thing from Mawaru that their society actually sent forgotten and unwanted children to. Except instead of the children being changed to fit into society, they either metaphorically or literally die, it’s hard to tell which you’re supposed to interpret it as. That anime was not messing around guys…)

The situation with the brothers’ parents is also based on Mawaru (the Takakura parents were leaders in the Kiga Group, and in the backstory to the current events going on in the show they bombed a train station in 1995. Which in itself is a reference to an actual incident where a Japanese terrorist cult that bombed a train station in 1995—Later, the parents basically went on the run and left their children behind. The Kiga Group’s philosophy involved the “frozen world” rhetoric that was mentioned in Momoka and All for One’s conversation. On that note, Momoka clashing with All for One is reminiscent of how Oginome Momoka and Sanetoshi went against each other during this same backstory.)

The aquarium and penguin exhibit mentioned is also from Mawaru, as it was the place the siblings went to together. Himari also got the Princess of the Crystal penguin hat from that aquarium. (The Princess of the Crystal is technically a character that is the product of half of Momoka’s soul, in the form of one of the penguin hats, possessing Himari. CoF!Momoka tends to act more like the Princess of the Crystal in terms of personality than regular Oginome Momoka.) Also, the reason why Momoka has a penguin and all Children of Fate got penguins that resemble them is because the Takakura siblings also got their own penguins that mirrored them. There is also a Crystal World in Mawaru, but they way it looks is fairly different and it's not connected to the diary/

Mawaru had a huge train theme going, and labeled all their episodes as “stations”. So the first episode was “1st Station”, which is referenced by the title of this chapter. This isn’t important at all, but I actually label all my chapters on my computer as “stations” just because that’s the way I view them. Most scenes in the show were prefaced with text that vaguely talked about what goes on the scene, which ran across a train station electric announcement sign. I tried to mimic that a little this chapter by having those little
prefaces to each scene so that it felt more like Mawaru Penguindrum.
The First Station: Departure

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Witch was a curious man that liked to indulge in experiments, and so he wished to see if the Princess’s power was so great that she could turn a puppet into a real person. But the Witch was also a man that didn’t understand the value of other people’s lives, and so to him no human was that different from a puppet. The Witch was also a liar through and through. But even so, he truly hadn’t meant for his promises to the Princess to become a lie. However, when the moment came for him to act upon those promises, it had been years since he made them, and he didn’t see any point in keeping them anymore when the Princess was no longer part of the world.

Looking back, this was the moment that could be called the turning point of their story. Everything was just a downward spiral afterwards…

Momoka spent years happily living with her brothers.

Shouma graduated and entered a nearby college that Sanetoshi gladly paid for. Momoka made friends at her school. She also continued making new things to fill her world with, including a Tree of Knowledge.

However, she got the feeling that it shouldn’t be used until it was needed, and so she feared the consequences of using it.

She also renovated the Penguin Exhibit so that it could make penguins in the image of other people independently of her. The exhibit made two new penguins— one with blond bangs covering its eyes, and the other with a smart-looking dress shirt on.

Her brothers were amused when she introduced them. They said that she could name them, so pointing at Sanetoshi’s penguin, she decided, “This one’s name is Kanda-chan.” Pointing at Shouma’s penguin she decided, “This one’s name is Shou-chan.”

“Why is mine the only one that doesn’t get a separate name?”

“Because Shouma nii-san is already too much like a cute but slightly dumb penguin, so I had to
name your penguin after you.”

“That’s so mean!”

The reminder of her abilities must have inspired Sanetoshi, though. Because a couple of years after that moment when Momoka was nine, he presented her with an interesting but somewhat disturbing request.

The two of them were alone in the Crystal World again, when Sanetoshi pointed to his chest and said, “Little Momoka… right now, I have an extra apple core inside of me. That’s the part of the fruit that has people’s quirks in them. Do you think that if you used it, it would be enough to make a human being?”

“…Huh? What are you talking about? And where did you get that from?”

“A person who didn’t want their quirk anymore because they wanted to be “normal” gave it to me. It creates warp gates derived from mist.”

Pacing slightly and cupping his chin in thought, Sanetoshi explained, “You see– I’ve been wondering for some time why you couldn’t create a person. Most people see humans as being “special creations”, but really all we are is another type of animal. If you can create sentient penguins and the animals that fill your garden, in theory you should be able to make a human too; but you can’t.”

Tapping his chest, Sanetoshi got to the heart of the matter, “And I think the reason for that is because you can’t create one of these apples. It’s like you’re missing an essential ingredient. Therefore, if I were to provide that ingredient for you –even just a part of it– I think your quirk would be capable of creating a human. So… how do you feel about testing it out?”

Momoka blinked at her brother in confusion. “Is that… really okay? To just make a person just to see if I can?”

“Why wouldn’t it be?”

*It was times like this that Momoka had to remember that for how smart of a man he was, Sanetoshi nii-san was really dumb in other ways…*
“Because it’s a person? Please try to regain at least a little of your humanity and empathy to think about it for a moment, Sanetoshi nii-san. Life is too important of a thing just to use for an experiment. That’s what this is, isn’t it?”

“But surely it’s not too different from how you’ve made your other creations. I always thought you considered them to be “alive” as well.” Sanetoshi swept his hand out towards where Himari-chan was listening in with the Teddydrums and the Champion. She must have heard the conversation and spread the word they might get a new family member…

“They are, but I had a reason for bringing them to life. I was lonely and needed someone to take care of me,” Momoka admitted as she frowned in discontent, “What am I supposed to tell this child? That I made them because my brother was curious to see if I could? They’d feel horrible about that probably!”

“You don’t need to make a child –Actually, it’d be preferable if you made an adult instead. And if your “reasoning” is so important, you don’t need to think of this as you creating them because I asked you to. Do you have another reason that you would want to make a person?”

…No? That seemed like the obvious answer, but I also wasn’t completely accurate. She was looking forward to making her own family when she was older, including having children. What would be her reason for bringing them into the world?

It would be because she wanted them here, she thought to herself, Because she wanted them to experience the world, and experience love. So that they could experience living, and so that they could be loved. That should be the reason why all children are born into this world.

If that’s the way it is, then there isn’t a reason why she needs to confine herself to biologically-made children. If she has the power to bypass that and make a person right now, the same way she made her other children, then isn’t it fine to make them?

It would be just like adding another member of her family, and the bigger her family is, the better. Why does she need to wait until she’s an adult to make that happen?

–Also, she herself is curious to see if she has that power–

“…Alright, then. I’ve decided that I want to try and bring this person to life,” Momoka declared,
bringing out her diary to write a wish in. Excitement rose in her now that she had caught onto the idea, and a smile bloomed on her face. “I think this will work better if I have a way to hold the core, so I’ll make something that will let you pass it to me.”

Momoka made a little glass box that should theoretically allow the apple core to manifest inside of it. It worked perfectly, since Sanetoshi was able to give up the quirk and core– it was still a glittering gold despite being separated from the rest of its fruit.

She held the box to her chest and allowed her pencil to write the next wish in her diary for her, trying to imagine an adult being born of the core.

The core glowed a brilliant gold when her magic seemed to take hold of it, and in a burst of light, the glass box shattered as the glowing figure took the place of the core. Momoka was forced to release the remains of the box as the figure was enveloped in a shell of crystal.

The light settled to reveal a black body made of mist laying down inside the crystal. The head was more of a bellow of mist than something head-shaped, and there was a distinct lack of facial features. There was also a general lack of features on the rest of the body, though its two arms and legs where still distinct, with all of their digits accounted for.

Despite that, Momoka knew just from the feeling she got from this person when she was creating them that– “He’s a boy!”

Her hands threaded their fingers together in delight, and the rest of her children clapped in celebration, appropriately expressing their own joy.

Sanetoshi’s reaction was nowhere near as appropriate. “Why does it look like that, is there something wrong with it– Ah! What was that for?!” he cried out when Momoka slapped the upper part of his leg in offense.

“That’s my child your talking about! Don’t call him an it!” she demanded while scowling up at him. “And the reason why his body formed like that is because his body was created from the quirk, so it made itself up from the warp gate mist. There’s nothing wrong with him, he’s exactly the way he should be! Because everything I create is perfect!”

“Your child? Isn’t that a bit of an extreme comparison?”
“It’s not a comparison, that’s just the way it is. I made him, so he’s my child– just like all my other creations are my children as well!”

“Just because their your creations doesn’t necessarily mean their your children.”

“Yes it does, because I said so!”

“That’s not how it works– ”

“Yes it is, because I’m the one making them! So if I think “this is my child” when I create them, that makes them my child!”

Sanetoshi looked at her serious expression, then looked back at her newly made creation, then looked at her other creations still lurking in the background.

Then, he paled dramatically, his hand unconsciously came up to hover by his mouth. “Oh dear. I had no idea you would take this so seriously– I just asked a really terrible thing of you…”

“You’re the one who wasn’t taking this seriously enough!” she cried in exasperation, pointing her finger at him accusingly, “I told you creating life was a very important thing and that you needed to think about it more! You didn’t take it seriously at all, did you?!”

“I didn’t think you were interpreting this as you making a child for yourself! I was just thinking that this was– ” Sanetoshi cut himself off before he could say anything damning, and restarted in a calmer tone, “If that’s the case, then why did you agree to try it?”

“Because I thought it would be nice.”

Sanetoshi took a deep breath in, and let it rush out of his mouth in a big sigh.

A tense hand grasped his chin firmly in thought. “I suppose this is my fault. I should have thought more deeply on the way you were thinking of things. And while you’re a brilliant child, you’re still a child– you don’t understand the level responsibility that comes with having children…”
“Of course I wouldn’t think I can raise a baby or anything, but he’s already an adult so it should be fine.”

“He may be an adult physically, but will he still be able to process things emotionally or mentally at the same level as a normal adult? He doesn’t have the years of experience to back it up.”

Momoka looked at her creation with heavy consideration. “His brain is fully developed, so it should mostly work the same. But it’s true that some things need to be learned…”

“And that’s where the problem lies– he’s going to need some level of guidance above what a normal adult would need, and placing that burden your shoulders –at your age– is too much to ask of you. Is he like your other creations, in that he can’t stay outside of your world permanently?”

“No. I made him so that he could live life as a normal person, so he’s meant to live in the real world.”

“Okay, that’s good to know.” Sanetoshi seemed to have finally steadied himself completely, and he nodded as though to confirm an idea to himself.

“This is fine. I was already thinking that I would be the one to take charge of whoever you made, so I’ll take responsibility for him. And I’ll take him to a place where he can be watched over until he wakes up.”

Momoka just gave him a look.

Sanetoshi raised one eyebrow at it. “What’s wrong with that idea?”

“Sanetoshi nii-san, you just almost admitted that you were thinking of this whole thing like an experiment– You definitely don’t see him as family. You’re so mean to people that aren’t me and Shouma, you’d be a horrible person to entrust the care of anyone that wasn’t the two of us! I can’t trust you with my child!”

“Do you have no faith in me?! I’m not planning on being cruel to him!” Sanetoshi yelled, expression clearly conveying how offended he was by her dismissal of him.
“But are you going to be kind to him?”

“…If you want me to be kind to him.”

“In other words– you weren’t planning on being kind to him.”

“That’s just because of the sort of person I am,” Sanetoshi sighed in defeat, holding up his hands in mock surrender, “But since it means so much to you, I promise that I will be kind to him.”

“And that you won’t use him?”

“…If he happened to join my cause–” he stopped himself once he caught the unimpressed expression on his sister’s face, “Alright, I won’t force him to join my cause, or press him into doing so. I won’t use him, I promise.”

“I want to see him as soon as he wakes up. I’ll going to make him part of the family.”

“I promise I will bring him to you then.”

“If you break these promises, I’m never going to forgive you.”

“I know. And I don’t want that, so I don’t plan on breaking them.”

—But even so, he turned them all into lies anyway—

Momoka nodded in satisfaction now that the terms of agreement were set, and put the matter aside. She looked back to her creation with a smile. “Alright, now all he needs is a name!”

“Is there a reason he’s not awake now, though?”
Her forefinger tapped at her chin as she thought aloud, “Because it’s not time for him to be awake, maybe? Sometimes things like that happen with the wishes I make. I don’t have total control over the process.”

“How mysterious…”

In the end, she decided to give her fifth creation the name that would most suit him, “Kurogiri!”

There was a moment of silence, before Sanetoshi attempted to choke down a deep snort. He utterly and completely failed.

“What?! What’s wrong with that name?”

A hand over his mouth and eyes shining with mirth, Sanetoshi tried to speak between his snickering, “I’m sorry, it’s just a really suitable name for a 9-year-old to choose– Like how a child gets a dog with spots and names them Spot. You make a person made of black mist and name them Blackmist. It’s a cute pet name.”

Momoka’s pride deflated, and she cried in dismay, “When you put it like that, it’s a horrible name to give someone! I need to think of something else then…”

“No, No. There’s no need for that. Kurogiri is a perfectly fine name.”

Frowning in doubt, Momoka couldn’t help but ask, “Are you sure? I don’t want to give him a name he’ll hate.”

“I’m sure.”

Sanetoshi’s large hand came down upon her head to ruffle her hair. “You made that name out of a place of fondness, didn’t you? So it’s perfectly fine. I’m sure Kurogiri will appreciate it when he hears it.”

But as Sanetoshi’s eyes wandered towards Kurogiri, and then back to Momoka, the fondness in them that she had gotten used to leaked back into coldness.
“But really, to be able to create a human out of nothing but another quirk… Genesis is an incredible quirk, Momoka. *The most incredible I’ve ever seen*, maybe.”

—“I want it”, he didn’t say out loud, but the message rang out from his eyes and through the air just as clearly—

The look in his eyes made Momoka think back to those warnings she had heard, about *adults that would want to use her*. The warmth of the touch upon her head seemed to turn cold, and she involuntarily stumbled out from under his hand and away from her brother.

That snapped Sanetoshi out of his thoughts. The coldness evaporated as a concerned expression crossed his face. He retracted his hand to cover half of his face with his palm, averting his gaze from her. “Ah— I’m sorry. I must have had a scary look on my face, just now. I don’t know what came over me…”

And so quiet that Momoka almost couldn’t hear it, she heard him mutter to himself, “*I shouldn’t be considering that kind of thing. I already decided I wasn’t going to do that…*”

*The Witch had already decided to wait until the Princess had lived a fulfilled life before claiming her power, but in that moment, he had considered taking it anyway. It disturbed him that he could consider being so cruel to a person that was supposed to be one of his exceptions. Therefore, that moment of internal weakness made the Witch decide that it was time to part ways with the Knight and the Princess. That way, he could start on his destiny to achieve greatness while his siblings continued to have a happy life with him watching from afar. He believed that the distance would lessen his temptation.*

*The Knight couldn’t accept that fate, and the Princess paid for that…*
Sanetoshi left their home shortly afterwards. He said that he would visit occasionally and that he would bring Kurogiri as well once he had woken up, and hadnt Shouma been pissed at him for using Momoka’s quirk like that. He hadn’t talked to their brother for days afterwards.

But Sanetoshi’s visits started becoming less and less frequent, until he stopped coming entirely. The only way they knew he was still attentive to them was through the money regularly sent to Shouma.

By this point, Shouma had gotten suspicious of their brother’s actions—having heard rumors of a man that was accumulating power in the underworld of society—and when he confronted Momoka wanting to know if she had any idea as to the legality of Sanetoshi’s business, she answered honestly. She was also worried about the kind of crimes their brother, who was so removed from normal human empathy, was committing against others.

She wished that she had lied instead—

That’s when Shouma started leaving to search for signs of Sanetoshi. Momoka found herself alone in their home more and more frequently. Sometimes, she had to make her own dinner. She found herself worrying whether or not they would be able to properly celebrate her birthday this year.

To make up for the increasing loneliness, Momoka visited her world more often, and created more things to fill it. She was writing in her diary to wish a new object into existence that she suspected would be very useful—a Red String of Fate that would allow others into her world—but when the wish was completed, she felt something crack throughout her being.

Pain burst through her chest, and she fell to the ground when her legs faltered. Himari-chan helped to catch her and break her fall somewhat.

Her right hand clutched at the part of her shirt over her heart, and she looked down to see her familiar golden apple. It had a long, obvious crack running down from one top corner to the opposite bottom corner. Even now, she felt a dull, continuous pain emanating from it.

“What is that…?”

She had no answers. No one to help her other than her creations, who were just as lost as she was.

No Sanetoshi nii-san to offer his brilliance.
No Shouma nii-san to offer his comfort.

She could feel in her soul a ringing through the air, a weight lying heavy on her back. Fate was ringing like a funeral bell. Learning the answers to her questions could mean the difference between life and death.

—So she committed the original sin of humanity to gain that knowledge—

Momoka entered her Garden of Eden with Himari-chan waddling behind her, and walked the long path that led up to the giant Tree of Knowledge. Standing on a platform beneath one of its low hanging branches, she stowed away her fear and plucked a bright red apple off of it. Its skin was so clean that she could see her reflection in it when she stared at it.

Momoka brought the apple to her mouth, and thought of the information that she wanted to know as she bit into it, What is the apple that lies inside of me, and what’s wrong with it?

Punishment came immediately in the form of new, sharp pain blooming in her gut. When her hands grasped at it, they felt mangled skin underneath her shirt as though she had gained an old scar in less than a second.

—She hadn’t known it then, but her stomach was missing—

But her answer came immediately as well.

That apple is your Fruit of Fate, it is the representation of your fate, heart, and soul all rolled together. Your Fruit is breaking apart now, as a consequence of your punishment for being a Child of Fate.

That was all she was told. It wasn’t enough, so she had to take another bite, What punishment is that, and what is a Child of Fate?

This time her chest became pained.
--One of her lungs was taken now as well--

Children of Fate are people with quirks that have the ability to change fate by interacting with the Fruit of Fate in some way, they are marked with golden stems. In exchange for this ability, the Children are punished. Your punishment is that for every wish you make with your quirk, your Fruit becomes weaker and weaker so that one day it will shatter, because your quirk powers your wishes by sacrificing the strength of your Fruit. You’ve made so many wishes now, and your emotional state has made your heart so fragile, that it is causing your Fruit to break.

Her face, which had already been pale from the pain, grew even paler.

For her fate, heart, and soul to shatter… she didn’t need to ask to know what would happen to her if that should happen. It would surely mean death.

All this time, the quirk that she had counted on and had loved to use had been bringing her closer and closer to an early grave.

But even this amount of information wasn’t enough now, because…

She took another bite, What will my brothers’ punishments be, and is there a way to fix the damage to my Fruit of Fate?

Her left field of vision suddenly went dark as her left eye collapsed in a burst of blood. It rained down her cheek like tears. She cried out as actual tears leaked from her remaining eye, and her hand held the pained side of her head.

Her diary fell out of her grip and fell to the floor, opening on its own. The pages flipped to a blank spot before black ink bled onto the page.

There is no way to heal that type of damage. All you can do is lengthen the time it takes before it shatters entirely by not making wishes, and not allowing your heart to break further. But it will eventually shatter anyway, for that is the destination of your fate.

There’s no way she could accept that kind of fate…
Assuming that her brothers’ punishment had been written in her diary, Momoka picked up the pink book and read what was written in it.

*Takakura Sanetoshi:*

*Child of Fate*

*Punishment-To-Be – Will be incapable of breathing without life support and loss of eyes*

*Takakura Shouma:*

*Child of Fate*

*Punishment-To-Be – Will be killed by his brother, Takakura Sanetoshi, and accidentally kill his sister, Takakura Momoka*

“…What– What on Earth is that last punishment?! There’s no way that would ever happen! …Right?”

Momoka looked at Himari-chan, and Himari-chan could only shrug her shoulders. While Momoka had faith that Shouma wouldn’t kill her even by accident, Sanetoshi… had become rather dangerous lately. And even now, Shouma was seeking him out.

Momoka used her spell of healing to alleviate the damage done to her eye, but the eye itself wouldn’t reform. She had give up on it and transport herself out of her the Crystal World half-blind. She spent most of the night wallowing around in silence, with only Himari-chan’s comforting presence at her side.

It was late that night that Shouma came back from his last excursion. Momoka quickly made to cover her missing eye with her bangs when she heard the front door unlock.
“Little Momoka, what are you doing up so late?” Shouma asked in surprise, greeting her with his usual hug.

She hugged him back tightly. “I was waiting for you to come home. You were gone for so long this time…”

Shouma winced, and patted her hair softly. “I know, I’m sorry… I’m actually not going to stay here for long, either. I got a strong lead on where Sanetoshi nii-san is, but it might take a while. I came back to ask Hirahara-san next door to check in on you while I’m gone.”

Fear and dread coursed through Momoka’s veins, and she clutched at her brother even harder. “Don’t go please! Just leave him be, Shouma nii-san!”

“I know this is hard on you, little Momoka, but I can’t just ignore our brother if he’s making trouble for people. As his brother, I have to be responsible for his actions and put a stop to them.”

Shouma frowned into her hair as he confessed, “I don’t want him to end up like our parents did… They got themselves in a huge mess of crime and ended up dying for it. So I need to save the people he’s hurting from him, and I need to save him from himself.”

“But you don’t, though…” Momoka played the devil’s advocate, because that was the only way she foresaw the only brother she had left staying with her. “No one’s asking you to do any of that, so you don’t have to do any of it! You can just stay here with me instead. My birthday is next week, what if you miss it?”

He didn’t promise her that he wouldn’t miss it. Instead, he said, “Then I’ll give you the biggest birthday cake ever to make up for it. I’m really sorry, Momoka, but… I just can’t leave things as they are. It wouldn’t be right. And I’m just the type of person that always strives to do the right thing. Please just wait until I come back.”

That was when she started screaming at him, “But what if you don’t come back?! I– I got told by my Tree of Knowledge that it’s fated for Sanetoshi to kill you, what if he kills you now and you never come back?! Please don’t go, stay with me instead! You promised that you would be here for me!”

There were a few seconds of stillness, then, Shouma pulled back from her to give a reassuring smile. It filled her with hope.
“There’s no way that fate will come true, little Momoka. Because I won’t let it. I will definitely come back to you to be here for you like I promised.”

–How is she supposed to believe a promise like that, when there are now more days when he’s gone then when he’s here? There’s no way she can believe in that kind of miracle–

Her hope died as those words rang in her ears. Shouma put her to bed that night and told her goodbye. When she woke up the next morning, he was already gone.

This situation… she knew what it was; Shouma had chosen something else over her.

That was the only reason why he would leave her when she had pleaded with him so sincerely. It was only a question as to what he had chosen over her.

The first option was that he had chosen the world over her. He felt like he needed to save the world from his brother, and so he chose the world and everyone it. That would make sense– most good people would make that sort of choice. Choosing one person over an entire world of people could be considered nothing but a selfish thing.

–But even so, the thought of it gave her Fruit of Fate another crack. Because to children, their caretakers are their entire world–

The second option… The second option was that he had chosen Sanetoshi over her. He felt like he needed to stop Sanetoshi from doing wrong and save him from the consequences of his poor choices, and so he chose his brother over her. And that would also make sense– Sanetoshi had taken care of him for years and was his sibling by blood, something that Momoka could never claim.

When it came down to it, the bond they had with each other was much stronger than the bond they had with her.

She was just the stray that he picked up off the streets out of pity, after all

Momoka gasped as her heart –her so-called Fruit of Fate– shattered into a spiderweb of cracks. The bulk of it just barely stuck together, while she could see that the edges were slowly but surely withering away into tiny glass shards that formed a trail of disappearing dust.
“Nothing lasts for eternity! The people you love, the love shared between you, the joy you once shared; they all end at some point. And what happens if you are the one who happens to get left behind, with none of those people and no love to hang onto? You end up falling too, you end up dying alone.”

The dying Princess fell into despair. She couldn’t accept that the Knight that she had believed in, the Knight that had chosen her, would end up inadvertently hammering the final nail into her coffin by breaking her heart. As her heart withered, so did her love. And as her love withered, her regret and hatred grew. She hated that the Witch’s words had become true. She hated that maybe her parents had been right when they claimed she would have been happier as a “normal” girl.

She didn’t want to hate the Knight that had chosen her, even though it was his words that pushed her over the edge, so she turned her hatred on an easier target.

And from the combination of her hatred and regrets, something else was born…

From the rate that her heart was dusting off into pieces, Momoka estimated that she had but a few days left.

Years ago, before she had become a Takakura, Momoka had made a glass coffin with the beautiful fairytale of Snow White in mind. She had loved the idea that a kiss of true love had so much power in it, that it could bring those you loved back to life.

Now, she knew there would be no prince to offer her salvation in the form of a kiss. She moved the coffin out of the treasury and into the throne room, placing it just beneath where the light shone through the stained-glass window set above the cutesy throne. The red rose pattern on it filtered through the glass of the coffin and onto her where she was curled up on her side inside of it.
Momoka got into the coffin believing that it would be the place she would die. She didn’t think to go out and let the neighbor see that she was okay—she didn’t see a point to it. She stayed in that coffin for days on end. Doing nothing but lying there and thinking about everything she had still wanted to do with her life.

Her creations could only watch in despair and she resigned herself to her fate. Beings made by her quirk, once she died they would surely die along with her. It was literally the end of their world. On her birthday, the day she turned 10 years old, her second born walked up to her. The Champion of the Rose Bride kneeled down next to the transparent walls that separated them.

“…I don’t want to come out.”

The Champion tilted its head in an inquisitive manner.

“Why does everyone go on living if they all have to die someday?” Momoka weakly whispered, her back turned towards the mannequin. “Why didn’t I realize it before today? That there’s no such thing as something eternal. There’s no such thing as miracles.”

She turned her head slightly to gaze at her Champion. And her singular eye slid over the two Teddydrums and Himari-chan, who watched her with worry by the large doorway.

“There’s no such thing as living with the people you love forever.” She glanced away and turned her back on them once more. “So I’ve had enough. I’ll never come out of this coffin. I’m going to die soon enough anyway, there’s no point in leaving it.”

She heard the sounds of writing, and the Champion moved around the coffin to kneel back down and present to her a piece of paper with words on it.

“Eternity doesn’t exist in this world. It’s just that one could think that a heart that longs for eternity is beautiful,” Momoka read aloud. Then she scoffed, “With the sorry state my heart is in right now, that doesn’t really comfort me.”

The Champion turned the paper around to write on it again, before it presented the paper to her once more. She blinked at the words she read there.

For you are my glorious creator that I deemed worthy many years ago, I am certain that you are
capable of accomplishing the impossible. If you wish for something eternal, perhaps you may gain something close to the eternity you wish to see. There is still time before your end is upon you; not enough time to do all you wished, but surely enough to grant at least some of your wishes.

_Not enough time to do as she wished_— that was a certain truth. There would be many things that she had wanted to do with her life that are out of her reach forever now. Countless regrets that piled upon one another.

Momoka found herself speaking in a broken whisper, “I… I’m never going to finish elementary school. I’m never going to start middle school, high school— _college_. I’ll never get to do any of that.”

She turned her body to lie in her back and gaze up at the mosaic ceiling. Her voice echoed throughout the cavernous throne room, “I’m never going to have another birthday party. I’m never going to make more new friends. I’m never going to have a boyfriend or girlfriend. _I’m never going to get married. I’m never going to get to have any children, or make my own little family._”

Her remaining pink eye became wet, but she wouldn’t let her tears fall.

“I’m never– I’m never going to get to see my brothers again,” her voice started to waver, “I’m never going to get to meet Kurogiri. I’m never going to get to tell Shouma nii-san what happened to me. I’m never going to...”

_“I’m never going to get to see Sanetoshi nii-san again”, is what she was going to say, but... why would she want to see him anyway?_”

_Why would she want to see that man, when he was the one who set off this chain of events? When he would be the one to kill their brother?_”

_When he was the one that left first_”

“That’s right… he’s the one who started all of this, isn’t he? Shouma only left because he was running after him. Sanetoshi left first, and he didn’t even have a good reason for it.”

Momoka moved her head to look at the Champion, an angry energy entered her voice, “Shouma left because of love; love for the world and love for Sanetoshi. Sanetoshi left because he didn’t think love was important enough, whether it was because he truly thought it was a burden or because _he_...”
was scared of getting hurt by it I don’t know– but that’s why he chose stupid things like *ambition* and *revolution* over it. What an idiotic man!”

Her right hand slammed up into the cover of the coffin, causing it to swing open wildly. When the lid hit the ground too fast, it shattered into pieces around her. It caused her Champion to step away from her, but she didn’t notice that. She sat up in her place in the coffin.

“He’s the reason why it’s hurting *me* now instead! Everything would have been perfect if he just gave up on his so-called revolution! The three of us could have lived happily ever after together, but now I don’t even get to live past my 10*th* birthday!”

“I can feel secure knowing that little Shouma can still have the life filled with familial happiness that he wants, while I pursue the life I want”

“He should have known– “ she insisted to the Champion and herself, “He should have known that Shouma wouldn’t stand by and do nothing when he’s going out and hurting people! He should have known that Shouma wouldn’t accept him leaving! He should have known that *Shouma would leave me* if he left! He’s so smart, how could he have *not* known?!”

Himari-chan waddled up to her cautiously, and Momoka glared at the penguin hat that Sanetoshi had given her, which was on her penguin’s head. She insisted to her, “He’s the one who ruined everything, but he’s the only one of us that isn’t fated to die! It’s not fair! He’s going to kill Shouma nii-san, I’m going to die from a broken heart, but he just loses his eyes? There’s no way those are equal punishments! It’s not fair!”

Himari-chan leaned up to press a flipper to the side of Momoka’s face and wipe away the tears on her cheeks. She hadn’t even noticed that she was crying.

“It’s not fair!” she cried, anger turning into anguish. Her hand reached up to clutch at the penguin hat that Shouma had given her, which was on her head. “No one told me that using my quirk would do this! No one told me what this *Fruit of Fate* was, or that I would die if I used my quirk too much! If I had known– I wouldn’t have used it! I would have gotten to live longer! There’s still so much I want to do! Why wasn’t there anyone that could tell me that?! It’s *not* fair! It’s too unfair!”

Teddydrum Black was crouched forward in a position that suggested it would be sympathetically crying with her if it had been capable of tears, but Teddydrum White trembled with rage. It took the paper and pen from the Champion to clumsily write its own thoughts, and shoved the paper at her.
Then let’s find a way to make it fair!

She liked the idea of that.

And so, with nothing else to lose, Momoka found herself under the Tree of Knowledge once more.

As she bit into another red apple, she found that her thoughts were too disarrayed to form an actual question. All she could think of was a never-ending amalgamation of regrets: I want to make it fair. I want to see what it’s like to have a baby. I want to see what it’s like to watch a child grow up. I want to have a new family. I want to love more people. I want to see Kurogiri. I want to see true love. I want to see a real miracle. I want to save Shouma. I want to save my children. I want to save my world.

I want to hurt Sanetoshi for leaving

I want to live

I want something eternal

I don’t want this to be the end

I want to change fate

“I don’t want to die…” the child whispered as she bit into the apple.

The right hand that had been holding the apple fell right off of her wrist and thumped onto the floor, as though it had never been attached in the first place— but she didn’t pay it any mind. She wouldn’t have needed it for much longer anyway.

There is no way for Takakura Shouma to be saved, and there is no way for you to live. But there is a way for you to survive after death. For this miracle to come to fruition, sacrifice is required. Use your Fruit of Fate to make something that can be left behind, so that when a Child of Fate with the power to realize your miracle is born, they will inherit your legacy.
The Tree of Knowledge told the Princess what she could do to grant her wish. She listened to it.

She gave a temporary farewell to all of her present creations. The Teddydrums gave her gigantic hugs, and Teddydrum Black took their parting especially hard. It trembled and rubbed at its eyes as though it was crying again. The Champion of the Rose Bride kneeled before her, and gave her a facsimile of a graceful kiss upon the back of her remaining hand. Kanda-chan and Shou-chan bowed in apology for the way neither of their humans were here for her.

Himari-chan stood by her side, and didn’t make any move to say goodbye to her. She knew that there was no way for her to survive this, so she planned on being with Momoka till the very end. But she did give both Kanda-chan and Shou-chan pecks on the cheek to say goodbye to them.

When everything had been said and done, Momoka allowed her pen to write by itself one last time inside of her diary. She spoke the words of the spell she was casting — the last wish she would ever make — as they were written…

“Let Us Share the Fruit of Fate!”

More of her Fruit cracked, but that didn’t matter anymore. In a flash of light, a train that she had never seen before appeared.

She and Himari-chan boarded it together with their two hats and her diary. And the train moved forward towards the outside of the crystal dome that she had never been passed before.

The train seemed to travel for a long time through endless darkness and nothingness. But eventually it stopped. Momoka and Himari-chan got off to stand on the train tracks in the dark, and the train started to move backwards, leaving them behind.

The two of their bodies started to break apart into glass shards, floating off of them and disappearing in a glittering dust much like how her Fruit had been breaking these past few days. Himari-chan took off the penguin hat that had been upon her head, and gave it to Momoka. Momoka also took off her own hat. She moved her diary into the crook of her arm so that she could hold them with her left hand.

She stared at the two hats, and spoke to them as if they were actually her brothers, “As it turns out, living was a punishment. I’ve been punished in small doses, living as a Takakura.”
Momoka walked to the edge of the train tracks, and looked down. She could see nothing below but a continuation of the nothingness that was around her.

“But, still, we were together. We took all the punishments, no matter how small and trivial. They're all precious memories.”

Momoka turned around, and then let herself tip backwards.

“Because the only reason I felt alive was because you two were there.”

She fell off the edge of the tracks and into the void. Himari-chan jumped after her.

Momoka and her penguin’s body shattered and fell away into nothing. Her small golden and broken Fruit of Fate finally shattered completely, and fell apart. But while the some more of it disappeared into nothing, the majority of the pieces remained.

Those pieces divided into two, and combined with the gifts that represented the love her brothers had given her. Then, her diary opened, and the two halves of her soul were sealed inside of it in a glow of golden light that showcased the power emanating from it.

The diary continued to fall through the dark nothingness by itself. Spiraling down further and further, but never reaching anywhere.

For that was the true identity of eternity. Nothing lasts for eternity—so her soul persisted inside of nothingness to become something eternal.

Thus, came the end of Takakura Momoka’s existence, but there was still more to go before she would reach the destination of her fate…

And thus, came the beginning of the Princess of the Crystal’s legacy, and the beginning of the Penguindrum…
Sanetoshi hadn’t been expecting to see his brother again for quite some time. When he caught Shouma sniffing around, he had some of his agents send him packing, and wrote up a message saying that he should “leave things be and stay home to take care of Momoka for the both of them”. Sanetoshi knew that her birthday happened recently, so he figured that Shouma would at least stay for a while to make up for not being there the rest of the time.

But instead, here is brother was, staggering in by the lead of one of Sanetoshi’s followers. Shouma’s face was angled downward, causing his bangs to cover his eyes and shade his face from Sanetoshi’s view.

“I thought my letter was pretty clear when I said you shouldn’t come after me if you don’t plan on joining me, little Shouma. Little Momoka must be furious that you’re gone again so soon…”

“…So you’re not the reason why she’s gone, then.”

That got his attention. His brother’s voice had a disturbing hollowness to it that caused a slight chill to run through him. “What do you mean by she’s gone? Where is she?!”

“I don’t know!” his brother screamed. He finally looked up at Sanetoshi, and Sanetoshi could see that he was crying. “I don’t know! As far as everyone else is concerned, she doesn’t even exist!”

Sanetoshi tried to settle his alarmed confusion to gather more information, and not let his concern show in his voice as he inquired, “What do you mean by that?”

Shouma grit his teeth as he belted out, “I mean that when I last left, I asked Hirahara-san to check up on her while I was gone. But when I came back, Hirahara-san didn’t even know who she was! She said that I didn’t have a sister!”

Dread seemed to weight down his stomach as his brother continued, “I checked the house, and nothing she owned is there anymore! It’s like her room just turned itself back into your old office!
There’s no pink bed! No pink toothbrush! No penguin hats! Her diary isn’t there, her adoption papers aren’t there— it’s all gone! She’s not even in our pictures anymore!”

Shouma pulled at his hair harshly as his eyes shut tight from emotional pain.

“The school said no child by her name was ever enrolled there, her teachers don’t remember her, her friends don’t remember her— I feel like I’m going insane, Sanetoshi. It’s like she’s never been here, and I’m the only person in the world that remembers she’s supposed to be here!”

_How… How is something like that even possible?_ It shouldn’t be possible. _But there was no way his brother was lying, his grief was much too real. And he wouldn’t lie about something like this anyway…_

Then, another thought crossed his mind, and Sanetoshi found anger rising up in him, “And you thought that _I_ did something to her? What kind of monster do you take me to be, Shouma, when _I_ was the one taking care you two for all these years?! How could you even think something like that?!”

“Well I don’t know, Sanetoshi, because lately it seems like you’ve been doing a lot of shit I wouldn’t have thought you capable of!” Shouma glared up at Sanetoshi through his tears. “I certainly never believed you would make another fucking _cult_ to take over the world like our parents did—”

“It’s not a _cult_, a cult implies religious reasoning. It’s an _organization_—”

“I knew you didn’t care much for others, but I never believed you would be okay with _inciting riots_ in order to expand your control and powerbase—”

“Those people were already going to riot without my influence—”

“I never believed that you would use our sister’s quirk to enact a science experiment to see if she could fucking _make a human being_ like she’s some _god_—”

…He didn’t have a good excuse for that, actually. That was a poorly thought-out decision on his part.
And I never believed that you would ever even think about killing me, but the last thing Momoka told me is that that is my fate! So forgive me if I considered the idea that maybe my extremely suspicious-acting big brother might have been involved in some way!"

Sanetoshi’s first response was denial.

“I would never do that! And I truly have no idea what could have happened to Momoka!” Sanetoshi found himself glaring down at his brother. “But weren’t you supposed to be watching her?! How often have you been leaving her– if you just stayed with her like I told you to maybe whatever happened to her wouldn’t have occurred!”

Shouma glared back at him with fury that Sanetoshi had never seen from him before. “What else was I supposed to do, Sanetoshi?! Let you play around with the world and all the people in it like they’re your personal puppets and chess pieces? You’re the one that’s doing horrible things, I was just trying to do the right thing by stopping you from continuing your mistakes! Do you want to end up like Dad and Mom?!”

“I’m never going to end up like those people! They were filled with nothing more than half-baked ideas and visions, I know exactly what I want to do with the world and how to go about it!” Sanetoshi’s glare transformed into a sneer, he didn’t think he had ever aimed this particular expression at his brother before.

“And even if your decision was what most would consider to be the “morally right” thing to do, was it actually what you were supposed to do? When you have a child you love that’s dependent on you, your first priority should always, always be them!” That’s why I upturned my entire life to raise you, Shouma– because even more than my wish to find my true potential or change the world or pursue higher education, you were always my number one priority! And I thought that you understood that Momoka was supposed to be yours! Not the “world” or the random people that pass by you on the street, Momoka!”

Shouma flinched back from his words, and Sanetoshi held half of his face in his hand in an attempt to contain himself. “You’re an adult now, so I thought it would be okay to leave you and watch over you from a distance! I thought you could properly take care of Momoka on your own, and that I didn’t have to worry about either of you since you had each other! So how did this happen, Shouma? Why couldn’t you just accept things as they were?!”

“…What are you talking about?” Shouma chuckled bitterly, his face was turned down again as he seemed to stare into his lap, “How could I ever accept that my loving older brother, that I looked up to so much, that had taken care of me even when our parents left us behind, would ever become someone that could be considered evil? How on Earth was I supposed to accept something like that and ignore it? To just live freely without a care in the world with little Momoka while I was
constantly aware of the terror you were causing—There’s no way I could have done something like that! Even though…even though now I wish that that was what I did instead. I wish I had just never noticed anything was wrong with you, or just pretended like everything was the same.”

While clenching his fists, Shouma turned his despair back onto Sanetoshi, “The better question is why you think you get the right to just do whatever the hell you like without any consequences! Why would you even want to leave us and do this kind of shit in the first place, Sanetoshi?! Why couldn’t you just accept the way things were?! Weren’t you happy to be with us?!”

“…I was happy, I truly was. But that doesn’t mean I don’t also want more out of life. I want to build something that can last for eternity, so that I know when I die that my life will have left a mark upon this world. That I lived my life to the fullest and lived up to my potential. That I had a reason for being here.”

“Why do you even need any of that? Why couldn’t I be your reason? Now I don’t have a reason to be here! Momoka…she’s gone to who knows where. And in her last moments, she asked me to stay and I wasn’t there for her. How am I supposed to live with myself knowing that I failed her, that I hurt her?!” Shouma didn’t even seem to be talking to Sanetoshi anymore, he was just shouting at himself.

And that was what it came down to, really; Shouma was a good person made up of love that relied on love and people to complete his existence. Sanetoshi was a bad person made up of hatred that relied on things he saw as being more reliable than love or people, so that he could complete his existence by achieving greatness. People saw love as a good thing, but Sanetoshi knew that being overly dependent on it made you dependent on other people to prove your self-worth.

When it gets to the point that you can’t live without it, there was no way to survive on your own anymore. There was no way to truly love yourself anymore, because that love would always be on the condition of other people loving you first. And if it’s not unconditional, there’s no meaning to it.

That was why Sanetoshi rejected that type of thinking—it just wasn’t healthy in the long run. But despite that, despite Sanetoshi trying to teach his brother and Momoka this, they never learned. They were too blinded by the warmth and beauty of love to see the bad side of it.

And Shouma was especially convinced of this, and convinced that the only way to live a good life was to always do good. Just based on this, it was clear that the two of them had never been compatible from the very beginning.

When he had accepted Momoka as his sibling, he had thought that this type of end could be avoided.
That she could be the bridge that connected them while sustaining their opposing weights and kept them from collapsing in on themselves. But if she was no longer part of this world... it made sense that the two of them would fall with her.

He had denied the thought when Shouma had first told him, but if there was nothing left in this world for Shouma other than the fully committing to whatever choice he picked between joining Sanetoshi or opposing him... Then Sanetoshi could see himself potentially killing his brother at the end of it all, if he felt like it was his only option. If Shouma wouldn’t rest until Sanetoshi himself was dead.

A Shouma with his only purpose being to bring Sanetoshi down was too dangerous to take lightly. A Shouma that reached for the greatness Sanetoshi had always known his brother to be capable of was too dangerous to take lightly.

And if it came down to it, Sanetoshi would commit to his choice to pursue his ambition over love, just as Shouma had to commit to his choice to bring down Sanetoshi over staying with Momoka.

It was better to die with purpose than to live without it.

“My dear, pitiful little brother... my little Shouma...” Sanetoshi slowly walked over to Shouma, his footsteps echoing loudly all around them. For some reason, he thought it sounded vaguely like the ringing of a bell.

“Since it’s come down to this... there’s no way I could leave you to wallow in your despair like this. There’s no way I could leave you without a reason to be here.”

Sanetoshi leaned over his brother, and Shouma glanced up at him with his blotchy, still teary face. He looked remarkably like he had on that fateful day when their parents had never come back home, and he had sobbed endlessly into Sanetoshi’s chest at the hurt of their abandonment. It made a twinge of bittersweet nostalgia bloom in Sanetoshi’s blackened heart.

“I always told you, didn’t I? That you were special, that you were capable of leaving something behind in this world that would persist after your death. That you have the potential to achieve greatness, just as I do. Be not afraid of greatness; some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others... have greatness thrust upon them.”

Sanetoshi mentally sorted through the many cores that he now carried inside of him, until he found the one that he had taken with his brother in mind. The one that he had taken just in case.
“So since you have nothing left in this world to keep you here other than joining me or chasing after me, I will help you strengthen that reason whatever it may be, Shouma. Even if it ends up coming around to burden me or make things harder for me. Even if it ends up turning you against me. Because I want you to want to stay in this world for as long as you can. I want you to have a reason to live, something that makes you feel alive.”

His right hand grasped his brother’s face harshly. Shouma didn’t even have enough will to try to pull away, and that was how Sanetoshi knew that this was the right decision to make.

“Because now… you are my only exception.”

The Penguindrum continued to fall through nothingness for years upon years, never reaching an end to the void.

Until one day, it fell out of the nothingness and into the world. It fell through the sky.

Then, it fell into the hands of a child.

A curly-haired 10-year-old Midoriya Hisashi stared down in confusion at the book that almost seemed to have placed itself in his hands. He opened the book to see that it contained nothing but blank pages, except for the very first page. It only had one line written on it.

“…Survival Strategy?”

Chapter End Notes

I'm curious about your guys' thoughts on this, so I thought I'd ask; are you on team
“Sanetoshi was a dumbass that shouldn’t have left his family”, team “Shouma was a dumbass that shouldn’t have left Momoka”, or team “they were both dumbasses and Momoka deserved so much better”? Leave a your answer in the comments! 🐲( ͡° ͜ʖ ͡°)

References from this chapter:
Shou-chan is the nickname the character Himari uses for Shouma in Mawaru Penguindrum. In Mawaru, (Momoka died had her soul split in two when she was 10, and it was a plot twist that the Takakura parents are dead. Also, I should mention that the two methods I’ve shown for erasing someone from existence (dissolving into glass shards and burning alive in fire) were both a reference to what happened to the two Takakura brothers in Mawaru. It wasn’t really explained by the show exactly what happened to them, but afterwards both of them seemed to have been erased from Himari’s and the other characters’ lives and no one remembered them, so I simplified the explanation to being “erased from existence”)

“What does everyone go on living if they all have to die someday? Why didn’t I realize it before today? That there’s no such thing as something eternal... So I’ve had enough. I’ll never come out of this coffin” is a quote from Revolutionary Girl Utena. And, Utana spoiler: (the entire scene with Momoka in the coffin and saying this is a reference to the scene where Utena says this in her childhood, when she’s given up on life because of her parents’ death)
“The there’s no such thing as miracles” and “Eternity doesn’t exist in this world. It's just that one could think that a heart that longs for eternity is beautiful” are also quotes from Revolutionary Girl Utena.

“As it turns out, living was a punishment. I've been punished in small doses, living as a Takakura. But, still, we were together. We took all the punishments, no matter how small and trivial. They’re all precious memories. Because the only reason I felt alive was because you two were there” is a quote from Mawaru said by Himari.

“Be not afraid of greatness; some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon them” is a quote from Shakespeare.
The Second Act Tells the Tale of the Successors

Chapter Notes

Youtube copyright took down the Mawaru Penguindrum and Revolutionary Girl Utena music. I'm so sad, and now I have to go back and get rid of those links I used for them too T.T

On another note, I had been planning on going back to more normal sized chapters after the flashback, but there's so much shit that I have to cover before I can let the kids start school again that it's not even funny. Why did I make this plot to be so complicated? Don't even expect the fun dorm times to start until at least the chapter after next...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After Momoka’s penguin hat unceremoniously fell off his head, Izuku texted his group of friends that had gone to Kamino that he was okay, predicted that either Hitoshi or Shouto would transport themselves to the Crystal World to interrogate him and headed them off by texting them privately to wait until he finished his business with All Might, and then met up with Toshinori just outside the ruined area of Kamino. Toshinori left the clean-up of Kamino Ward in the hands of other heroes on scene, and they went to the Crystal World together to question Momoka.

Now in the library of the Crystal Palace, Izuku and Toshinori sat next to each other in silence as they processed the story Momoka had just finished telling them.

The fact that the Penguindrum was actually born of the combination of Momoka’s Fruit of Fate and the world her quirk created... it made sense in hindsight, but Izuku still never would’ve guessed it himself. The penguin hats that were made up of pieces of her Fruit of Fate –her soul– were resituated upon her mirror, sealing her inside of it in the form of Izuku’s reflection once again.

It was physically impossible to remove them from that spot, so that was where she’ll reside until the Penguindrum comes to an end, whenever that may be.

Along with this, they were also processing the punishment that they had read from the Penguindrum just before that...

*Midoriya Izuku:*
The full story behind the Takakura family, the full story of All for One, One for All, and the Penguindrum and how they were all connected, was a topic so vast that the thought of broaching it was too intimidating. So instead, Izuku decided to voice his thoughts about his punishment first, “Loss of empathy, not loss of morals… I didn’t expect that.”

“What are morals but subjective and personal standards derived from the empathy an individual has for the people and world around them?” Momoka shrugged her shoulders. “Morality isn’t a thing that’s concrete enough for someone to objectively say what a “loss” or “gain” of morality is. Empathy is much more understandable, since it’s all based on feelings that truly exist.”

After staying quiet for so long, leaning forward with his hands steepled in deep thought, Toshinori finally joined the discussion, “…The thing that I don’t understand though is how Izuku’s loss of empathy is connected to him being possessed by you. Those two things seem totally unrelated.”

Momoka hesitated for a few seconds, before she gazed at Izuku to confess, “But they are related. The only thing that was keeping my will in charge of Izuku’s body was that he was wearing penguin hat. The hat is only half of what’s left of my soul, while Izuku still has his whole soul in his body. If he had felt strongly against what I was doing, he could have overpowered my will and taken off the hat.”

“That’s why fate set it up so that I wouldn’t feel strongly against what you were doing…” Izuku muttered, he had realized it from the moment he read the punishment, “It wanted you to erase All for One from existence –both the person and the quirk– and so it set you up for success by eliminating the thing that would get in your way; my empathy for “enemies”, which in this case was All for One and Shigaraki.”

“That’s correct.” Momoka averted her eyes from Izuku, gazing listlessly at the ground with furrowed brows to show her discontent. “I was told that “sacrifice would be required” for my miracle. But at the time, I had assumed it only meant the sacrifice of my existence and Fruit. But those things only built the way for part of the miracle…”
“So the sacrifice of my empathy was needed to build the way for the rest,” Izuku finished Momoka’s thought. Momoka nodded slowly, still not looking at Izuku.

“I only realized how fate was going about this once your punishment status had changed to In Progress, and by that time there was nothing I could do but go along with it. And even so… I did sacrifice my soul for this miracle— I didn’t want it to go unfulfilled. But still…”

Momoka finally looked back up at Izuku to show her clear, pained eyes. “I had always believed that your empathy is one of the most stunning qualities about you, little Izuku. I’m so sorry it was tarnished because of my decisions.”

Toshinori frowned deeply at Momoka as he said, “While I understand that there were many things about this situation that was out of your control, there was really no need for you to follow through on erasing All for One, or trying to kill Shigaraki! Couldn’t you have at least spared Izuku the pain from that?!”

And that… what she was saying was true. Out of all the things that had could have been taken from him, his empathy was one of the things that most contributed to who he was as a person. It was the core of his being; the thing that made him want to help others, the thing that let him forgive others, the thing that made him want to be a hero. He should be distraught that it had been chipped away to accomplish something awful. And like Toshinori said, he should be upset that she had used him in such a way.

However…

“It’s not like I’m missing that part of me entirely,” Izuku voiced his thought aloud, looking down at his chest to grasp his hand over his heart, “I still feel empathy for my loved ones, for the strangers in need that I’ll be rescuing as a hero in the future. I’ll just… probably have a problem with holding back against villains, like I’ve already been experiencing. And I’ll have a problem with forgiving.” Izuku glanced back up at Momoka.

“But I don’t have any problem with forgiving you, Momoka-san. Because you’re already one of my loved ones, and because you didn’t choose for fate to handle your wish this way. You were just a scared child that didn’t want to die– there’s no way I would hold your wish to live and fulfill your last regrets against you. I accept your apology.”

“…Thank you, my dear Prince.” Momoka graced him with a small smile, but it was a sincerer smile
than what she usually gave.

“Even if that’s the case, Izuku… how do you feel about this and what happened to you? While I can understand you being able to forgive Momoka’s part in it, you must still feel upset about these circumstances,” Toshinori tensely asked, turning his body to lean towards Izuku. It was clear that he was nervous about hearing the answer to his question, but this was the part that needed to be talked about the most.

“…I didn’t feel anything.”

Toshinori blinked at him in confusion. “Surely that’s not the case– ”

“No, you don’t understand, Toshinori-san. I didn’t feel anything,” Izuku made sure to emphasize the last sentence as his stare pierce into Toshinori’s earnest gaze. “I could see everything that Momoka was doing, and the only times I felt upset were when she was acting against you, Gran Torino, and Edgeshot. And even then, she never did anything overly harmful, so it never got to the point where I was strong enough to take control back from her.”

Izuku looked away to stare down at his hand, which he held palms up as though there was blood on them. “When she had the Champion of the Rose Bride run a sword through Endeavor, or when she threatened his life. When she tried to go after Shigaraki’s life. When she burnt All for One to death and blew him into oblivion– I didn’t feel a single ounce of disgust or horror or remorse. Nothing. Actually, when she was getting rid of All for One I thought it was a good thing. Because that horrible, horrible thing that he had made with other people’s’ Fruit was taken with him, and because it meant that he could never make another one again. That he could never hurt people like that again.”

When his hands gradually began to tremble, Toshinori took them into his own. Izuku looked back up with wide, horrified eyes to see that his teacher was giving him a grieving look.

Izuku’s voice was a soft whisper now, “I didn’t feel anything. I didn’t care whether they died or not. I didn’t care about what Momoka was doing to them with my body. I– What’s wrong with me?”

He knew the answer to that question, but he had to ask it anyway. Toshinori tightened his hold. “Even now when think back on it, I still don’t care. It still doesn’t bother me. I’m just bothered because I know I should be, but even when I tried to be disturbed, the feeling just never comes.”
Toshinori brought Izuku into a strong hug as he replied, “It’s okay, Izuku. There’s nothing wrong with you, you’re just different from how you were before. And that’s okay. You’ll be okay.” His hero furrowed his brows as he looked down at Izuku with sorrow in his shadowy eyes.

“I’m sorry this change was forced on you, and that you were thrust into the middle of all of this. I’m… I’m sorry you’re missing part of yourself now. If I had a way to get it back for you, I would.”

Tears formed in Izuku’s eyes—whether from his disgust with himself or from the warmth of his hero’s comfort he didn’t know—and he pressed his face into Toshinori’s should as they leaked out with harsh breaths.

For a good few minutes, he cried into Toshinori, and Toshinori accepted his pain. Momoka stood silently in her mirror, forever watching from a distance.

Then, the moment flopped onto the floor ungracefully as a disheveled Takahiro appeared next to Momoka’s Mirror.

“I’m here!” he announced with his hands up in the air as though to present himself, “I’m here!” He swerved his head almost violently around trying to find a person in the room besides Momoka. When he caught sight of Izuku, he practically glided over to the couch he was on. “Izuku-kun! Shit– you’re crying. I fucking knew you got yourself caught up in whatever the hell happened in Kamino when I heard it turned into a historical once-in-a-lifetime showdown that was mysteriously interrupted by flowers of all things! What the hell happened?!”

Once he was next to Izuku, Takahiro reached out as though he was about to take Izuku and examine him for injuries, but stopped halfway through the motion. He stared stupidly at Toshinori as though he only just noticed the man he should now recognize as the Number One hero was there. Toshinori stared back at him awkwardly.

“Oh… uh– hey there, All Might. Nice to see you’re doing okay.”

Toshinori unconsciously glanced down at his frail and sickly true form, and at the cast that was covering one of the arms holding Izuku and one of his legs, as well as the bandages that peaked out of his shirt. He also winced, likely from the memory of Recovery Girl giving him hell for skipping out of the infirmary.

“Relatively speaking, I mean.”
Izuku examined Takahiro carefully. The man’s feathers and hair were thoroughly ruffled, and there were deep bags comparable to Hitoshi’s or Shouta’s hidden under his visor. He was also visible jittery in a way that suggested he had subsided on caffeine for far too long.

Pulling himself out of Toshinori’s grasp, Izuku asked, “…Takahiro-san, weren’t you in the middle of a case? How long has it been since you slept?!”

Takahiro waved him off casually. “I officially finished taking care of the Neo Kiga Group approximately fifteen minutes ago, caught them all just before they finished replicating the original group’s metro-train bombing incident! And that last thing isn’t important!” – which was another way of saying that it’s been more than 24 hours – “What’s important is that there was a once-in-a-lifetime villain disaster that you were involved in, and I missed it!”

Takahiro grasped at his head with almost comical frustration while flaring out his wings. One of them hit a lamp, which caused it to jostle but thankfully didn’t tip it over onto the floor – Though Izuku knew that the furniture here had been made impervious to physical damage, so it wouldn’t have mattered if it fell anyway – Takahiro didn’t even seem to notice this though as exclaimed to the heavens, “Literally every other hero in the top five was there but me! It’s an outrage! I’m the one you have on transportation speed-dial, God– why can’t there just be two of me so I can be at two places at once?! This is bullshit! But anyway –what’s wrong? Are you okay? What happened?”

Takahiro was going so fast that Izuku was getting whiplash, but at least his tears had dried up from the distraction. “Takahiro-san, it’s a really long story. I think you should get some sleep first– ”

“I’m fine, kid, don’t worry. I’ve gone up to four full days without sleeping before and I’m only on my third right now– ”

“That’s really not heathy. Go sleep!”

“I won’t be able to sleep until I know that you’re okay, and I know the reason why it seems like no one can remember what the villain that All Might was fighting looked like! He should have been caught on camera, but they don’t have any footage of him! It’s fucking weird!”

“Fine. The short version is that Momoka sacrificed her soul to make the Penguindrum and the most convoluted assassination plot in history. Which came to fruition at Kamino, where I was present to help a not-quite-illegal rescue of my old friend Kacchan, and the sight of the villain that All Might was fighting triggered her possession of my body. Which she then used to erase said villain from
existence, which is why no one besides the people who were there in the Crystal World and people who are Children of Fate remember him. And I’m okay besides the fact that I no longer have any empathy for people I consider to be my enemies as a side effect of all of this due to the punishment fate bestowed upon me. Can you go sleep now?”

Takahiro stared at him with his jaw agape, hands raised to fruitlessly grasp at answers that weren’t in the empty space between them.

“…No? What– Just. What the fuck?! And that was the short version?!”

“It’s clear you two have a lot to talk about. What a coincidence, Snow White also has much to discuss with me!” Momoka cut in with an unnatural segue. Her smile had turned insincere. “Why don’t you go to Takahiro’s meadow and see if you could explain some things for him before knocking him unconscious?”

“Momoka, what the fuck was that I heard about an assassination plot and possessing Izuku’s body?”

“I’m sure my Prince will tell you all about it!”

After looking back and forth between Izuku and Takahiro, it seemed that Toshinori wasn’t able to keep himself from interrupting anymore, “I’m sorry my boy, but whenever you had talked about this ‘Takahiro-san’ you were friends with, I had no idea you were taking about Hawks! Why didn’t you mention this before?!”

...What?

“He didn’t tell you that either? Oh good, I thought it was just me he was keeping in the dark about being friends with another high ranked hero!” Takahiro sighed in relief, then gestured a hand towards the Number One hero, “You don’t happen to be that ‘Toshinori-san’ he talks about, do you?”

“That’s right, my name is Yagi Toshinori…” Toshinori trailed off as he turned to stare at Izuku. Takahiro’s striking hawk-like eyes stared at him in a similarly questioning manner as well.

Izuku could only stare back at them hopelessly as he confessed, “I… totally forgot I never really told you about each other. I didn’t even think about how I only really refer to you guys by your first
names when talking about you in the context of my personal life, and that you wouldn’t actually
know who I was talking about… My bad! Takahiro-san, this is Toshinori-san. Toshinori-san,
Takahiro-san!”

Takahiro pushed his high coat collar over his mouth to cover up his bemused snorty chuckle and
Toshinori raised up his large hand into a facepalm, sighing, “Izuku, I’m quite certain we’re well
passed the basic introduction stage. I think you’ve been spending too much time with Momoka; Her
habit of not giving important information is rubbing off on you…”

“I didn’t do it on purpose, I swear!” Izuku tried to defend himself, but Takahiro’s muffled chuckling
wasn’t helping.

Toshinori just gave another large sigh, before standing up to fully turn towards Takahiro. Noticing
the Symbol of Peace’s attention was on him, Takahiro’s amusement calmed down and he released
his collar to show a mostly neutral expression.

After an extended beat of silence, Toshinori inclined his tall form in a shallow bow. “I’m sure you’ll
be hearing about this soon enough, so I might as well tell you now—my time as a pro hero is coming
to an end, and I’ll be leaving society in the hands of the generation after me. But when it comes to
young Izuku, while I’ll be guiding his education and staying by his side, it worries me that I’ll no
longer be able to protect him. That’s why… I’m very relieved to hear that you’re close to
him.”

Toshinori straightened up to grace Takahiro with a gentle smile. And Takahiro leaned back in
surprise at the hero’s words. “I’ve met you a couple of times as “All Might”, but truly this our first
proper meeting. Perhaps this is too much to place on you considering that, but I am leaving that
aspect of Izuku’s welfare in your hands along with the hands of the heroes at UA. Thank you for
supporting him this whole time, and for your continued support.”

Takahiro blinked his eyes as though his motif was an owl instead of a hawk, and his wings fluttered
nervously. “Uh… You really don’t need to thank me for that, All Might-san. I was already going to
look after him. Izuku- kun’s a good kid, and I don’t really have anyone else outside of my work that I
interact with often anyway…”

“Then please consider me to be another person that is familiar with you not just as a hero, but as a
regular person. There’s no need for you to call me All Might. Should I refer to you as “Takahiro”, or
perhaps your family name instead?”

Toshinori presented his hand to Takahiro, who gazed at it dumbly for a moment. Then, Takahiro
returned the offered handshake with his gloved right hand.

“…I really don’t go by my name, the kid’s sort of an exception. So you can just keep calling me Hawks, Yagi-san.”

“Is that so…” Toshinori gave Takahiro a knowing look, but didn’t comment on his preference.

That’s when Izuku couldn’t contain his sniffling any longer. When the two heroes turned back to look at him, tears were streaming down his face once more. Both of them shouted simultaneous exclamations.

“My boy! What has you so distressed?!”

“Woah! Kid, what’s wrong?!”

“T-There’s nothing wrong!” Izuku cried as he wiped at his eyes with his forearm, “T-This is the **opposite** of wrong—This is a fateful meeting. It’s so **right**! And so pure! Two of my favorite people are making friends and getting along, **I-I’m so happy**!”

“…You’re really weird sometimes, Izuku-kun, I’m not gonna lie.”

Takahiro shook his head slightly as he patted Izuku’s back through his happy crying, but Toshinori just gave him a fond smile. “Young Izuku can be very… **emotional**, but that’s just because he’s such a kind boy. His heart is too big for his body sometimes.”

“Are we talking about his actual heart, his metaphorical heat, or his metaphysical “heart” which is his Fruit of Fate?”

Toshinori just raised an unimpressed eyebrow at Takahiro’s joke, who pouted and rolled his eyes at the Number One hero. “Everyone’s a critic these days! Shouldn’t be surprised an old man like you has a reduced sense of humor…”

A spurt of blood shot out of Toshinori’s mouth as he shouted an offended, “Just walk with the boy in the garden or something so he can calm down and let you in on what happened!”
“I’m sorry, but you need medical assistance sir?! I assumed you were fine since you weren’t in the hospital or anything!” Takahiro focused a lingering worried glance at the trail of blood streaming from the Number One hero’s mouth, who wiped it away hastily at the added attention.

“I’m fine, this happens all the time!”

“I know I’m running on three days without sleep, but I’m still pretty sure that’s the opposite of fine.”

After Hawks left with Izuku, Toshinori was left alone with Momoka’s Mirror. He took the opportunity to speak a thought that had occurred to him at the end of Momoka’s story.

“You know… during the fight with All for One, it seemed like you were mad at him because he was the one responsible for some tragedy that struck your life, but…”

“But it seems like he’s less involved in that than you assumed,” Momoka finished his thought for him. She stared at him with unreadable pink eyes.

Toshinori winced slightly before explaining, “I mean– he obviously made some very wrong decisions, and he did leave your family behind to pursue evil. But proportionally speaking, he was only directly responsible for a small portion of your misfortune. The biggest thing that made your story a tragedy was… how your quirk took a toll on your Fruit of Fate and how Shouma unknowingly tipped that damage over the edge, which lead to your early death. Even though that’s what Toshinori thought of it, saying it out loud seemed too cruel. “And yet, the majority of your anger was still directed at All for One.”

“Well, my only other options were being angry at Shouma nii-san or being angry at fate.” Momoka averted her eyes form Toshinori to gaze aimlessly at the many books that surrounded them.
“I didn’t want to accept Shouma’s role in my punishment, so I avoided thinking of it. And getting angry at fate doesn’t lead to anything. It’s impossible to retaliate against it. So looking back, my anger towards Sanetoshi nii-san was mostly just an outlet for my sorrow and frustration with everything else, not just him…”

Then, Momoka’s face turned into a dark glare. “But after I accepted that he *did* kill Shouma nii-san like Shouma’s punishment said that he would, after I first realized that he was using Kurogiri when little Izuku described him to me from the USJ incident, and after hearing from Kurogiri what that man convinced him of— I’m glad I erased him from this world. Not only was he a danger to the entire world and everyone in it, but he clearly wasn’t the Sanetoshi nii-san that I loved if he could so easily break such important promises to me. Just because he thought I was dead doesn’t mean he should think they don’t matter anymore! He should have known that I would come back from the grave to get him just for that!”

*Hell hath no fury like a child’s scorn*… Toshinori couldn’t help but think. He wondered if Momoka being so quick to turn to murderous revenge was a byproduct of how her soul had broken apart— the 10-year-old described in her story before that event occurred didn’t seem to harbor hatred that strong…

“My predecessor… he shouldn’t have left you like that. At the very least, he should have tried to balance his priorities better,” Toshinori admitted in a quiet voice, looking down at his hands where One for All had once flowed through, “As the carrier of his legacy, I just want to say that I’m sorry he hurt you.”

“…If you’re truly sorry, then you can convey those feelings by staying by Izuku’s side. Don’t make the same mistakes as he or that Shimura Nana did.”

Toshinori stewed in silence for a bit after that— he didn’t like the comparison Momoka was making between his teacher leaving her son and Shouma leaving his sister. But at the same time, his teacher’s decision did most likely contribute to the fate of Shimura Tenko despite her best efforts to keep her family safe through distance, so he couldn’t claim it was unwarranted.

He decided to move onto the next topic he wanted to go over, “Well speaking of what happened tonight, you should know that I have to give some explanation of what happened to the Hero Commission and head of police, not to mention Edgeshot, Gran Torino, and…”

He didn’t finish the list with *Endeavor*, because even if the Number Two hero came to him looking for answers right now, Toshinori honestly wasn’t sure he could hold a proper conversation with the man before learning the truth behind what had gone on in the Todoroki household.
Momoka gave Toshinori a knowing look. “You should include the Brave Little Tailor since he was also there. Though he was unconscious, he’ll still remember meeting All for One when everyone else on his team won’t. I won’t get into the details of Cinderella’s home life, but the school and that detective friend of yours has already been busy with an investigation to collect evidence against the Evil Queen and remove Cinderella from his custody. The kidnapping set them back, but they should be following through with it quite soon. I’m guessing they’ll try getting that out of the way before school starts up again.”

Toshinori blinked at her in shock. “What? They already knew about that?! How?!”

“My prince convinced Cinderella to confide in their homeroom teacher.”

Guilt welled up in Toshinori’s gut, and his gaze lowered to the wooden floor below them.

“I… I had no idea. I was so caught up in my thoughts about my teacher and Shimura Tenko that I didn’t even notice young Todoroki was going through such an ordeal. Not to mention Izuku’s part in it…”

“You weren’t meant to find out anyway. Other than little Izuku needing to talk with you about it for emotionally support, you don’t have a reason to be informed. The only teachers aware of it are the Mad Hatter, the Cheshire Cat, and the Dormouse.”

Toshinori just stared at the mirror for an extended moment of silence.

“…Present Mic, Eraserhead, and the Principal. Use your critical thinking skills!”

“How on Earth was I supposed to figure that out?! The only one that makes any sense is the Principal as the Dormouse! And what’s with the Alice in Wonderland theme?!”

“Because Hitoshi is Alice, Hitoshi’s future parents should also have names related to that story. Also, I heard Eraserhead likes cats, so his name does suit him, and Present Mic is outlandish like the Mad Hatter.”

“Whose future parents?!”
“Never mind that; that’s also not related to you.”

Toshinori sighed, and decided to drop it so that he could find out want he actually wanted to know, “So, what should I say?”

Momoka shone a bright, utterly fake smile at him. “Whatever you want to, Snow White!”

“I’m being serious!”

“And I’m being serious.” Momoka dropped the smile to give him a heavy stare. “I’m never going to be able to leave this world again. My time as a main influencer of fate is up, just as yours is. However, you still have a supporting role to play here. You may lose your title as Number One and Symbol of Peace, but the influence you have over people and your society due to your legacy as “All Might” is a hefty one. Whatever amount of information you decide to impart on your heroes and your government is up to you.”

Momoka narrowed her eyes in another glare as she continued, “I will give you some advice though, since I know that my Prince was already going to tell you these things; How trustworthy you believe your comrades to be is best left to your judgement, but do not just assume that the same could be said for your government. Not only did the Hero Commission take advantage of Takahiro, but according to Shouto’s sister, they had already learned of Endeavor’s abuse against his family. They thought if the corruption of a hero who had been the Number Two hero for so long was exposed, it would make the entire industry look bad. So they covered for him. Or at least, one of their ilk made that decision –how extensively the whole organization was involved is unknown.”

After a jaw-dropping moment of quiet dread, Toshinori steepled his hands together to give an intense, thinking stare at the dark hard-wood floor.

“Well… that makes things extremely complicated. If there’s a chance they don’t react to Izuku’s abilities well or want to use him because of them, I don’t want to tell them anything. But there’s no way the heroes at the scene haven’t given their report already– and it’s certain that they’ll mention both you and what you did using Izuku’s abilities, so I have to tell them something. I have to confirm that it wasn’t Izuku acting under his own will anyway, or else he’ll get in a massive amount of trouble because of your actions.”

Then he looked back up at Momoka to give her a questioning glance, asking, “But what do you mean when you say they took advantage of Hawks?”
“That’s not my story to tell. I will say though… in some ways, you two are very similar. He has a kind heart, and his goal is to change the world to be a place where heroes have more free time than they know what to do with –to make a world of peace– and he pushes himself to the limits to chase that goal. However, he is also very different in certain ways.”

That simultaneously told Toshinori a lot and nothing at all. He decided to put the matter on hold, seeing that he already had enough on his plate.

“How is UA going to push for Endeavor to resign, or simply take custody over young Todoroki?”

“Only take custody.”

Toshinori slapped his hand over his eyes.

“That means Endeavor’s going to have to be the Number One hero! Is he really going to be able to properly support society in this time of crisis?! Is it even okay to let him take up that position considering his charges?! Maybe we should try to get Hawks to– ”

“Do not ask Takahiro to try and surpass Endeavor to be the Number One hero,” Momoka ordered firmly, contradicting what she had just said about her not telling him what to do. Her mention of Endeavor’s actual hero name and not just “the Evil Queen” or “that man” caught Toshinori’s attention immediately.

“Why is that a bad idea?”

“It just is. Let’s just say that both the upcoming Number One and Number Two heroes have some serious issues. Also, I’m positive that my Prince will agree with me if you ask him. Both of us actually believe that you falling from your position is only the beginning to what fate has in store for your society… We think it’s highly likely that the Evil Queen and Icarus will fall someway as well.”

Toshinori lowered his head into his hands in exhaustion. “…Oh Momoka. Is there anyone high up in our industry that’s not on the verge of an existential or emotional crisis, or fated to meet a horrible end?”

While Momoka seemed amused by that replacement of “God” with her name, she didn’t comment on it. “You complain about that like you’re one of the heroes with a fully golden Fruit. You’re Fruit
of Fate has improved by leaps and bounds with your fight—it’s down to a forth poisoned—but you’re not quite there yet. The Brave Little Tailor’s Fruit is perfectly golden and Ninja’s looked good as well. But that’s only based on what they seem like from the outside, and those are the only ones I can testify to.”

“Okay, then I’m definitely going let them in on some of the background to this mess. It seems highly likely we’ll need their help.”

“Even if you have to tell them about the origins to your own quirk? Or are you going to find a way to explain everything that doesn’t involve it?” Momoka raised an eyebrow at him.

“…While that’s not something I tell people lightly, I may just have to do so in this case. I’m not sure,” Toshinori frowned in displeasure as he admitted, “If you’re right and both Endeavor and Hawks fall as well, there’s no way the public will take losing all of their top heroes like that well. The very least I could do is help prepare the ones that will have to take up that burden should it occur. I’ll have to think through what details they need to know and what can be left out.”

“I see. Well, while we’re on the topic of your quirk…” Momoka frowned back as she questioned in a serious manner, “Are you truly planning on awakening Sleeping Beauty?”

He didn’t bother to ask who that was—there was only one candidate for One for All at the moment. “It’s like what you were talking about before, Shigaraki Tomura with the quirk All for One is a dangerous villain to leave be, and One for All’s purpose is to stop said quirk.”

To think that One for All had purposely come to be because All for One himself, out of a place of distorted love… Toshinori almost couldn’t believe it.

He almost couldn’t believe that such an evil man had once been capable of love, distorted and reject by the man it came from it may be. It made him remember that at their core, even the worst villains were born of not inhuman “monsters”, but humanity itself.

But now wasn’t the time to get stuck over such things, time didn’t stop for anyone. “I’m going to personally meet the boy, and if my impressions of him is the same as Nighteye’s… I’ll listen to the advice that Gran Torino told me and present it as an option to him. Whether he takes the quirk even knowing the misfortune that could come from it will be up to him.”

“In other words, you’re relieving yourself of the responsibility of that decision by putting it on the
child instead.”

Toshinori felt a pang of guilt at that, and opened his mouth to defend himself before Momoka cut him off with a wave of her hand. “It’s not like he wouldn’t have had to make that decision for himself anyway, but you also shouldn’t be thinking about this as just “leaving it to him”. Just you deciding to tell him is a significant decision. It’s a decision that could lead to his fate being changed in a dramatic way, whether for better or worse is anyone’s guess. After all, you giving him your quirk will change his fate, that’s what makes you a Child of Fate in the first place.”

Lifting the hands of Izuku’s reflection one at a time, Momoka questioned, “Between a person who continues to dream and a person who’s awoken from a dream, who is happier? You shouldn’t forget that the awakened world you introduce this boy to may be filled with more pain than the dream he is living in. Please be sure to properly communicate the type of risk you are introducing Sleeping Beauty to by giving him the chance to accept your quirk.”

Eyes flashing to the picture of Midoriya Hisashi that was still hung on the wall, Toshinori replied, “I understand that perfectly well. But while we’re talking about quirks, I was wondering…” His eyes glanced back to Momoka. “With the way that you created Kurogiri… he is somewhat similar to the Nomus All for One created, isn’t he?”

“That’s correct. That man was most likely trying to replicate what I had done with science, but wasn’t able to get around the need to use an already existing human being as the starting point. Of course, Kurogiri was only made with one quirk, but I imagine that he ideally wanted to create beings that had a similar level of intelligence and sentience while also having multiple quirks.”

Momoka’s frown deepened as she growled out, “He was probably thinking that he could create them the way I created Kurogiri by stealing what seemed to be my quirk from Izuku. But as it is, even if he had altered his approach to stealing the Penguindrum instead, he still wouldn’t have gotten the ability he wanted from it. There’s no way to use my quirk Genesis anymore, even by using the Penguindrum.”

“So… hypothetically speaking– If Izuku were to take the core of someone’s Fruit of Fate with his own quirk, he wouldn’t be able to create a person from it like you were able to. He can only use what you’ve already made.”

“Yes, and not just because he doesn’t have access to my quirk. Sanetoshi was able to only take the cores of Fruit of Fate because his quirk was specifically designed to do so, like an apple de-corer. Izuku’s quirk is more like cutting with a regular knife and then pasting the Fruit back together– he would have to remove the entire rest of the Fruit first before he would be able to reach someone’s core.”
Raising her finger as though she were a teacher lecturing a student, Momoka continued with, “Additionally, Izuku’s ability to transfer the Fruit of Fate from one person to another is founded on the basis of love. It’s impossible for him to take someone’s piece and give it to another person if they don’t love them enough to want to sacrifice it for that person. It must be \textit{given}, not taken. Therefore, like consent by the giver is needed for One for All to be transferred, consent is needed for Izuku’s transfer to work.”

Toshinori thought on that for a moment, before he said, “I see… So even if the core was already separated like with Kurogiri or the cores attached to All for One’s and the Nomus’ Fruit of Fate, he wouldn’t be able to get them back.”

Momoka narrowed her eyes at him, pink irises becoming frightfully cold, as she firmly stated, “Since the core is all Kurogiri has for his Fruit, taking it would kill him. So please don’t suggest that Izuku would consider doing such a thing even as a hypothetical scenario! And on that note… you should make sure to tell your fellow heroes that if any of them end up killing Kurogiri because it was \textit{the only way} or some other pitiful excuse, \textit{I will kill them}. I don’t know \textit{how} right now, but trust me when I say that I \textit{will} find a way if necessary.”

\textit{What a scary mother she makes…} “Don’t kill anyone else, you’ve already done enough damage!”

Toshinori beseeched.

“If you don’t want me to kill anyone else, then make sure no one kills Kurogiri. Or my Prince. Or Cinderella, or Alice, or Icarus—”

\textit{Please don’t increase the list of people you would kill for! I’ll do my best, okay?! But revenge is not the best response to everything!”}

Momoka huffed a bit, not giving any indication that she had taken his words to heart. Then, she returned to his question, “That’s correct. But if Izuku had permission, he would be able to take them if they were separated like that. However, he would have to find a person that was missing their core to put it in. He can’t just add it onto a Fruit like my brother could or hold it indefinitely.”

“That means he can return quirks stolen by All for One though! …If Shigaraki gives them up.” \textit{Yeah, that’s not happening.}

“Yes, but most of those cores burned up with Sanetoshi nii-san. It looked like he only passed a few of them onto the Huntsman.”
Toshinori’s already cut-down hope promptly died in his chest. He couldn’t help but glare at Momoka. “I see… more sacrifices you forced on other people, then.”

“You wouldn’t have been able to find the owners to those quirks that easily. Most of them are probably dead.”

“But some may still be alive!” Toshinori insisted, “Ragdoll was at the factory with the Nomu, it’s quite possible that he stole her quirk during his time with her! We could’ve found a way to give it back to her at least if that was the case!”

Momoka’s half-lidded eyes glanced away in guilt. “Well… there’s still the possibility that her quirk was one of those passed on.”

Toshinori scoffed, “And what are the chances of something like that happening?”

“While I agree with your sentiment, you should keep in mind that fate isn’t a random force of nature. It prefers it when things connect back together or wrap up nicely. Perhaps this will be one of those things?”

*If only they could be so lucky…*

After Izuku explained everything to Takahiro, put him to sleep with Teddydrum Black, and returned to Toshinori, the man had told him that as a huge portion of this story was Izuku and Momoka’s story, Izuku had the right to tell anyone he wanted about all the details as to what had happened with All for One and his siblings. Izuku was immensely glad he did, because he didn’t know if he would have been able to deter both Shouto and Hitoshi when they were tag-teaming him to find out answers.

Seeing that they knew everything about the Fruit of Fate and Children of Fate already, Izuku decided that he might as well fill them in about the rest. As well as his punishment.
“And well… that’s everything, literally everything, that happened.”

The two of them stared into the air in silence. Izuku figured it would take them a while to voice their thoughts, it was certainly a lot to take in...

Even still, the reaction he got was entirely unexpected.

When Shouto’s gaze set back on Izuku, he reached out to cradle Izuku’s face with his hands, and leaned in to place a soft kiss on his lips.

Izuku’s brain ceased its functioning.

When Shouto pulled back, he gave Izuku a soft look. “Even if you’ve changed… that’s okay. I love you, and that won’t change. I just thought I should let you know that, so that you wouldn’t have to worry about how I feel about you.”

Izuku stared at him with his mouth agape for an extended moment.

“…Are you okay? Why are you crying?”

Brining his hand up to rub away the wet trails on his cheeks, Izuku croaked out, “I just– you love me. You said you love me! That– That makes me so happy! I’m sorry…”

“Don’t apologize for crying,” was Shouto’s immediate response. He brought Izuku into a tight hug and let Izuku’s face wet his shoulder. “ Especially if they’re happy tears…”

Izuku held onto Shouto tightly, crying into his shoulder to release the overwhelming feelings that were bursting from his chest.

But the moment was short lived…
“What the fuck…”

Izuku glanced to the side to see that Hitoshi was staring at them like a dumbfounded third-wheel.
“What the fuck?! After everything we heard, that’s your first response?! That was so damn smooth! Did you plan that?!”

“Of course not.”

“What the fuck?! You fucking princes– Your natural skill in romance is literally so unattainable for normal people that it actually pisses me off! Share some of that talent with me!”

“I don’t think it works like that. And do you even have someone you want to romance?”

“No, but that doesn’t mean I don’t want the ability to do so!”

“I think you’re ruining our moment a little…”

“Does it look like I care?! You’re the one that decided to have this romance drama now when I’m right here, dammit! You think I like being your third-wheel?! Get a room!”

“Technically, Izuku owns all of the rooms in this castle, so you’re the one that’s intruding.”

“Don’t fucking sass me!”

Wow… This turned out a lot better than I thought it would! Izuku thought to himself. He made sure to hide his amused smile in Shouto’s shoulder.

“What the fuck…”

This time everyone turned their heads to the doorway of the library to see a drowsy, messy-haired Takahiro peeking in. “I’m asleep for like 2 hours and you’ve already moved on from villain assassinations to love confessions?”
Takahiro sighed while rubbing at his eyes, “I don’t know why I’m surprised! I went out of touch for three days max and you initiated an almost-illegal rescue operation and assassinated said villain– I need to stop leaving you alone…”

“…Why is the Number Three hero here?” Shouto asked as he turned to Izuku. Hitoshi also turned to Izuku with a questioning look.

“Oh Momoka…” Izuku slapped his hand over his face, looking down towards the ground in embarrassment. “I really didn’t explain anything to anyone, did I? Hawks’s name is Takahiro!”

“Hawks is the Takahiro-san you’ve been talking about?!” Hitoshi exclaimed in exasperation.

“Oh… I had no idea. At least I already figured out that Toshinori-san is All Might,” Shouto muttered to himself.

“Toshinori-san is All Might?!”

“What exactly have you been telling your friends about me, kid…”

That’s when Izuku’s reflection reappeared in the mirror. “All good things, Icarus, don’t worry!” Momoka chimed in with a grin.

Takahiro just side-eyed Momoka. “It doesn’t fill me with confidence when you’re the one to say that.”

“Don’t be mean! I wouldn’t lie about that kind of thing to you, you know. You’re one of my favorites. Actually– all of you are my favorites! Little Izuku, please take a group photo with them for me while you’re all in one place! I’ll get Snow White so that he can take the picture for you!”

“Snow White?”

“That’s Momoka-san’s nickname for Toshinori-san.”
“All Might is here?! Right now?!”

Things dissolved into chaos after that. Izuku rather liked the group photo idea, and so he forced his three companions into a nice scenic picture in the Garden of Eden. A bemused Toshinori took their picture without complaint.

But soon, they had to disband; Izuku used the bracelet being worn by Horus at Takahiro’s agency to deliver the man back, exacting a promise from him that he would continue to rest. He made sure to replace Takahiro’s bracelet —as well as Horus’s, in case he needed to drop Takahiro off at Kyushu again— Then, Izuku brought Shouto, Hitoshi, Toshinori, and himself back to the Kamino area. Toshinori split up to hear how things were doing on scene with the other heroes, and the rest of them headed back to their friends.

Ochako smothered Izuku in a tight hug. Yaoyorozu gave a relieved and grateful sigh. And Kirishima gave him a strong pat on the back and cheerfully reported that they had already delivered Kacchan to the police. During the awkward train ride back, Izuku tried his best to explain the situation without including anything fate related —though there was no way to get out of vaguely explaining who Momoka was and that she was connected to his abilities. He was pretty sure they could easily tell he wasn’t giving the full story, but they also guessed that Shouto and Hitoshi did know the full story, so they didn’t push him for more answers.

When Izuku arrived home, his mother just gave him a look. She must have recognized the poppies Momoka used to essentially drug the news crew as being from the Garden of Eden. And there was absolutely no way he was getting away with only explaining the bare minimum like he had with his friends.

Plopping down on their couch in the living room, Izuku sighed, “It’s a long story…”

Mom sat down beside him, raising an eyebrow. “I’ll be here all night if that’s how long this long story takes, Izuku. Don’t you dare leave anything out.”

He winced a bit at that, but before he could start talking, his mother pulled him into a warm hug. She whispered, “But before that… I’m so glad you’re safe, sweetie. Welcome home.”

Lips curling up into a smile, Izuku closed his eyes and returned the embrace. “I’m home, Mom. Don’t worry.”
Tomura was at the end of his patience; Sensei is gone. This weird rotten apple suddenly started showing up in his chest with these weird parts attached to it. He had to figure out how to access them to use one of the quirks Sensei had given him. He had to figure out how to use said overly technically quirk to find his subordinates while Kurogiri warped them from area to area. Then, after actually meeting up with said subordinates, they started spouting bullshit. And he didn’t even know how to turn off this Search quirk so that he wasn’t constantly feeling the presence of these people and all the people outside of their hideout—which was an awful, awful thing to feel; how did the hero this quirk had previously belonged to ever put up with it? It was like his mind was being pulled multiple ways at once, so that it could access way too much information at once.

Was it any wonder that he ended up strangling one of his annoying league members by the neck, just barely lifting his pinky finger off of them so that he didn’t decapitate them entirely?

As Spinner desperately scratched at his hands in a vain attempt to pull them off, croaking from his inability to breath, Dabi tried to pull at Tomura’s arm. “What the hell?! Why are you choking him?! He’s just telling you how it is!”

“He’s lying! You’re all lying!” Tomura screamed back.

“No we aren’t! We seriously have no idea who this villain that was said to fight All Might was!”

“How the fuck could you not know?! You literally met him just before their fight started– or at least most of you did! So how the hell do they not know who Sensei is or what he looks like?!”

“Even if you say that, the matter of fact is that we don’t remember that occurring at all!” Magne hesitantly added, her hands were half way stretched out towards Shigaraki’s other arm, “We tried to get back Bakugou from the other kids and All Might showed up, but we never met this person you’re talking about!”

“He was the fucking leader of this organization! How do you not know him?!”
A misty black hand gently grasped his forearm. Tomura looked away from Spinner to stare at Kurogiri, who gave him a pleading look with his glowing eyes. “Sir, I understand how confused you are right now, but this isn’t the way to handle it. We both know they saw All for One, and they aren’t lying, so something must have happened to their memories of him– that’s no fault of theirs. Let’s calm down and think about what could have occurred.”

“Do you really care so much about whether I’m still here or not?”

“Of course. That’s the thing that I care about most now”

That was another thing that had been muddled up by this night– after Kurogiri risked his life to save Tomura and told him all those things, Tomura has been looking at him differently. It’s like his chest has suddenly sparked up new emotions he had stopped feeling for people other than Sensei; gratitude for Kurogiri’s actions and attention mixed easily with guilt he felt from how he had treated Kurogiri before. They flowed into a small but steady trickle of empathy.

That was something else which frustrated Tomura greatly…

Tomura released his grip to let Spinner drop carelessly onto the floor. From below, the lizard man coughed up hacking breaths while rubbing at the bruises Tomura had surely left. When Kurogiri gave a sigh of relief, Tomura was annoyed that he felt pleased at having contented his subordinate. The others that crowded around them – Dabi, Magne, Toga, Compress, and Twice, all present and accounted for – physically untensed at the de-escalation of violence.

As Kurogiri pulled him away from the others to talk in a private room, Tomura protested just for the sake of being defiant, “They could still be lying…”

Kurogiri shook his head and replied with a serious, heavy tone, “That’s highly unlikely, actually. I just finished a phone call with the doctor, and… he thinks that he’s only working on the Nomus. He doesn’t remember having All for One as his primary patient.”

“…W-What?” Tomura’s dry, blood-shot eyes widened in shock as he found himself stuttering, “But– the doctor has known him for years! He’s been working for Sensei since before even me! How–”

There’s no way Dr. Tsubasa would lie about that kind of thing, but… How is something like that
even possible? How can someone just forget a person that they’ve known for years?

“I was wondering how that could come about as well, and I think this may be connected to the terminology that Princess of the Crystal used. After all, if she had simply killed All for One, why would she need to specifically refer to her act as “erasing him from existence”?”

“Imagine… A world where you do not exist”

Tomura’s muscles violently seized up as he froze, those words rang through his mind like a song on repeat.

“There’s no way… She couldn’t have meant that literally, right? This is like—” Tomura felt himself fall apart with his thoughts, and he helplessly gestured at Kurogiri with both hands. “It’s like she hacked into the server and erased his character files, but the fucking server is the universe and reality!”

Stumbling forward, Tomura grasped at the top of Kurogiri’s black vest to pull the man towards him and into his spiraling despair. “This— This isn’t a video game, Kurogiri, this is real life!” And what did it say about this situation that Tomura would actually say something like that, when interpreting life as a video game was his default mental state? “Something like that doesn’t happen in real life! It can’t! It’s impossible! So why— Why does it seem like that’s exactly what happened?! This can’t be real! How could everyone have just forgotten about him?! He was supposed to be remembered for eternity—!”

Tomura cut himself off when Kurogiri gently placed both of his hands over the ones Tomura was using to hold onto him. He observed Tomura with an equally gentle look.

“I understand, Shigaraki Tomura. I also don’t know how something impossible like that could happen… But this doesn’t have to be the end for him, because you’re still here, and you are his successor. That means if you crave your ideals into this world to last for eternity, in a way, it will also be like he is a part of that eternity as well.”

After a moment to process what was said, Tomura felt himself physically release some of his sorrow and stress. “That’s right… Things haven’t totally changed. Our revolution is still pending, we can still win the war— No, we must win the war. For Sensei’s sake. But other than that, our most immediate goals are already decided.”
Anger. Sorrow. Hatred. They all swirled around inside of Tomura’s chest as he thought back to the last message that his teacher and savior had given him through the connection that was used to transfer his quirk to Tomura…

“The book being used to destroy me is Momoka’s diary, and it is the source of Midoriya Izuku’s power. You must steal it from him. Do not forget, Shigaraki Tomura… If the egg’s shell does not break, the chick will die without being born. We are the chick; the egg is the world. If the world’s shell does not break, we will die without being born. Complete my revolution by breaking the world’s shell so that your true self may survive!–

Tomura let go of Kurogiri, who released his own grip on Tomura’s hands in response, to glare into the empty air.

“First, we go hunting for a certain annoyingly pink diary. And then, go hunting for the heads of Midoriya Izuku and that Princess of the Crystal! I will avenge my teacher no matter what!”

Chapter End Notes

References from this chapter:
“Between a person who continues to dream and a person who’s awoken from a dream, who is happier?” is a quote from Princess Tutu.
It was only right after Shinsou had left that Izuku finally breeched into a subject that Shouto was certain had been on his mind for a while—he had been catching Izuku’s worried glances constantly.

“Shouto-kun, there’s… something else that I need to tell you about. It’s about information that was foretold by Momoka’s storybook about the League of Villain’s attack on our camp. You know, like the kind that have appeared before?”

“…You’ve never told me about anything like that.”

Izuku cursed at himself, angrily hitting his forehead as though that would make him a little less like Momoka and her never-telling-anyone-anything ways. Shouto reached a hand out to grab Izuku’s hand and force him to stop, as he already knew that was a lost cause.

“Well! That’s a thing that we have! Anyway—” he moved on quickly, as though the existence of a future-telling book was just something that Shouto was supposed to accept without question. He was right. At this point, nothing was too weird about his boyfriend’s life for Shouto to accept. He had gotten too used to it. “This time, it gave information about the leader for that attack. These are the kind of details that Momoka usually wouldn’t be able to talk about without us finding out about it first, but she had been able to speak about it when she was “alive” by possessing my body, so it’s fair gain now.”

Shouto’s eyes narrowed into a look of serious thought. “I didn’t think about how Shigaraki wouldn’t have been able to directly control them when he wasn’t there. Which of the villains was the leader then?”

“Based on context clues, the villain with the fire quirk, Dabi.”

“And why do you need to talk about this information with me?” It would’ve been perfectly understandably for Izuku to chose to only discuss this with the police or teachers, there was no need to tell Shouto. “Did something about it upset you? Or do you need to talk with someone about it?”

“N-No, actually… I need to tell you because it’s personal for you.”
Now Shouto was really confused. “What? What could I possibly have to do with Dabi? Is he my long-lost brother or something?”

Izuku’s jaw dropped. He stared at Shouto in shock.

In a high-pitched voice, Izuku exclaimed, “How— How did you know?! Did you recognize him?!”

Shouto stared back at Izuku, also in shock. “I… was just throwing it out there? That– I wasn’t even being serious! Are you telling me that it’s for real?!”

“How are all of your most impossible conspiracy theories right?! First guessing that I brought Shouta-sensei back from the dead, and now this?! If I had actually been Toshinori’s love child that would’ve been a perfect streak!”

“I think that I was right in the end about that, actually,” Shouto interjected with a partly raised hand, “You may not be his biological child, but you sure act like father and son a lot of the time, so I think I managed to guess the spirit of it right.”

“That just means that all of them have been right!”

“…Well shit.” Shouto could do nothing but down at his hands, as though they held the answers to how he knew these answers. “Maybe… You know that future-seeing sidekick All Might had? Maybe he’s my actual father, and I’ve been subconsciously seeing the future this entire time?”

“…Ah– Well, at least now you don’t have a perfect record. That makes me feel a little better.”

Then, Izuku narrowed his eyes in thought, and asked, “More importantly, do you think Dabi could be…”

The mood turned sour. Shouto kept his pinched expression turned down at his hands as he remembered the villain’s now familiar blue eyes.
“Yes. He’s Touya, but– why would he… Why– ?” Why would he do that?

He had barely spent any real time with Touya nii-san, having been kept away from his siblings, but he remembered some things about his brother. How he used to yell at their father for Shouto. How if he caught Shouto doing something normal like playing games that Endeavor didn’t like him doing, he would smile at Shouto mischievously and leave him be, as though it was meant to be their little secret.

Shouto couldn’t finish his question, as he brought his eyes up to see the worried face of the boy he loved, who had done everything in his power to save Shouto from himself, and loved everything about Shouto.

The boy that Dabi –Touya nii-san– had almost stolen straight out of Shouto’s own hands.

Why would he do that Izuku?

Why would he do that to Shouto?

“It’s the Hero Billboard Chart JP! Based on the number of cases resolved, level of contribution to society, and popularity ratings among the people, among many other things, we rank currently active heroes and broadcast the list twice every year!”

Hitoshi had just been dropped off at his house after he and Todoroki both met up with Izuku to ask what the fuck that was all about. Despite the fact that Izuku had explained everything to him, he still felt like he had no idea what was going on. That entire situation concerning the villain that everyone forgot and Momoka’s soul was something beyond the realm of what Hitoshi had thought was possible.

–He should have known to expect something as crazy as that when the Prince of the Crystal was involved, though–
The TV continued to drone on in the background of the living room, “In a stunning turn of events causing an uproar not only here in Japan, but in the home of heroes itself America, the erstwhile unshakeable Number One All Might has revealed his true form has reached the limit of its power, and declared he will effectively retire from heroics!”

*Of course he’s retiring. According to Izuku, the man has been coughing up blood for the past five years at least— It was high time he retired…*

“Meanwhile, the Number Four hero Best Jeanist had been hit with a nasty wound, but has mostly recovered! He is expected to go back to hero work sometime in the future! Number Two hero Endeavor was also injured by the villain in battle, but he has also recovered! It was said that he will be released from the hospital today, and will be going back to hero work as soon as possible! While the identity of said villain is still undisclosed, the heroes who were at the scene have reported that he was killed during the confrontation.”

Hitoshi felt himself tense up upon hearing the name of the – former? – Number Two hero. Todoroki and Izuku hadn’t told him anything about what was going on with Todoroki and his father, but it was clear that something was going on just by Todoroki’s attitude towards every mention of the Number Two hero. Not to mention the fact that Todoroki was preparing to stay at Izuku’s house for quite awhile instead of heading back home like Hitoshi had.

–And Hitoshi knew very well that some parents failed to love their children like they should–

Todoroki had seemed pensive at the thought of his father’s sudden promotion instead of showing an outright negative reaction, though. Hitoshi had no idea what must be going through his head right now.

And the mention of the villain’s fate also set Hitoshi on edge. To think that Momoka would use Izuku for such a thing… To think that Momoka had had to sacrifice her soul just for the chance of survival… To think that someone as kind as Izuku could just lose a part of his empathy, an integral part of his character, because fate decided on it…

It’s like Hitoshi really was in a crazy, mad wonderland. Except it wasn’t wonderous at all.

“As for the Number 32-ranked hero and member of the solidly popular Pussy Cats, Ragdoll, an anomaly from her abduction has rendered her unable to use her quirk. As such, the Pussy Cats have suspended hero operations!”
Hitoshi shivered slightly at that. To think someone actually had the ability to steal people’s quirks, and that Shigaraki Tomura of all people had that ability now… It was frightening to think about.

—But he also couldn’t help but wonder… if Hitoshi had heard about someone like that before, right after he had been abandoned because of his “villainous” quirk, then would he have wanted to see if they could take it from him? If they could switch it out for a different one? He honestly doesn’t know the answer to that—

But at the very least, he knows he doesn’t want to change his quirk now

“Yes, the newly dubbed “Nightmare at Kamino” laid a heavy blow on many a hero, and all in a single night! So what will become of Japan now?! Of heroes?! That was today’s quick news bite! Stay tuned for the weather!”

“You’re dropping it just like that? How can these people in the media move on so quickly?” Hitoshi couldn’t help but mumble to himself.

A knock at the door interrupted his thoughts. Hitoshi slowly got up from the couch to walk towards the doorway, and when he opened it, he was surprised to see two of his teachers there.

“Aizawa-sensei? Mic-sensei? Are you here to talk about the new boarding policy?” Hitoshi unconsciously looked back around him to glance around the empty house. “I thought that was happening in a couple of days– my foster parents aren’t home…”

“While we will need to discuss things with your foster parents later, it might be for the best that we talk to you privately first.”

Hitoshi looked back to his hero to see that the unusually well kempt man was awkwardly glancing away and scratching his chin. Present Mic had his usual bright grin stretched across his face, but reached out to gently pat Aizawa on the back as he explained, “We thought it would be better to run this by you first to see how you felt about it!”

“You mean how I feel about boarding at UA? Or joining the hero course?”
“No…” Aizawa spoke up, brows furrowed in discontent, “This is… Honestly, it’s not a good time to be starting something like this since we’re especially busy now— but the way things are going, there’s never going to be a good time, and you deserve to be a priority. Is it okay to talk inside?”

While Hitoshi was still perplexed, he obliged to his hero’s request and guided the two of them to the living room’s suddenly unimpressive couch. Hitoshi couldn’t help but feel self-conscious about how the house looked to Aizawa, even though his foster family always kept their space relatively pristine.

“Now, I know that this has been a confusing time for everyone, so are there any questions that you want to ask us before we get into why we came here?”

Hitoshi blinked a bit before replying, “Well… Izuku pretty much explained everything to me, so not really.”

Aizawa narrowed his eye slightly. “Oh, so the problem child has decided that his friends are deserving of answers, but not his anxiety-ridden homeroom teacher, huh? So that’s how it is…”

Note to self: tell Izuku to contact Aizawa-sensei and give him some info before the man expels him in frustration. “I’m sure he’s just been busy too. I only got answers because I chased him down for them, if you talk to him he’ll tell you what you want to know. For the most part,” Hitoshi tried to cover for his friend, even though he had no idea how much Izuku actually planned to share about the situation with Aizawa. At the very least, Izuku would tell him something though…

“But on the topic of Izuku… There was something involving him that I wanted to ask you about, actually.” Hitoshi had been planning on asking Izuku instead, but with the shit load of other information he had gotten, that had been the last thing on his mind at the time.

“What’s on your mind, little listener?” Present Mic responded this time, leaning forward eagerly.

Hitoshi frowned a bit before admitting, “I’m not sure how much you know that I know about Izuku’s quirk, but I’ve heard that it can revive people from the dead. And after Monoma pointed some stuff out to me, I’ve been thinking… Aizawa-sensei, did you actually die during the USJ incident?”

Mic’s grin fell off of his face, and both him and Aizawa visibly tensed up.

“…Yes. Hizashi and Izuku saved me,” Aizawa finally confessed.
The breath rushed out of Hitoshi’s lungs as his gut seemed to drop into the floor. He had thought that was the case, he had thought that he prepared himself for that answer, but even so… to know that things had been this close to Eraserhead meeting his end for good…

That if things had gone a little different, Hitoshi would’ve never had the chance to properly meet his hero, let alone be chosen by him. He would have gone his entire life without knowing him.

There was nothing more dreadful to think about. Even that fateful day where his mother had never come back for him somehow paled in comparison.

That was how important his teacher had become to him.

A warm hand on his shoulder brought Hitoshi back to the land of the living. Aizawa was leaning in towards him to make steady eye contact. “Please don’t worry about that now. Everything’s okay, because I’m still here. And I’m fine now.”

Hitoshi’s eyes unconsciously flickered to the eye-patch covering Aizawa’s left eye.

“I’m fine. This is the type of injury that one has to expect from hero work. Ectoplasm lost both of his legs, you know, and he turned out fine. The worst-case scenario was avoided— that’s the thing that matters most.”

Gripping his knees so tight it almost hurt, Hitoshi scowled down into his lap. “If you say so…”

He heard Aizawa sigh softly, then some rustling as the man repositioned himself. Hitoshi’s eyes widened slightly when he found that Aizawa had crouched down right in front of where Hitoshi was seated on the couch.

“I know that was probably hard for you to hear, because I know that I’m important to you. You’re important to me too.”

Hitoshi felt his face heat up as joy erupted in his chest from those words. Aizawa was looking at him so seriously, they could be nothing but the truth.
“That’s why it upsets me to think that you… might not be happy with your home life, right now.”

A chill interrupted the warm joy Hitoshi was feeling. “My foster family isn’t treating me wrong. I’m not– they’re not abusive or anything like that.”

“But they don’t treat you right either, do they? Emotional neglect is still considered abuse.”

Hitoshi didn’t have a rebuttal to that. Instead, he quietly muttered, “They… they just tend to avoid me, because they don’t like my quirk.”

Aizawa’s frown set in deeper as anger entered his eye.

“Some action will have to be taken against your foster parents, seeing that they are unfit for fostering if they can’t even properly deal with a so-called “villain” quirk.”

“But everyone has been like that with me!”

“That just means that everyone is wrong,” Aizawa firmly declared in a way that refused argument, “There is not one single thing about you –let alone your quirk– that makes you deserving of not being cared for.”

Once again, Hitoshi’s breath caught in his chest. He could only stare at Aizawa.

“This is part of why we came here. Firstly, you need to know that Hizashi and I are actually married –I’m not sure if the problem child ever mentioned that to you. And after some discussion, we’ve decided that we would like to bring you into our family.”

...Now Hitoshi felt like he was downright hallucinating. That was the only reasonably explanation for this.

“Uh… What? You– you can’t be serious about that.”
“Does this look like the face of a man who’s joking?” Aizawa deadpanned, gesturing to his still serious and frowning expression.

“But that’s…” Not something that happens? Ever? Let alone with the person who has been Hitoshi’s favorite hero since childhood?

“I know this must be sudden for you,” Present Mic cut in, Hitoshi had almost forgotten that the other man was right next to him. He looked to the side to see that Present Mic had an uncharacteristically somber expression. “And I know that the two of us haven’t personally interacted as much as you have with Shouta. But I see a lot of Shouta in you, so I think it will work out. You’re a good kid who deserves better, and we can give you better.”

“That’s right.” Aizawa nodded in solemn agreement. “It’s all up to you in the end, but just know that we would be glad to have you. Of course, with the boarding it won’t exactly be the ideal domestic image of a family, but I’ll be living in the teacher’s building along with Hizashi to look after you kids. So we’ll still be available for you even then. And during the summer we would all live at home.”

“I…” Hitoshi didn’t even know what to say, he was in shock. The look he was giving them right now must be incredibly pathetic, but he couldn’t bring himself to try and contain his expression. “You… You really want me?” his question was barely even a whisper.

“Yes. I don’t know anything about parenting, really, but I’ll do my best for you,” Aizawa answered confidently.

“Oh…”

And that’s when Hitoshi had to bring his hand up to cover his watery eyes. It was useless to try and pretend that he wasn’t crying though, his shaking and the beginning of his sobs were surely giving him away.

As embarrassed as he was to have such an over the top reaction, there was no stopping it. Too many emotions were piling up inside of him– the wonder and disbelief were too much to handle. They just couldn’t stay inside.

Two warm hands gently pulled his head forward to press his face into the collar bone of Aizawa, then one moved itself to wrap around his middle in a nonrestrictive hug. Aizawa seemed to guess
Hitoshi’s reluctance for his tears, because the man murmured, “It’s okay, Hitoshi. You can cry as much as you need to— I’m here for you.”

“You already have one of your children out for your blood, so you shouldn’t take Shouto’s stance on that matter for granted”

Even more than the turmoil of All Might falling from his position and Endeavor reaching his lifelong goal without truly winning it, those words haunted him. He wasn’t stupid– there was only one of his children that was suspiciously uncounted for. And the last time he had seen him, the boy had set himself on fire trying to set Endeavor on fire instead.

There was always the chance that that Princess of the Crystal had been lying to enact her plans, but the possibility that Touya might be out there somewhere actively planning on killing him seemed more likely than unlikely.

It didn’t help that it was already reported that one member of the League of Villains was described as a “disfigured young man with a quirk that made blue fire”. Endeavor had assumed it to be a coincidence, his family was hardly the only one in the world that featured fire-based quirks, but with the context he now knew… The black hair color could easily be due to hair dye, and the disfigurement…

Enji had never had the nerve to check on his son after hearing from the hospital how his body had become permanently scarred after that incident, so he put it off to focus on his work. He was paying for that dearly now.

The whole situation made him question, how— How did Touya fall so far? How did it get to the point that he wanted to kill his own father?

How did things end up this way?
Those questions forced him to look back on his entire life.

Endeavor wasn’t a man that liked to admit his mistakes, but everything about this was clearly due to his mistakes. Looking back, his dismissive attitude towards Touya and the rest of his children, as well as his callous treatment of Shouto and Rei, was most likely what led to Touya’s behavior and eventual running away. It led all the way to one of his biological children literally wanting to murder him.

And Touya… based on what he remembered, Touya had started off very non-confrontational, much like his younger twin Fuyumi. Touya had not been a child prone to destruction or violence. And yet, he had escalated to attacking Enji all those years ago, and now he had become a villain who attacked two classes of school children –one of which his own younger brother was part of– and was aiming to kill his father.

That was how badly Todoroki Enji had fucked him up. There was truly no other way to describe it.

“Don’t drag your family down with you”

“Stop it, please! He’s only five years old!”

–It was much too late for that. He had already dragged his family down with him years ago, and he hadn’t even noticed until now. How did he not realize it before?–

Watching All Might give his press conference explaining his retirement helped Endeavor find the answer to that question. Suddenly, Endeavor had everything he had worked for throughout his entire life in the palm of his hand. He had trained tirelessly to climb an unreachable summit, but now that he was looking down from said summit… what did he do now?

What was left for him to do? Work hard as a hero? He had already been planning on doing that. The pressure as Number One would be immense, but hero work as the Number Two hero trying to surpass the Symbol of Peace had also been immense. He had worked so hard –had ignored his family, had treated his family so harshly, had worked Shouto so hard– to reach this spot, and he found that there was no substantial difference between the place he was now and where he had been before.

The only reason he had to feel accomplishment for reaching the Number One rank was due to the satisfaction of defeating All Might, and he never got that. So now…
Now it was like he did all of that shit for nothing

The emptiness that filled his chest dosed the flames of the ambition that he had carried within him for decades now, and without that feeling of burning want and hatred and envy, his mind had become unclouded.

His ambition had been filling the hole in his life where loved ones were supposed to be, and now neither with neither his ambition nor any meaningful relationships in his life, he was empty.

He looked back on the way he had dismissed the people around him without a thought, giving no mind to the people he had saved or his own family. Looked back on the obsession that had guided his thought process and goals. Looked back on the look of fury his sons had look up at him with—a screaming Touya with blue fire covering at least half his body, a resentful Natsuo demanding to know where his Touya nii-san was. He looked back on the despair that his only daughter Fuyumi had on her face when Enji had told her Touya had disappeared from the hospital, the fear that she had tried to hide whenever he had dragged Shouto away.

The way Shouto had cried in pain when Enji had hit him and ordered him to get back up, the way Shouto had cried in anger with one eye covered by a bandage as he glared up at Enji with hatred.

The way his wife Rei had screamed at him to stop his training with Shouto, the way she had cried when he hit her, the crazed look in her eye when Enji had come upon her right after she threw boiling water at their son’s face because he looked too much like Enji.

—Thinking about those things now made him feel sick to the stomach, when before he had never given them any thought at all—

Why had he never given any thought to those things before? Why hadn’t he cared about what he was doing?

He had just been thinking to himself that entire time “they don’t know how important this is, they don’t understand”, but that wasn’t right—All this time, Enji, Endeavor, the Number Two hero had been the one that hadn’t understood.

He hadn’t understood how little the thing that he was reaching for actually mattered. He hadn’t understood that there were things more important than being Number One. That there were things
more important than winning.

It was something that was obvious to most people, but he hadn’t thought about it at all. Because all he had cared about was becoming Number One, surpassing the unbeatable All Might, and attaining that specific glory he had wanted so badly.

All he had cared about was himself

“Like I already told you– the type of people that I hate most in this world are parents who hurt their own children. I created Kurogiri like how I created my Teddydrums and my Champion, so… even though this was the first time we’ve met properly, I couldn’t bring myself to hurt him.”

Endeavor hated thinking of that girl who put a hole in his stomach and then claimed to be his “practically an in-law”. Frankly speaking, the way she could have so easily killed him, and the way that she had cut down every hero that stood in her path had scared him.

But even that girl had stopped pursuing her desires when doing so meant that she would be hurting her “child”, there was a distinct and firm line that she would not cross.

And that line had been the very first thing that Endeavor had tread over.

He had made the decision to cross that line over and over again every time he interacted with his family. When he considered that, he did much more than “make a mistake”, he made thousands of them.

–Is it even really a “mistake” if you do it more than once?–

Those had been the kind of thoughts that Enji had mused over during his time at the hospital and the couple of days after he had returned home with doctors’ orders to rest and fully heal up. The only person he had seen during all that time was Fuyumi, who had informed him that Shouto was staying at a friend’s house for some unnamed reason –it was probably his boyfriend he was staying with, that Midoriya kid with the crazy powers Endeavor didn’t want to think about– and it was probably for the best that he hadn’t seen Shouto yet.

He wouldn’t know how to approach his son. Enji didn’t know what he should say to him or if he should even broach the subject in the first place– with the way Shouto didn’t want anything to do
with him anymore, it was likely he wouldn’t even listen to Enji’s words.

However, it was after those couple of days had passed that his daughter approached him in his study. She had an unusually neutral and unreadable expression on her face. Her glasses glinted in the light, preventing Enji from seeing her eyes.

“They were going to send this to you by mail, but… I thought we would need to discuss it, so I offered to just deliver it to you myself,” with those vague words spoken, Fuyumi placed a bundle of papers down by where he was seated at his desk and slid it over to him to read. She stayed standing on the other side of desk, the dark wooden furniture acting as a barrier that separated them.

With apprehension derived from the strange tension in the air, Enji read through the first page, and felt himself freezing in place once he fully understood what was written there.

“The police want to remove Shouto from my custody?!”

“That’s right. UA is working with a select group to settle this matter quietly– that is, if you agree to their terms and don’t try to bring it to court. I asked Shouto’s homeroom teacher if he was serious about pressing charges against you if you put up a fight, especially considering the… current situation with society right now, it would surely bring chaos. But he said that while he’s a hero that tries to work in society’s interest, as a teacher his students are always his first priority. He’s completely willing to bring down the industry’s reputation to ensure Shouto’s safety if he needs to.”

Unlike the fiasco that happened when Touya had tried to do something about you before, she didn’t say, but Enji was certain that she was aware of what had occurred. If there was anyone Touya would have told about his plans, it was Fuyumi.

“…Would they be giving custody of him over to the school, then? How did they– ” How did they know? he couldn’t bring himself to ask. Enji tried to push his shock down as he moved on to glance over the rest of the legal document.

“It seems like Midoriya Izuku gave Shouto the courage to speak up to their teacher about it.” –Oh, of course that kid was involved in this. He didn’t know why he expected any differently… “And no, I’m the one taking custody of Shouto.”

Enji stopped in his tracks, and glanced up from the papers to look at his daughter to give her a stunned expression. Her face was still unreadable. “What…”
“I’m taking custody of Shouto,” Fuyumi repeated, as though that had been the thing Enji had needed to be clarified, “After UA’s legal team meets with you in a few days and all the proper documents have been signed, I’m moving out and taking Shouto with me.”

He didn’t know how to respond to that. Fuyumi had always been the only one among his children that he hadn’t had any issues with. She was the only one that had stayed obedient to him all the way up until this day, even when her brothers had been progressing through various stages of rebellion. Her suddenly saying that she was taking Shouto away from him seemed to come out of nowhere.

Fuyumi read the confusion that must be showing on Enji’s face, and took off her glasses to rub her closed eyes, brows furrowed in pain. “Father, you… remember when Touya nii-san secretly videotaped you with Shouto and Mom, and then tried to get you in trouble with it, right?”

Of course he remembered that nightmare. He had freaked out because there was nothing more damning for his career than actual video evidence of him striking his wife and son. He had been lucky the Hero Commission interfered with the situation before it spiraled out of control.

–He had told himself that it only looked bad because the public wouldn’t understand. But no, it looked bad because it was bad. And the fact that he dreaded people discovering what went on behind the closed doors of their home showed that, deep inside, he had understood that–

But Enji didn’t say any of this, all he did was nod in confirmation.

“The government took your side and confiscated the evidence from the police. You even let some agents search through Touya’s computer to confiscate any copies,” the last part Fuyumi said with an undercurrent of accusation in her voice. Enji didn’t argue against it.

“But…” His daughter lowered her hand to open her eyes and give him a boring gaze. “You didn’t think to have them search my computer.”

Enji’s heart seemed to stop as a familiar dread reemerged in his chest at the unsaid implication. “You–!”

“I had a copy, Touya nii-san gave it to me for safe keeping. It was the only one they didn’t get rid of,” Fuyumi confessed with a steady tone. She closed her eyes as she continued, “I don’t have it anymore, though– he asked me to move it to a USB and bring it to him at the hospital before he left.”
This time, Enji was sure that for a moment, his heart actually did stop beating.

Because if Touya had that video right now, that meant it was very likely that the League of Villains had it.

Endeavor is fucked—no, even more than that, the public’s trust in the entire hero industry is fucked if Touya is that “Dabi” villain from the League, and the League or Touya manage to spread around that the current Number One hero did that kind of shit. Forget just dragging down his family, Endeavor is going to drag down everyone with him.

He has to find a way to know for sure if Touya is really with the League and tell someone about this, but who–

He almost forgot that he was in the middle of a mostly one-sided conversation before Fuyumi interrupted his thoughts with, “The point is… is that you hadn’t given any thought to me because I stayed quiet and out of your way, but all this time– in little ways, I have been defying you. It’s just never been enough.”

Fuyumi’s hands clutched the edge of his desk tightly. Distress and shame swelled in his chest together with the fear that had already been there as his daughter went on, becoming quieter and quieter with each sentence, “He didn’t say anything, but when Touya nii-san left, I’m sure that he was thinking “I’ll leave everyone to you, Fuyumi”. But even though we’re twins, I could never be as bold as him. I could never bring myself to step in between you and Shouto, or demand that you stop. Not just because I was too scared of you to try, but also because I’ve always, always held onto the hope that one day you would change, and we could be a real family.”

“Fuyumi, I– ” I am changing, we can be a family, he wanted to say. But was that even true, or is that just what he was hoping for as well?

“I was so selfish…” Fuyumi opened her eyes to reveal they had become watery—they looked so much like her mother’s. Her voice started wavering, “Even when I knew you were hurting Shouto, when I knew you were hurting Mom, when I knew you had hurt Touya— I still hoped that things would just magically get better like we lived in a fairytale. That you would get better. Not because I truly believed in you, but because I wanted to believe that I could have a normal, happy family like everyone else does, even though I knew that that could never happen… It’s no wonder Touya left me behind.”
“Wanting something like that doesn’t make you selfish!” he had to say, before his words failed him again, “You weren’t– you weren’t doing anything wrong! I’m sure Touya didn’t think you were doing anything wrong either! I…”

He had to avert his eyes from her when he confessed, “I’ve realized after learning some things, that I was wrong in how I treated all of you. You weren’t wrong to want me to change and stop hurting Shouto or your mother!”

When he glanced back up at her, she just shook her head at him.

“Even if you say that now… it’s too late to do anything right, isn’t it? Even if you do manage to change now… what does that really mean for the rest of us? All of this family has already broken apart. Mom’s still in the hospital even after all these years. Natsuo used university as an excuse to leave. Shouto’s ready to move on from you. Touya left years ago. I was the only one left holding out hope for us as a family. And how could it not be selfish when I was choosing my own fleeting hopes over the rest of my family’s pain?”

Fuyumi took a deep breath in, as though to steady herself. “That’s why– that’s why, after I heard what was going on from Shouto and after I checked with Eraserhead that things wouldn’t end up like last time, I decided to give it up. I’ll take Shouto away from you, just like he wants.” She rubbed away a stray tear.

“If you truly want to fix things… I’ll tell Shouto that. But regardless, it’d be for the best if you weren’t in charge of him during that anyway –that would just pressure him into accepting you. And if he still doesn’t want to see you, nothing you say to me will convince me to stop this or let you see him. So…”

Placing her hand on his desk to support herself as she leaned forward towards him, tears fully fell from Fuyumi’s eyes as she pleaded, “If you’re serious about realizing that you need to change… then don’t fight this. Stay quiet and go along with UA’s and Shouto’s wishes. Don’t make this harder than it needs to be for all of us.”

Since she had been the only one of his children that he didn’t need to worry about acting out, Enji hadn’t given much thought to his only daughter before. Now, he’s realizing that that was also a mistake.

It was a mistake to think that her avoidance of conflict meant she was being obedient. It was a mistake to look at her brothers’ stubborn defiance and think that, while it was annoying, it was also a sign of strength. It was a mistake to compare her to this and think that it made her weaker than them.
She hadn’t been weak in the slightest, she was just stronger in a way Endeavor hadn’t seen. She had been the only one who acted against Enji so effectively that he hadn’t even noticed until it was too late. She had been the only one that had been trying and hoping to fix the mess that had become their family.

And out of their entire family, she had been the only one that hadn’t lost herself in the all-encompassing negative feelings that circled between them – *that Enji had been causing* – and her kept her head on straight.

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*In that respect, she’s surpassed Enji by far---

All Enji could do was avert his eyes, and do as she wished. “…I understand. I’m sorry, Fuyumi.”

Fuyumi didn’t respond to that. She just nodded, then turned her back on him and walked away.

A few days later, a day before when Endeavor should’ve been meeting with the teachers about UA’s new boarding policy like the rest of the parents, he was instead wearing a business suit at the neutral territory of a private room in the Hero Commission’s main headquarters. The way Eraserhead eyed everyone they passed by with suspicion made him wonder what the Commission had to say about UA’s actions concerning this matter. The Principal, who was the only other UA hero to have come to this meeting, didn’t seem particularly concerned though.

UA’s legal team presented the official order to give up custody of his son to his own lawyer. After checking over the document one more time, Endeavor wordlessly signed where they needed him to sign. And then signed the agreements to pay child support to Fuyumi and continue paying his wife’s medical expenses —*not that he had been planning on stopping that, but he understood that the only way to truly trust someone’s word in these kinds of things is if their word is in legal writing.*

Principal Nedzu hummed in surprise, “I had thought you would argue a bit more before giving in, maybe try to call our non-existent bluff.”

“My daughter made it perfectly clear to me what this situation is. And now… I believe you aren’t wrong to want Shouto away from me,” Endeavor replied bluntly.

Eraserhead glared at him with his one eye and scoffed, “How convenient of you to come to that realization *after* you’ve already been caught with your pants down.”
Endeavor’s eye twitched as a spark of anger ignited from the insult, but he forced it to die down. “If you can ask your team to leave for a minute, then there’s something important I wanted to inform you about while I have the chance.”

The Principal tilted his mouse-like head to the side in curiosity. A wave of a paw sent the selection of lawyers from both Endeavor’s side and UA’s side out the door. Once they had left, Nedzu asked, “And what is that?”

Endeavor took out a picture of Touya in his teens, and slid it over to the UA heroes as he confessed, “Due to some comments someone said to me, I believe my eldest son Touya may be Dabi from the League of Villains. If he is, then he’s in possession of hard evidence against my… behavior towards Rei and Shouto.”

Eraserhead took one look at the picture. He must have recognized certain physical features as belonging to the villain that he had encountered before, because he then slapped a hand over his eyes and deadpanned, “What the hell, Todoroki?”

“Shouta– ”

“Don’t you Shouta me, Nedzu, that man couldn’t have fucked up more if he had been actively trying to! At this rate, we might as well just force him resign now so that the industry can cut him off before this blows up in our face!”

Alarm blared through Endeavor’s system instantly, contrasting with Nedzu’s still calm demeanor as he answered, “Even if he were to resign, that comes with its own problems. For example, if he were to just retire without any good reason, what would the public see that as?”

Through the shock he still felt, Endeavor instinctively responded with, “They’d think I’m running away.”

Nedzu pointed a paw in his direction. “That’s exactly right. People would infer that the true reason he’s leaving the Number One spot is because he believes he can’t handle it. That the coming trials we as a society will face will be too difficult for him. And as of right now, Endeavor is the Number One hero. If the public is given the impression that the Number One hero can’t handle what awaits us, that will bring both more fear for villains and distrust in the heroes. Not only that, but Dabi may still disclose his evidence even after this, so we would still have to deal with the fallout.”
Nedzu steepled his paws and gave Endeavor a frighteningly intense look. “We do have the option of biting the bullet by disclosing his deeds ourselves and getting him fired for them. However, that would still result in distrust for heroes. If this had been caught years ago, maybe not as much, but at this point Endeavor has been the Number Two hero for a good twenty-five years. Even if we try to present this as a situation we have control over, it won’t be enough to make this anything less than the scandal of the century. Not to mention we would be going against our student’s wish to keep him and his home life out of the limelight.”

Eraserhead deflated into exhaustion, and mumbled, “I don’t want to force that on him, but… If the villains let this get out, then we won’t have a choice in it anyway.”

“That may be, but not all hope is lost.” A calculating look entered Nedzu’s beady eyes. This intelligence was exactly why Endeavor had chosen to admit his problem to UA’s Principal; even he could accept that he was completely outclassed by it. “Endeavor, do you perhaps know when your son came by this evidence against you? And what exactly its contents is?”

“Touya made a recording of me interacting with my wife and Shouto during one of my training sessions with Shouto. Some years after Rei was admitted to the hospital, he tried to go to the police with it, and the Commission shut him down.”

Nedzu nodded to himself slightly. “Yes, I believe your daughter vaguely mentioned something about that to Eraserhead, but she hadn’t specified video evidence was involved.”

“Then, some years after that, Touya got… aggressive towards me, and use of his quirk landed him in the hospital. Fuyumi says that it was during that time she retrieved the hidden copy of Touya’s video and returned it to him. And right after, he ran away. This occurred five years ago, when he was seventeen.”

Nedzu’s bear-like ears perked up at his words. “That’s promising news! If Todoroki Touya has had the video for so long but hasn’t done anything with it yet, that most likely means one of two things; One, he wasn’t capable of distributing it the way he wanted to. Or two, he was waiting for a better opportunity to release it. That means we may have some time before he goes forward with it, which means we have an unknown period of time to retrieve the evidence.”

Leaning back in his seat, Nedzu’s tone became heavier, “Of course… with you as the Number One hero, now is the prime time for him to use it, so I’m guessing the time we have is short. But the only way to completely avoid the fallout of this situation is if we get to him before he uses it. That being said, the likelihood of us accomplishing such a feat is uncertain. Therefore we should prepare for the possibility that the video will get out before we can get to it. So tell me, Todoroki Enji…”
Endless small black eyes seemed to peer into Endeavor’s soul.

“If I were to ask you to resign from your position for the good of everyone else– would you do so?”

Even though it had already been brought up, the shock from such a possibility still hit Endeavor just as hard. He felt like he couldn’t even breath, let alone give a coherent answer to that question.

He might not have gotten the Number One rank the way he wanted, but it was still everything he’s ever wanted–

“You fucking–”

His hesitation set Eraserhead off. The normal composed and stoic man shot out of his chair so hard it crashed back onto the ground, and his single black eye glared at him so strongly that there was no doubt at all that this man hated him. Eraserhead yelled, “You act like a selfish asshole for years, hurt your family–my student– for years, and now when the consequences of your actions are going to damn us all, you don’t even have the damn decency to get off your high-horse and step down?!
Fucking get over yourself!”

A small white paw placed itself on Eraserhead’s arm, as though to hold him back. “Calm down, Shouta. I think Endeavor understands the gravity of these circumstances.” The black piercing eyes were on Endeavor once more. “If I had suggested something like this but a month ago, he would have screamed in my face. While he hasn’t agreed, he hasn’t said no either.”

The second small white paw slid a business card across the table toward him.

“You don’t need to have your answer now, Endeavor, the best course of action still hasn’t been decided yet. In fact, I might never ask such a thing from you. But, should I attempt to get in contact with you in the future about this, be prepared to give your answer then.”

The animal that acted at UA’s principal bared a cutting, tooth-filled smile that didn’t reach his eyes.

“I’m sure that since you haven’t answered yet, you must know what the right answer to my request is. We both know it. So I look forward to hearing it.”
“I promise you that one day, you’re going to look around yourself to find that everything important—everything you value and hold dear in your life—has been burned and reduced to irrecoverable ashes.”

“Hawks, you’re to gain the favor of the League of Villains.”

“Huh? Hold up a minute, what are you saying? Weren’t you putting together a search team with Gran Torino and others?”

The representative from the head of Police stared him down. “Where did you hear about that? We haven’t made an announcement yet.”

Hawks covered his mouth with the collar of his coat at his mistake, not saying anything in response.

The president of the Hero Public Safety Commission cut in, “That’s exactly why we’re asking this of you, Hawks. You’ve got sharp eyes and ears. During the attack on Kamino, we were in a rush to ensure the safety of the victims and those taken captive. As a result, we lacked enough information and misjudged the villains’ power. In order to exterminate this dark organization, we need as much information as we can get.”

“More specifically, pertaining to those modified humans… Are they only able to make them using the quirk of the villain All Might described to us, All for One?” the police representative questioned, “We need every last bit of information about the League laid bare, or else we’ll simply be repeating our past errors.”

“So you’re telling me to just ignore all of the victims they’ll create while I’m off trying to butter them up?”
“Yes. We’re asking this of you because we believe you’re up to that task. You’re not concerned with fame or prestige. You focus only on the long-term goal, and take action accordingly. We feel that there’s no one more suitable for this job than you.”

“Is this really necessary?”

The president stepped towards him once more. It reminded him of when that first Hero Commission agent, who had seemed loomingly tall to the small Takahiro, had approached him and his parents about what they wanted of Takahiro’s future.

“That’s the whole idea behind this proposal. If we can corner them by surrounding them both on the surface and behind the scenes, we can completely cut off any attempt they make to retreat.”

“Proposal? Despite knowing that I can’t possibly refuse, you still phrase it like that. How malicious of you,” his teasing tone, and the lazy smirk and shrug he gave with that sentence, made it seem like he was joking.

But he wasn’t.

“I won’t deny it, Hawks. The fact that your circumstances didn’t allow you to be present in Kamino turned out to be very fortunate for me,” was all the President said about that. She didn’t acknowledge Hawks’s implication that they wouldn’t let him refuse this task.

“You know that a good portion of their members were recruited because of the Hero Killer, right? The man that I turned in myself? You really think they’ll just let that go?”

“While that’s true, it’s also been reported that the leader of the organization dislikes the Hero Killer. That means there’s a possibility that matter will actually help you infiltrate, since gaining the leader’s trust is the best way to gain the most information.”

“That won’t help if I can’t use the members that are actually doing the ground work to get to him.”

“You’re a smart man, I’m sure you’ll figure something out. It’s also because of your intelligence that we believe you to be the best fit.”
Are you sure it isn’t also because you know you have the tightest leash on me? What better hero to trust to not go behind your back and join the League than the one you raised straight from its nest? Hawks didn’t ask.

Instead, he gave a dramatic bow, spreading out his Mighty Wings behind him as though he was offering them.

“If corrupting myself is enough to put everyone else at ease, then I’ll gladly take on this job.”

What a liar he was— to both himself and others

After the horrendous meeting with the Principal and Eraserhead, Endeavor stopped at a nearby liquor store to get a bottle that he could get drunk with once he got home— he knew that Fuyumi wouldn’t be there anymore, all of her and Shouto’s things would be moved out by the time he got there. He hadn’t realized until now how his house was much too large for only one person to be living in it.

But when the chiming of the door interrupted his musings, he reflexively turned his head towards it to see a casually dressed Hawks. His brilliant red wings looked out of place in such a lack-luster location. The hero froze like a deer in headlights once their eyes met, before he seemed to recalibrate himself and showoff one of those lazy grins he was known for.

“Well what do we have here, it looks like both the Number One and Number Two heroes had the same idea!” Hawks strut up next to Endeavor and took three bottles of some whiskey off the shelf—which was two bottles too many for one person. “I tend to stop by here whenever a meeting with the Commission turns annoying, but I don’t think I’ve ever seen you around. This must be fate or something. Is everything going okay with your new promotion?”

Absolutely nothing about his life in its entirety was going okay right now, least of all that. He tried working around actually answering the question, “Technically speaking, I’m not officially promoted to Number One until the Billboard chart gets renewed. You’re not planning on going through all that at once are you?”
“What, this? Of course not!” Hawks brushed him off easily, but his smirk seemed a bit too strained at the edges of his mouth for Endeavor to take it as the complete truth. “I’m just going to have a little to take the edge off. Hero work can be pretty miserable sometimes.”

“Is everything going okay with your promotion?” Endeavor couldn’t help but ask. He hadn’t interacted with Hawks much before, but something about the man seemed off, and “miserable” was a strong word to choose.

Hawks stared up at him for a moment, seeming to think the question through, before his eyes softened. His strained smirk turned into a small smile.

“Yeah… It’s like a dream come true, you know? Getting to be the Number Two to your Number One…” Hawks trailed off as his eyes averted themselves from Endeavor. Endeavor stared at him in confusion for a moment, before a thought occurred to him.

“You’re pretty close to that Midoriya kid, aren’t you? You referred to him by his first name during our conversation over the phone.”

Hawks returned his gaze to blink up at him owlishly. “Uh… yeah, I guess. Why do you ask?”

Yet the kid hasn’t told the hero to stay clear of Endeavor...

“I don’t believe it would be good to kill you; Dear Takahiro would be devastated, and dear Shouto isn’t the type of child that would take joy in that”

Endeavor had been too preoccupied to wonder who this Takahiro that she had referred to was, but now…

Takahiro… Taka… Hawk…

“Is your name Takahiro?”
Hawks dropped his three bottles as he jolted at the sound of that name. Endeavor rushed to catch them, but luckily Hawks deployed three small feathers to catch them before they hit the ground. He didn’t seem to pay it any mind, though, as he gaped at Endeavor. “How did you– I thought no one in the industry really knew my name? It doesn’t get passed around enough.”

How is he supposed to explain this? “Well… I’m assuming that you know Midoriya’s… acquaintance, Momoka, because she mentioned you during the Kamino incident. She said that you would be upset if she killed me…”

Hawks raised his eyebrows at him. Then, shook his head while sighing, “It’s just one thing after another with that girl! I only got a vague overview of what happened during the fight at Kamino, but I heard she was in some sort of conflict with you during it? I’m sorry if she hurt you… or gave you an existential crisis, since that seems like something she would do.”

“Existential crisis is a good way to describe it…” Endeavor thoughtless responded, though he caught himself before he could mention anything about the “conflict” Hawks had spoken of. He shook his head at Hawks. “You certainly don’t need to apologize for that. It’s not like you have any control or responsibility over what she does.”

Pursing his lips, his eyes glanced upwards in consideration as he mused, “If anything, I should probably thank you. Since if she hadn’t been thinking of you, she might’ve been even more heavy-handed with me.”

The ruffling of feathers caught his attention, and Endeavor glanced back at Hawks to see that the man was energetically waving his hands and wings at Endeavor in dismissal. There was a faint blush on his face, and Hawks’s words were filled with the same rushed and nervous energy that embodied his movements, “There’s no need for that at all, Endeavor-san! I mean– it’s not like I did anything about that, really, Momoka just decided that on her own! Getting thanked by you for doing nothing is– is really too much!”

It was only then that it occurred to Endeavor that Hawks was actually a fan of him.

The way he said that he was glad to rise up in the rankings alongside Endeavor and the way that the Princess of the Crystal had said he would be “devastated” if Endeavor died gave him his suspicions. But now, looking at the way the young hero was looking up at him with his distinctive eyes wide and shining at the thought that Endeavor might feel gratitude towards him made it undeniable. Hawks seemed to honestly be happy about Endeavor’s rise to Number One.

Endeavor knew he had fans, in theory. Though he had never actively sot popularity or
acknowledged said fans in anyway. Fans were for heroes like *All Might*, whose very image as a hero strove to inspire everyone and give them hope. Endeavor hadn’t been interested in that aspect of hero work, but had gained a fanbase throughout the years anyway just due to his choice of profession.

He hadn’t thought anything of it before, but now… Now that he’s actually paying attention to one of those people who look up to him, now that he can see the belief Hawks has in Endeavor as a hero, it’s only now that he can see how much he’s inadvertently fooled them.

*He’s so young— Isn’t he the same age as Touya and Fuyumi? At that age, Enji had already become the Number Two hero and was obsessed with surpassing All Might. And yet here was the next Number Two hero, not thinking competitively at all and looking up to Endeavor as though he was a hero like All Might, when he was actually the furthest thing from it. This young man, a high ranking and capable hero in his own right, has chosen Endeavor of all heroes to be his hero.*

Enji has never felt more like a fraud

*He wants to tell Hawks that he’s misunderstood the kind of man Enji is. He wants to tell him he should switch to looking up to All Might instead like everyone else, because if he continues to believe in Endeavor, he’ll surely disappoint the boy. He wants to apologize for not living up to Hawks’s expectations.*

*But he can’t say any of that, so instead…*

“…No. I’m sure you’ve done much more than nothing.”

Endeavor gave a moderate bow to Hawks. “I hadn’t realized until now that you’ve been supporting me, but it was those feelings that the Princess of the Crystal had been acknowledging, so I should do the same. I’ll say it properly this time… *Thank you.*”

Hawks’s mouth screwed up with whatever emotions welled inside of him. He gazed at Endeavor with wide eyes like he couldn’t believe what the hero had said. Endeavor almost couldn’t believe he had said such things, either. He couldn’t remember the last time he had thanked anyone for anything.

But that was just something else that needed to change.

After a moment had passed, Hawks’s eyes started shining a little bit more, and a delicate smile
bloomed on his face. “Have you always been that considerate, Endeavor? You haven’t, right! You don’t need to thank me for something like that, but if you really want to…”

Hawks grinned as he held out his hand towards Endeavor. “How about you thank me by giving me your number?”

Endeavor, coming out of his bow, raised an eyebrow at the boy. After apparently turning over what he had said in his head, Hawks’s faint blush deepened into a fully red face, the shade of it almost matching his wings.

“I– I don’t mean that in *that* way! I just mean that we’re entering very dangerous times now, and both of us are going to be facing a lot of difficulties —*you especially as the Number One hero*— So I thought it would be good to have a direct way to contact each other if either of us needed help! I can help you when you need it, and you can help me! It’ll be good to present a strong front to the public too.”

Hawks’s blush died down, and his smile turned sheepish as he rubbed the back of his head. “Honestly, I’m not very good at reaching out for support from others since I tend to just take care of everything on my own. But I’d make an exception for you.”

Considering what Endeavor knows, that sounds like a bad idea. The closer Hawks is to Endeavor, the more likely it is that Endeavor will drag Hawks down with him once everything falls down upon his head. But now, he couldn’t help but wonder…

—*What if Endeavor wasn’t there when Hawks needed him because he turned him down?*—

He couldn’t allow that, so he accepted the offer. The way Hawks gazed in delight at Endeavor’s personal phone number written on the screen of his phone made him wonder if maybe that was the right thing to do.

The three feathers that had been carrying Hawks’s whiskey that entire time started moving again; one headed towards the register with a feather carrying some cash floating after it, one placing it’s bottle back on the shelf, and the last feather presenting its bottle to Endeavor. Hawks pointed at it with a wink. “If you’re debating on what to get, how about you try this one?”

“You don’t want those extras?”
“Nah, I don’t need them anymore. I’m feeling a ton better now.” The way Hawks waved him off this time was much more natural than when he had first come into the store, his grin was also much more natural. Endeavor was content that the young man was no longer planning on drinking to the edge of alcohol poisoning. “And in any case, I’d like it if you tried it anyway. It’ll almost be like we’re having a drink together! Haha!”

“Well, I don’t see why not.” When Endeavor took the bottle, Hawks grinned even wider.

Hawks patted him on the arm shortly before he turned his back to Endeavor and began walking out of the store, glancing back towards him and waving goodbye. “It was good to finally talk to you properly, Endeavor-san! I’m glad I ran into you here!”

_Is this really okay?_ Enji thought to himself as he nodded back, he watched as Hawk’s back and wings disappeared behind the door of the exit, _It's not like I can just tell him everything, but is it okay to just let him keep that belief he has in me, totally unaware of the kinds of things I’ve done?_

He doesn’t know the answers to those questions. It feels like he doesn’t know the answers to a lot of things, nowadays.

Chapter End Notes

I forgot to mention it last update, but if you haven't checked out my newest chapter for Children of Absurdity (Just a Day in the Life of the Takakura Family), then I suggest reading it. It's pretty cracky, but it also gives AiO's honest perspective on his and Kurogiri's relationship, which is something that I'm not sure I can put in the actual story now that he's been erased from existence "\_\_(ツ)_/"  

References from this chapter:
The Hero Billboard Chart announcement and Hawks’s conversation with the Hero Commission president/policeman are from bnha.  
“Have you always been that considerate, Endeavor?” is a quote from bnha.
Chapter Notes

This doesn't have anything to do with this fic, but I recently found a cute drawing of Hawks wearing the Princess of the Crystal dress on Twitter and wanted to document proof that I'm not the only person in this world that's thought of putting these two series which have nothing to do with each other together lmao:
https://twitter.com/ttkxxx/status/1119645050273538049

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Shouta had expected the Bakugou family to be the most difficult to convince to send their son the dorms, considering he had been kidnapped under their watch. But that wasn’t the case.

Bakugou was unusually silent as he looked up at Shouta and the newly revealed form of All Might. His mother gave them a small, sad smile. The two of them sat together comfortably in a way they hadn’t been able to during their previous discussion about Bakugou’s treatment of Izuku and his punishment.

“Hearing what you said about Katsuki during that press conference… It really put me at ease, you know? Even though he’s caused you trouble, you were still able to see the good things about him. You were able to see how hard he was working. And in the end, you brought him back to us.”

Bakugou’s mother turned her smile to her son, who looked up at her with shining eyes. She gently carded her fingers through the spikes of his hair. “I– I was really scared that he wouldn’t come back. That everything would be left a mess between us. I was so caught up with my own feelings, I didn’t take the chance to remind him how much I love him. And to tell him how proud I am of him, and how he’s changing himself for the better. He’s come so far, and I have you supporting him through it all to thank for that. Both my husband and I are certain he’ll become a wonderful hero under your care.”

Ever the symbol of hope for people, All Might responded to her with, “We won’t disappoint you.” And gave bow of respect. All Shouta could do in response to those genuine feelings was follow his lead.

He, too, needs to remember to tell Shinsou– Hitoshi how proud he was of him. It wasn’t every day that a general studies student got to move into the hero course.
The teacher meeting with his mother concerning UA’s new boarding policy had been very anxiety-inducing. Just the day before, Shouto had left to stay with his sister at her new apartment—seeing that custody had been officially passed to her—so the meeting only involved Izuku, Mom, and both Toshinori-san and Shouta-sensei.

Izuku had taken Hitoshi’s warning to heart and took Shouta aside to explain Momoka’s role in the chaotic mess of Kamino Ward. His teacher, who had already seemed like he was dealing with more shit than he was getting paid for due to whatever reason, just accepted everything at face value for the sake of maintaining what little sanity he had left. Izuku tried to cheer him up a bit by thanking him for taking care of Hitoshi, and saying that he knew Hitoshi was very happy to move in with Shouta and Hizashi. He was still acting reserved towards them and signs of affection, but slowly weening him into it would allow their relationship to develop naturally over time. Shouta seemed pleased to hear this and thankful for the advice, so Izuku considered that to be a win.

During the actual discussion, Mom had reiterated her worries to Izuku’s teachers. Since he had already talked to her about it beforehand, Izuku knew that she was planning on accepting the school’s new policy and letting him go back, but that didn’t mean she was going to do so without grilling the school for better guarantees of protection against future villain incidents. Both Toshinori and Shouta bowed their heads to her and promised they would do everything in their power to keep him safe, especially considering it was likely he would become a larger target for the League due to Momoka eviscerating their leader.

In the end though, his mother recognized that Izuku living at the school would actively aid in protecting him, since they could rely on the school’s defenses and the teachers to ward off danger 24/7 rather than just relying on a couple of heroes watching over Izuku and the house from afar. They agreed to keeping watch over Mom in case the League tries to use her as a hostage, but with Izuku inside school grounds all the time there was no need to shadow him. Izuku tried to reassure his mother that there was no need for her to worry over him anymore. That he will be safe.

*But he knows that even if he tells her that— even if he tells all his precious people not to worry about him, they will still worry themselves over his recklessness and fate anyway. And they will hurt because of that. The thought of that made him grieve, and so he did his best to not make them worry.*

*But sometimes, it just couldn’t be helped. Izuku knew very well how little power he had compared to an all-encompassing decree of fate.*
And he did the same for them as well, so he knew there was no helping that. All he could do was do his best to relieve the pain brought by their love with more love.

Because that’s what it means to love, after all

With that, the end of summer break approached, and a new chapter of his story began.

The so-called new chapter of Izuku’s life started off with him vetting all of the UA teachers to confirm no one was actually working for the League of Villains, which—wasn’t exactly what he had in mind? But he was glad to help them out. It was hard to explain to them all that he would be seeing everything about their lives without actually explaining how he was doing so—they had to be cautious in case one of them was a traitor, after all—but they all agreed to it anyway for the sake of ensuring the school’s safety. With all the basics covered, Izuku transported them all to the Crystal World.

It was almost anti-climactic, seeing that all of the teachers were clean. There were only a couple of notable things Izuku found.

Firstly, Hizashi still had some poison in his core. Izuku had made sure to privately ensure him that Shouta’s injury and his parent’s hearing problems weren’t things he should feel guilt over and that it didn’t make his quirk bad, he hadn’t done any of that on purpose. Hizashi had already been on the road to accepting that for himself, but having more support wouldn’t hurt. Hizashi gave him a tight hug for that and Shouta gave a pleased nod in his direction.

Secondly, Ectoplasm—who Izuku still referred to as Ectoplasm-sensei, since that was how he thought of himself—had a sizable chunk of his Fruit of Fate missing, which Izuku supposed he should have expected seeing that the hero was missing two limbs. It had been a pleasant surprise to see that the Fruit was still golden despite this. Izuku made sure to tell Ectoplasm that it was perfectly natural for his Fruit to correlate with his body’s physical condition, and that the way he had accepted his injury and continued to move beyond it was admirable. Ectoplasm seemed to be very pleased to hear this—he didn’t get as much praise as he should in Izuku’s opinion because he was one of the heroes
that “looked like a villain”. Once again, Izuku has found a new facet of societal prejudice to gripe about.

Along with this, Vlad King—who Izuku now referred to as Sekijirou-sensei—had apparently been trying to encourage his class over their lack of media coverage compared to 1-A by hyping up their sense of competition against 1-A, reassuring them all that they were just as good if not better than 1-A and that they would get to prove this one day. And while that itself wasn’t a problem, it was good he was trying to keep their confidence up, Izuku had a strong suspicion that it was exacerbating Monoma’s behavior.

So he took Sekijirou aside to tell him that if he didn’t help Monoma see that he was acting like a delusion moron when it came to 1-A most of the time, then Izuku would do it instead and he wouldn’t be kind about it. Sekijirou luckily read the writing on the wall and confirmed that he would talk to Monoma, to save his student from the existential crisis Izuku would surely give him. Izuku neither confirmed nor denied that he had been planning on giving Monoma an existential crisis—who told the man Izuku had the tendency to do that anyway? Did the teachers gossip about him or something?

The last notable thing was the huge surprise Izuku had gotten when he looked into the Principal’s Fruit of Fate. Apparently, the mouse-bear-dog has been lowkey planning to assassinate some people that had been involved with his illegal experimentation, who had gotten away almost scot-free due to their connections with higher-ups in the government.

Nedzu’s beady eyes stared at Izuku, he had known full well what Izuku would learn. Izuku stared back.

Deciding that Nedzu’s murder plot wouldn’t affect the safety of his classmates since it was a much lower priority for the Principal, Izuku confirmed his innocence to Shouta-sensei, who had been in charge of this whole process since Izuku had already looked into his Fruit of Fate when he brought his teacher back to life. He didn’t mention anything about said murder plot, and he didn’t mention anything about the small pit of rot that Izuku found inside the meat of Nedzu’ Fruit. Nedzu gave him a subtle nod of thanks in response.

Getting to see everything meant that Izuku had also seen how pained Nedzu had been because of that time, and how much torture he had to endure just because those scientists hadn’t seen Nedzu as being deserving of empathy. In their eyes, he was “just an animal”, and “not a real person”. As it happened, Izuku didn’t see them as being deserving of empathy either. Nedzu could go ahead and murder them through some remote, diabolical plan that would leave the Principal looking completely uninvolved if he wanted to. Izuku didn’t care.

–It only then occurred to Izuku that he also probably had some rot inside his Fruit of Fate now.
Opening up his Fruit later confirmed this; It was only a small bit of rot, not even as large as the Principal’s, but it was there nonetheless. At least his Fruit was completely unfrozen now, and only a little poison was left—

The biggest concern that Izuku had with all of this, after confirming that none of the teacher were traitors at least, was that he now had to actively prevent himself from referring to them all using their first names in class. Frankly speaking, he had no idea if he would be able to pull it off. But UA’s motto was *Plus Ultra* for a reason.

“That’s not– I don’t quite think that’s the kind of struggle people think about in association with that saying,” Toshinori-san had tried to reason. He should have known by now that reason didn’t apply to the Prince of the Crystal most of the time.

With that potential crisis settled, the new semester was on the horizon. The students were to move into their new dorms a little less than two weeks before it began.

That’s why during an early morning in the middle of August, Izuku met up with all of 1-A in front of the new Heights Alliance building. He and Ochako gave Tenya an overjoyed hug at seeing that he was now fully recovered, and Tenya hugged them back tightly. Shouto gave Tenya an empathetic nod.

But the positivity didn’t last for long.

“This is important, so listen up. Todoroki, Kirishima, Midoriya, Yaoyorozu, Uraraka, and Shinsou all headed to Kamino Ward to rescue Bakugou. And I know that all of you who weren’t in the hospital were asked if you wanted to join.”

*Wait– all of them? Not just the ones who were present in the waiting room when Izuku was there?*

Glancing at Kirishima, Izuku noticed that the boy was scratching at his chin sheepishly.

That… Considering that Izuku now knew it was highly likely there was a traitor among the UA students, that had the potential to go *horribly wrong*. Izuku knows that most of his classmates had been present to hear the plan anyways, but *still*. He should make sure Kirishima knew what the definition of *covert* was next time.
“Let me say this clearly…” Shouta narrowed his eye at the lot of them. “Had it not been for All Might’s retirement, I would have expelled every single one of you with the exception of Bakugou, Jirou, Hagakure, and Iida.”

Izuku and everyone around him tensed up at that.

“The ones that went go without saying, but those who knew about it and didn’t stop it wouldn’t have gotten off either. Whatever reasons you may have had, it doesn’t change the fact that you betrayed our trust. So I’d be grateful if you restored that trust by going through the proper channels to do hero work legally.”

Shouta turned away from them to beckon someone forward from the dorm building. Hitoshi opened the door and stepped forward with the pinched expression of a person that recognized the mood wasn’t right for his introduction.

“With that said, I’m sure everyone remembers Shinsou from camp, but with this new semester he is now officially part of class 1-A. Let’s all welcome your newest classmate.”

…Are we just supposed to jump right back into excitement after how heavy everything was before? Sensei, please give us a better transition! Look a how awkward poor Shinsou looks! How could you have started out his new heroics student status by saying that you would’ve expelled him?! Izuku could almost hear his classmates think.

Of course, Izuku was beyond the limitations of expected social norms when it came to things involving his loved ones.

“Hitoshi-kun! I’m so happy for you! I can’t believe we get to be in the same class now, this is the best!” Hitoshi huffed as his breath was forced out of him when Izuku practically jumped Hitoshi. He slammed into his friend to give him a congratulatory hug. A tiny trickle of tears leaked from his eyes.

“What– stop crying! And let go of me! This is so embarrassing! Get a hold of yourself, it’s not that big a deal–”

“It’s the biggest deal!” Izuku tearfully argued, not letting go.

“It is the biggest deal,” Shouto, bless his soul, agreed with Izuku in a stoic, deadpan voice that was
completely unsuited for his words.

“Yeah! After everyone gets settled in, let’s plan a party for Hitoshi-kun! Ah– is it okay for me to call you that?” Ochako caught onto Izuku’s excitement quick. And at the mention of a party, the rest of their classmates perked up as well.

“There’s really no need– ”

“Too late! The motion has already been passed by the party queen herself!” Ashido declared, sticking her chest out proudly with her hands on her hips as though to confirm her new self-appointed title. “Me and my minions will plan you the greatest welcome party that has ever been hosted at Heights Alliance!”

“This building was only made three days ago, this will be the only welcome party ever hosted here!” Sero interjected.

Kaminari protested, gesturing to Sero, Kirishima, Bakugou, and himself, “And are you talking about us?! Since when were we your minions?!”

“The fuck– I’m not your minion, raccoon-eyes!”

Ashido, like may great rulers before her time, ignored the pleas of her minions.

“I want to help decorate!” Hagakure exclaimed while jumping in the air.

“I’ll make the cake and sweets!” Satou offered with a raised hand.

“I’ll be DJ, I brought my sound system with me!” Jirou spoke up, rubbing at the back of her head.

“I’ll bring the Teddydrums out!”

Ashido audibly gasped in delight, “The Teddydrums– hell yeah! Now we’re gonna have a real party! Thanks Midoriya!” The rest of the “we want to fly around on giant robots” group cheered
Hitoshi was bewildered by 1-A’s enthusiasm for him joining them. Shouta turned his back on them in a way that suggested he didn’t care about their antics, but Izuku was pretty sure he was just trying to hide that he was pleased with them. Hopefully he was feeling thankful that he hadn’t expelled them all…

“Keep the giant robots outside of the building. We literally just made it, don’t break it. And make sure anyone riding them wears a harness, no more trips to the hospital.” –Which was Shouta-sensei’s version of giving the class permission to ride the Teddydrums. This man tries way too hard to pretend like he isn’t mother-henning them.

He was also trying too hard to pretend like he wasn’t totally biased towards Hitoshi, probably not wanting to advertise that Hitoshi was his adopted son now. Izuku gave it until the end of tomorrow before everyone in the class knew about that though. Really, who would believe that it was just a total coincidence that he had put Hitoshi’s room right next to Izuku’s, when everyone knew that they were such close friends?

“Wow! You really lucked out on room picks huh, Shinsou! You’re right next to Midoriya!” Kaminari said while pointing at the board.

“Yeah, how lucky is that!” Kirishima agreed, patting Hitoshi on the back.

Hitoshi raised an eyebrow at both of them. They proved to Izuku that he had vastly underestimated the potential idiocy of his classmates.

After day turned into night, everyone was done setting up their rooms, and Ashido embraced her role as an agent of chaos by suggesting they have a competition for who had the best room. Once again, fate was not kind to Izuku, as he was chosen to be the first sacrifice.

“Woah, look at all this All Might merch!”

“So much Hawks too!”

“A lot of Mic-sensei stuff, also. Where did you even find merchandize for Aizawa-sensei?”
“You brought a safe? That was smart, I didn’t even think of that…”

“This is the room of a true hero otaku!”

“I-I just look up to them a-all a lot! This is so embarrassing…”

“Oh, is it?” Hitoshi side-eyed him with a smirk.

Those were fighting words. Hitoshi should know better than to try to pick a fight with the Prince of the Crystal. “Let’s check out Hitoshi-kun’s room next!”

“Wait–!”

“Oh my God! Look at all the cat stuff! So adorable! And he also has merch for Aizawa-sensei!”

Hitoshi just put his head in his hands and sighed.

Leaning on his door to block entrance, Tokoyami huffed, “What child’s play…”

Tokoyami should have known better than to try to pick a fight with the girls of class 1-A. Ashido and Hagakure bulldozed over his defense with ease to reveal his edgy goth room.

“Hey! I bought this keychain in middle school!”

“Get out!”

Things continued like this. Going through everyone’s rooms, they all learned a bit more about each other. The only room they didn’t get to see was Tsuyu’s, who hadn’t joined them claiming she wasn’t feeling well.
At the end of it all, the victory was down to not who had the best room, but who had cake. Satou was the only one that had cake, but it was very good cake. Izuku personally didn’t see a problem with all the girls giving him their vote for it. Though he himself had voted for Shouto, it was honestly impressive that he was able to renovate his room into a Japanese style room in such a short amount of time.

Watching from the distance as Kaminari complained to the vaguely pleased Satou about his win, Izuku was glad that all of them would move forward living together like this.

But of course, the good times couldn’t last forever. Because nothing lasts for eternity. And Izuku had already noticed that Tenya had been eyeing the rescue group in silence throughout the night.

“Ah– Deku-kun…” Izuku turned to look at Ochako, who had a pensive expression on her face. “Tsuchan wants to talk to us all.”

“In that case, I also have something I would like to say…” Tenya took the opportunity to speak up. He didn’t look at Izuku as their group walked to the doors leading to the courtyard.

As they passed by Shouji, the tall teen made eye contact with Izuku. Remembering that Shouji had gotten pretty heated up over their plan, Izuku gestured his head towards where they were headed to wordlessly question if he wanted to come. After that cue, Shouji followed.

“I say whatever is on my mind,” Tsuyu started out, staring at the ground and posture crouched forward in her usual frog-like manner, “But sometimes, I don’t know what to say. Do you remember what I said at the hospital?”

“It doesn’t matter how righteous our feelings are. If we start another fight… If we break the law… then we’re no better than the villains”

Her voice wavered as she explained, “I hardened my heart and spoke so harshly… But even so, you went anyway, and I– ” Tsuyu gulped a bit as tears began to well up in her large eyes. “I knew that I hadn’t convinced you to not go, I couldn’t even find a way to dispute what Izu-chan said. But even so, I still didn’t do anything else to stop you, because I had become confused as to whether stopping you was the right thing to do or not. It had seemed so simple before, but Izu-chan was right. I was being so straightforward with my thinking, that I hadn’t truly thought about how complicated the issue of “going against the law for righteous reasons” was.”
Ochako pulled Tsuyu into a one-armed hug as the girl curled in on herself more through her crying.

“I started wondering... If I stopped you, but it had turned out that Bakugou’s rescue had failed, would that mean what I had done was actually wrong? And that if you went and got in the way, I was right? That didn’t seem like the right way to think about it– but how else are you supposed to decide that sort of thing? I still thought it would be wrong of you to go, but because of my hesitation, I didn’t speak up against you and broke Sensei’s trust along with everyone else. With all these horrible feelings turning inside of me, there was no way I could go on having fun with everyone like nothing had even happened.”

“You’re not the only one that feels that way, Asui-san.” Shouji placed one of his hands on Tsuyu’s small shoulder. “I was also very vocal in arguing against them going, saying they would be getting Midoriya caught by the villains during their rescue just like Bakugou got caught trying to rescue Midoriya. But I didn’t do anything against them either. If I had truly believed my words, I should’ve reported them to Sensei as soon as possible to try and prevent such a thing from happening– but I didn’t. I just didn’t have enough conviction that I was the one in the right, where as everyone that went to Kamino were certain with their convictions.”

Shouji averted his eyes from them and a mouth sprouted from his arm continued, “Even now, I don’t know what the right thing to do would’ve been, but I still feel dissatisfied with their decision…”

Finally, Tenya spoke his own thoughts, fists clenched in frustration, “I don’t understand this... At the very least– Todoroki, Izuku, both of you knew of the mistake I made before! Why would you do the same thing?! While I know the circumstances were different, what’s the point of trying to become proper heroes if you just do whatever you wish like that?!”

Yaoyorozu stepped up to speak for the group, her face pinched with sorrow. As vice-president of the class, she probably felt like she had more responsibility over the situation than the rest of them. “I understand all of your concerns, but we were taking steps to ensure that things never went too far. That’s why I had joined them in the first place.”

“But even though you never went too far, Sensei was still prepared to expel you for just going at all, wasn’t he?!” Tenya insisted while leaning forward towards her, “Just because you followed the letter of the law doesn’t mean you followed the spirit of it, that’s why you would have been punished! As heroes, following the spirit of the law is even more important than simply not breaking them! We’re supposed to be the ones that uphold it, after all!”

Yaoyorozu, Kirishima, Ochako, and Hitoshi all seemed to not know what to say. They were all pained by their friends’ pain. Even Izuku wasn’t sure what could be said in response to his friend’s worries and pain, but...
This is just like how it was with Mom. Love between friends isn’t a love to be taken lightly, it hurts just as well as love for family or a romantic partner. So he has to try his best to find the right words to say, because they were trying so hard to convey their own feelings.

“It’s okay that you don’t agree with what we did,” Izuku affirmed. “I’m not sure if you guys know, but we actually did get Kacchan. But due to certain things out of our control, I also brought in some complications to the situation at Kamino. While we did succeed in what we set out to do, and helped the heroes by rescuing Kacchan, I don’t believe there’s a true way to tell if we were right or not in our actions just by that.”

Standing firm in front of Tsuyu, Tenya, and Shouji, Izuku looked down and brought his hand up to grasp at his chest, where he knew his Fruit with its hidden rot resided.

“But there are two things that I know for certain… First, that I don’t regret going in the slightest, even with everything that happened there.” Raising his head to look back at his friends, he finished with, “And second, that it’s okay that you don’t agree with our decisions, and that you regret not stopping us. All of us have different perspectives on what it means to do the right thing, on what it means to be a hero. It’s impossible for our views on those things to always align, due to that.”

Stepping forward to stand in front of Tsuyu, Izuku used his right hand to cup her chin and tilt her head upwards to look straight at him. He gave her a small smile.

“But that’s okay, because our friendship is unconditional! Even if we don’t agree on everything, we’ll always be able to join back together on the same side! So continue to grow and learn by listening to other people’s perspective on things, but also don’t be afraid to continue believing in your own straightforward perspective on what good is, Tsuyu. Because at the end of the day… following what you believe to be the truly right thing is how you will become the hero that you wish to be, whatever kind of hero that is.”

That was a bit of a simplification—just believing that you’re in the right doesn’t mean that you are—but that’s okay. That was what needed to be said. It’s not like Izuku had any solid answers on what “good” was, he was just good at debating the question without ever coming to a conclusion.

Large black eyes shining with tears, Tsuyu hiccupped as she asked, “Is it really okay?”

“It is,” he replied without a hint of doubt.
“That’s right, Tsu-chan!” Ochako burst forward to pull Tsuyu into a hug, “Everything’s okay! We’re okay!”

“Tsu-chan! I’m so sorry my hairbrained idea got you this worried! Thanks for talking with us!” Kirishima came in close to bow towards her, tears pricking at his eyes.

“Asui-san!” Yaoyorozu brought herself into Ochako and Tsuyu’s hug. Hitoshi rubbed at his neck awkwardly, but came in closer as well.

Izuku looked towards his other two dissenting friends that watched over in silence. “And the same goes for us, Tenya-kun, Shouji-kun. I’m sorry to have worried you both, I know that you just wanted us to be safe.”

Tenya furrowed his brows, before pushing up his glasses to rub at his eyes. “To be honest, I can’t really berate you too heavily– When that villain grabbed you, I lost all sense of propriety and rushed into a dangerous situation, completely ignoring what the pro heroes had instructed us. So… when it comes to wanting to save your friends, that kind of thing just happens sometimes, I suppose. But that’s also why it’s no good to act like that! That’s how I got myself stuck in the hospital during all of this!”

“That’s why instead of being emotional and rushing into breaking the rules, you should carefully plan out how to break them properly,” Izuku cheerfully added his opinion on that type of situation.

At that, Tenya had to respond with one of his usual, swift knife hands. He exclaimed in outrage, “There is no “properly” breaking rules! That’s impossible just from the fact that you are breaking rules! Where on Earth did you get such an idea from??!”

“You already met who he got that idea from. You remember how Izuku’s reflection was talking in the Crystal World? That’s where,” Hitoshi drawled, accurately guessing Momoka as the culprit.

“Remember how Izuku’s reflection was talk– You know what, never mind. I don’t even want to know what you’re talking about.” Shouji crossed his many arms and shook his head, rejecting Izuku’s madness.

Hitoshi smirked at Shouji. “I figured right from the get-go that you were a smart guy, Shouji. Good to see you prove me right.”
As all of his friend spiraled off into their own little conversations, Izuku watched the scene with joy filling his heart.

This is what it means to be friends.

“So none of you remember anything about the villain that was shown on TV at Kamino Ward? Or about the underground kingpin villain All for One?”

“My apologizes, Sir, but none of the Eight Expendables nor the rest of the men have reported remembering such a thing. And I myself cannot remember either,” Chrono reported in a hesitant voice, bowing his head demurely—but still not as demurely as many of the others got. Overhaul trusted him the most out of everyone though, so a lighter level of subordinate behavior was acceptable. It’s not like Overhaul cared too much about formalities anyway…

“I see, how peculiar.” Overhaul brought his gloved hand up to tap on the plague mask covering his face in thought. “For me to be the only one to remember that… there must be a reason behind it.”

“That seems likely. It’s reminiscent to how you recently started seeing those apples inside of people that no one else can see– something about you must be special.”

“…Ah–” The sound of tapping stopped as a thought occurred to him. “Perhaps those two things are directly related? I’ve been meaning to tell you, but it turns out Eri has been able to see those apples her entire life. That explains why the two of us are the only ones to have a golden stem; it must be connected to that. She claimed that I didn’t have a golden stem before now.”

Chrono was one of the select subordinates that Overhaul had decided to inform about that mysterious development. He would have preferred to keep it a secret entirely, but it turned out that said apples allowed him to speed through their drug development by a considerable amount, so it was only prudent that some people be informed.
Leaning back in the leather couch of his private office, Overhaul droned, “This could be a similar situation… but there’s no way to test that. Eri didn’t see the footage of All for One, and it’s gone now for some reason, so I can’t use her to confirm it.”

“Eri can see those apples too? Have you figured out what those things are, anyway?” Chrono asked, leaning towards Overhaul in interest.

Overhaul shook his head, and explained, “Not exactly. However, experimentation has granted me some additional information.”

He raised his index finger. “Firstly, the apple is completely intangible. I see Eri’s apple quite clearly when I’m in contact with her, but I am unable to manipulate her body in anyway that permits me access to it.” Then, he raised his middle finger as well. “Secondly, despite this, it seems that Eri’s quirk does have access to them. Certain versions of the drug made from her cells seem to cause a wavering affect in the stem of the apples of test subjects that goes away over time. I believe that if I focus my efforts on synthesizing her quirk in a way that makes that effect permanent, I will have what I need.”

“So you’re that close already… how incredible,” Overhaul knew that the praise that flowed out from behind Kurono’s mask was honest.

—But even so, Overhaul didn’t put too much consideration into that. Despite having known Kurono since they were young, he still enforced a certain amount of distance between the two of them. Other people’s love wasn’t something that one should trust in—

If you chase, it’ll run. If you run, you’ll be chased

He learned a long time ago that when it came to love, it was better to be chased than it was to chase. So now, there was only one person in the world that he allowed himself to love.

“That’s right. I’m essentially only one step away from the start of our goal main.”

Overhaul allowed his gaze to turn towards the direction where he knew the Boss’s room was located at, even if he couldn’t actually see it.
“I’m this close to transforming the world into the old man’s image. Even if he can’t see it for himself… *Even if he said himself that he didn’t want it*—I’m sure this is the best way to make it so that he and the ideals he treasured never disappear from the world. And I’m sure this is the best way to rid the world of the sickness caused by quirks.”

He clenched his gloved hands into fists, feeling his quirk tingling just underneath the surface of his skin. “So I will make sure to destroy this current, ill society that we live in, and reassemble it into a new, *cured* form.”

*Because that’s what it means to love, after all*

Chapter End Notes

References from this chapter:
What Aizawa's talk before going into the dorms and part of Asui's talk with Izuku and everyone is from *bnha*.

“If you chase, it’ll run. If you run, you’ll be chased” is a quote from Mawaru Penguindrum.
“As I told you all yesterday, our first priority is to acquire provisional licenses. Hero licenses are a serious responsibility, which are directly concerned with matters of life and death. As such, the exam to receive qualification is very hard. Even the average yearly passing rate for just the provisional license exam is only about 50%. So starting today—”

“Each one of you will be devising at least two new ultimate moves!” Nemuri-sensei cut off Shouta as she burst into the classroom alongside Ken-sensei and Ectoplasm-sensei. Izuku and the rest of his more rambunctious classmates cheered at the news, some even shot out of their seats in excitement.

“That’s both school-like and hero-like!”

With that introduction, all of them changed into their hero costumes and headed to Gym Gamma, also known as TDL, Training and Dining Land. The floor was entirely made of cement, allowing Ken to create whatever kind of terrain or objects each individual student required. The teachers went on to explain that ultimate moves would help show that they were maintaining their heads during battle and that they were practiced in combat, which would be essential to pass the exam. Thus, the ten days they had left before the end of summer break would be used to develop these moves for the provisional license exam, which also doubled as quirk training.

The ultimate moves should be symbols of who they were as heroes, and they didn’t need to be offense based. They were just moves that gave them an advantage in battle while also being highly individualized and iconic to each hero.

*But if that was the case…*

“Midoriya, I’ll be frank with you,” Shouta-sensei came up to him as everyone scattered to get started on their training, “At this point, you have too many ultimate moves.”

“…Too many?”

“Well, technically speaking there’s no such thing as having “too many” ultimate moves, but you certainly have an excessive amount. Just about every “spell” you can do in the Crystal World would count as one, they even came with their own names and everything. However, the only move you
have for outside your dimension is “Survival Strategy”. Therefore, I would like you to come up with at least one other ultimate move that you can use outside your dimension.”

Thinking back to Kamino Ward, Izuku was able to easily answer with, “There’s a secondary version of Survival Strategy that I need to learn, which brings a part of the Crystal World outside to the real world rather than bringing the target to the Crystal World. Would that count?”

Shouta stared at Izuku for a moment, before closing his eye and bringing a hand up to pinch at the bridge of his nose. He muttered underneath his breath, “God help everyone else involved in the provisional license exam…”

Izuku assumed that meant yes, that counted.

After a short trip back to his room to retrieve the Penguindrum from its safe, Izuku started the process of learning Survival Strategy: Wonderland. While Momoka possessing his body and erasing a villain from existence made the fight at Kamino a hot mess, it admittedly helped Izuku know what to do for this spell greatly since it gave him a first hand look at how it was performed. That was extremely fortunate, since if Izuku had been left to search in the dark to figure out the overly long incantation and looking glass manifestation process, he could have gone years without learning it. With everything laid out already, ten days seemed like a good amount of time.

That wasn’t the only thing he had to take care of during that timeframe though, as the teachers had mentioned they should consider renovating their costumes to have their ultimate moves in mind. If Izuku was going to start bringing the Penguindrum out of the safety of its… Well– safe, then he needed to add something to his costume to secure it properly to his body in a way that people wouldn’t be able to easily steal it or destroy it.

*If the Penguindrum was destroyed… it’s almost guaranteed that Momoka’s soul would also be destroy, as it was part of the Penguindrum. That possibility was unacceptable.*

It was for that reason that Izuku was venturing into the dangerous territory of a person he had been avoiding until now. Right from the outset of his journey he was proven right to be so cautious of approaching her, as a massive explosion erupted from behind the doors of the Development Studio and Izuku was sent flying back with a body thrown atop of him.

“Deku-kun!” Ochako, who had been safely approaching with Tenya from a distance behind him, exclaimed in shock.
“Izuku-kun! Are you alright?!” Tenya mirrored her concern.

“Hatsume!” Higari-sensei, the support department teacher that Izuku had also vetted, emerged from the smoke, “How many times have I told you to stop trying to make those damned Teddybombs fucking bigger! You won’t even be able to get the patent for them since their Midoriya’s design technically!”

After a few coughs, the person still on top of Izuku answered, “That doesn’t mean the process of learning how to build them can’t be applied to future devices that I can patent, Sensei!”

“If you’re planning on starting a line of explosives, please start developing them after you’ve graduated! My poor budget is crying!”

When the smoke cleared, the sight of Hatsume lying on him was revealed to Izuku. Along with the sight of her cleavage peeking out of her loose tang top, of which he had the perfect perspective to see. “Oh, hey there Ten Million! Perfect timing! I wanted to show you some of the babies that I made based off of your babies!”

“B– Boobs!” Ochako whisper-shouted to herself, staring at the sight of Hatsume on top of Izuku with even more shock than compared to Izuku being caught up in a sudden explosion –Ochako-chan, please…

Deciding that he was done with this entire situation, Izuku ordered in a monotone voice, “Hatsume-san, please get off me.”

“Right! Sorry, Ten Million!” As she got up and dusted herself off, she causally commented, “Actually– I was sort of giving you an eyeful just now too, wasn’t I? And you had a girl on top of you and everything, but you were still so calm. That’s rare for teenage boys!”

Izuku unceremoniously pushed himself off the ground while replying, “If it’s not Shouto’s cleavage, I’m not interested.”

“So faithful!” Ochako praised with obvious joy.

“Shouto? Are you talking about the pretty half fire, half ice heroics student? I totally don’t blame you, his cleavage probably looks great! You have good taste, Ten Million!”
“Men are considered to have cleavage?!” Tenya exclaimed in confusion. Ochako, Izuku, and even Hatsume gave Tenya a long stare.

As Izuku and Hatsume resituated themselves, Ochako pat Tenya on the arm and stated with a serious voice, “Tenya-kun… never change, okay? Stay as innocent and sweet as you are now.”

“What are you even talking about?!”

“You know what?” the teacher suddenly reminded them all of his presence, and turned his back on them, “I’m just going to walk away I pretend like I didn’t see or hear any of that. My department certainly doesn’t get paid enough for me to have to endure such torture, so it didn’t happen!”

The students followed Higari-sensei, who Izuku had to remember to call Power Loader dammit, into the studio. After explaining what he wanted done with his costume, Higari confirmed that he could do those changes in-house rather than requesting the support company to do them. Izuku was soon given a slightly altered costume, which now featured a sturdy, steel reinforced bag for Izuku to put the Penguindrum in. It was hidden behind both the red cape and black coat of his costume, and the steel would help keep it protected from various hazards.

Of course, with Hatsume there Izuku couldn’t get out of viewing her inventions. But he was pleasantly surprised by some of them.

“These are my pair of Teddydrum based rocket-boot boosters, along with some supporting arm boosters for maneuverability! Co-produced with Creati, AKA Yaoyorozu Momo! With these babies, falling from your Teddydrums won’t put you in so much mortal peril, Ten Million!”

“…I suppose having them in case of an emergency wouldn’t hurt, as long as they work.”

Trying them out resulted in Izuku slamming into the ceiling, but it was sufficient enough to save him from a fall. He silently decided to never use it unless he absolutely had to, so that he could avoid flailing around like a fool with them. Hatsume promised to make a set in black to match the aesthetic of his costume.

“This is a set of some Mini Teddybombs, based off of your original Teddybombs! Slightly less of a kick, so less dangerous to use on people, and only taking up a palm-full of space!”
After confirming that they wouldn’t randomly go off, Izuku was sold. Later, the belt holding both his sword holder and the bag for the Penguindrum was renovated to hold a bag of a few Mini Teddybombs. Izuku caught Higari quietly praying for the safety of Izuku’s future opponents, but he knew from his previous use with the regular Teddybombs that they shouldn’t maim people too much.

“And finally, my pièce de résistance of what I plan to call the Ten Million Collection—” Oh Momoka Izuku is never getting rid of that nickname now “—the Teddycannon! Based on you Teddydrum’s laser cannons, and co-produced with Creati!”

WhIPPING out an arm-length black and white gun that had the inappropriately cutesy design of a teddybear’s face on the side, Hatsume fired at a convenient testing target. A smaller version of the Teddydrum’s red laserbeam fired from it, destroying a perfect circle in the middle of the bullseye.

“—And all this can be yours, for the low, low price of giving me and Yaoyorozu the rights to patent them!” Hatsume batted her distinctive scope-like eyes at him.

Ochako whispered to him, “Hatsume and Yaoyorozu… working together… What a power couple.”

Izuku decided to ignore that very true comment, muttering, “Ah, so that’s what your plan was… Then any discussion about this needs to include Yaoyorozu-san.”

A very apologetic Yaoyorozu joined them after that, saying that she had been planning to bring it up with Izuku herself before the exam so that she could have permission to use the items as well. It turned out that when Hatsume said they were “co-produced”, that meant she had been utilizing Yaoyorozu’s quirk to synthesize the more complicated pieces of equipment necessary for functioning. She had noticed Yaoyorozu using equipment based off of Izuku’s robots during the festival, and thus sought her out about it. Seeing that Yaoyorozu had already been inspired by Izuku’s Teddydrums to learn how to make things like the rocket boots, she agreed to collaborate with the support student.

After the explanations were given, the true battle began. If Hatsume thought that Izuku was stupid enough to give her patent rights without being guaranteed a sizable cut of any potential profits, she was dead wrong. Ochako and Tenya quickly fled as soon as they realized the legal battle Izuku was enacting, not wanting to get caught up in the negotiation.

Izuku started with requiring that he was on the patent as well, and that profits were split equally three ways. Hatsume laughed in his face, and said that as he wasn’t actually making anything he shouldn’t
be on the patent, and that he should get 10%. Izuku replied that he did, in fact, know that *that’s not how intellectual property works Hatsume-san, don’t think you can trick me into not being on that patent! And I’m getting at least 30%!* Hatsume gave up on the patent argument but countered with the idea that any future company she might work with will be taking an unknown cut and she had to account for that.

The tide of the battle turned when Izuku got Yaoyorozu to admit that she had already haggled Hatsume into splitting profits so that no matter how much the hypothetical companies take, the ratio of what is left would be split 30/70 between her and Hatsume for every piece that she contributes to. Hatsume gasped in outrage at Yaoyorozu’s betrayal. Izuku ended the argument with the fact that any Teddydrum related piece of equipment is going to be associated with Prince Deku since the Teddydrums would be part of his brand, and that would directly contribute to the success of the product. Hatsume grumpily accepted the new ratio of 20/30/50 for items Yaoyorozu was involved in—with Izuku being the one getting 20%— and 30/70 for items she wasn’t.

Yaoyorozu and Izuku both left the makeshift negotiation table satisfied. Higari eyed Izuku from behind his mask. “You know… heroics students aren’t supposed to learn business and legal stuff until their third year.”

“I have a friend that promotes researching the exact legalities of everything so that I can properly exploit them and find loopholes!”

“Ah… is that so. Excuse me for a moment, I need to talk to Eraserhead about something.” The man practically ran from the room. Izuku didn’t know why he thought Izuku wouldn’t figure out what he was going to talk to Shouta about.

Four days later, Izuku and Yaoyorozu were both sporting prototypes of the *“Ten Million Collection”*. Yaoyorozu was notably more skilled in maneuvering with the rocket boots than Izuku was, most likely because she had been practicing with and personally adjusting her pair for a while now. Izuku wasn’t planning on actually using his equipment during the test since less than a week was hardly enough time to learn how to use them properly, but he would carry them with him just in case. He had mostly focused on practicing the Through the Looking Glass spell, working on manifesting many mirrors at once, so that he could have enough skill to use it for Survival Strategy: Wonderland.

During this time, Hitoshi started brandishing his brand-new hero costume. The black shirt, pants, and boots together with the capture weapon wrapped around his neck was clearly based on Eraserhead’s costume. The main differences were that the scarf was dark purple instead of white, the addition of Hitoshi’s voice changer mask, and the addition of a black trench coat with a hood over the whole thing, likely to cover up his shockingly purple hair when stealth was required.
“Hitoshi-kun! You look great! What hero name did you decide on?”

“Simon,” Hitoshi responded with no explanation.

“The fuck kind of hero name is Simon—” Kacchan’s complaint was cut off, and he began to stare blankly into space.

Hitoshi gave a mean looking smirk. “Simon Says: Slap yourself in the face.”

Kacchan’s hand immediately flew up to smack his cheek hard. This was immediately followed up with Kacchan screaming, “Fucking shit!”

“Hitoshi-kun!”

“That was a demonstration of one of my ultimate moves— though I would switch out the slapping in the face part for something else.”

The time passed by quickly with these types of shenanigans. Eventually, he finally felt ready to put his new spell to the test, and decided it was only prudent to make his classmates aware of what kind of chaos he might bring to the exams so that they weren’t caught off guard by it.

One incantation and a suitable spread of mirror flooring later, Izuku manifested the Crystal Palace into reality right outside of the gym. It wouldn’t fit inside the building. He should keep that in mind for when he uses it in the future…

“What the fuck!” Kacchan shouted as he ran outside to look at the newly placed castle. The rest of 1-A followed him, as well as Shouta and Toshinori.

“Hey everyone, just so you know– if you see this show up at the exam, don’t worry about it! It’s mine!”

“You actually own a castle?!” Hagakure yelled. Based on the positioning of her gloves, she seemed to be grabbing at the sides of her head. “I thought the prince theme was just because you thought it looked cool!”
“C'est magnifique, monsieur pingouin~☆!”

“Why the hell is Midoriya’s castle outside his pocket dimension?” Sekijirou-sensei asked Shouta as he walked up to the man. It seemed that 1-B had come for their turn to use the gym. They looked even more bewildered at the sight of the fairytale castle, as they were less used to Izuku’s antics compared to 1-A. He could hear some of them even whisper between themselves “What is he wearing?” –Why do people always have to comment on that? You would think the castle would be enough of a distraction to take attention away from his Prince of the Crystal uniform...

Shouta just groaned in response, “That’s his new ultimate move.”

“…Are you serious?”

“Does it look like I’m joking, Vlad? The damn sparkly castle is right there as proof.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Izuku saw Monoma open his mouth as though he was about to say something provoking like he usually did. But when Sekijirou made eye-contact with his student, Monoma closed his mouth with a discontent look on his face.

That’s when Izuku did a double take at Monoma. His hero costume was designed to be like a suit with a black jacket featuring double-breasted buttons and long coat tails. Since when the hell did they have similar outfits? It’s a good thing Izuku also had a prince and penguin theme added on, or else they would look way too alike!

When Izuku walked out of the range of the spell, breaking it and dismantling the wonderland into a flurry of intangible glass shards, Monoma did his own double take at Izuku’s hero costume.

Ever the blunt one, Tsuyu was the first to comment, “Izu-chan, Monoma’s costume is a lot like yours, isn’t it?”

“Yeah…” Tetsutetsu looked back and forth between them. “It’s just that he has a “phantom thief” vibe and you have a “prince” vibe!”

What little self-restraint Monoma had broke. Clutching at his jacket, he declared, “It’s nothing alike!
Those are two completely different styles! And I purposely designed mine to not stand out too much, while Midoriya’s is purposefully gaudy!”

“Is he sure that that outfit doesn’t stand out too much, and isn’t gaudy?” Kaminari quietly asked Kendou.

Kendou winced, and whispered back, “From his perspective… yes.”

“Having a prince theme isn’t gaudy, you just have to be confident enough to embrace it,” Izuku explained.

“Are you saying that I’m not confident enough to wear your stupid prince outfit?!”

That wasn’t what he had said at all. Your inferiority complex is showing, Monoma-kun…

“Alright, alright! Let’s calm down now!” Sekijirou walked up to Monoma and placed his large hand on his student’s shoulder. “Both of you have a very… unique sense of style, we’ll just leave it at that.” That wasn’t insulting at all, Sekijirou-sensei.

Monoma ignored the thinly veiled insult to his sense of style, and instead tried to charge on ahead with his attitude. “You know, it’s said that half of those who take the provisional license exam will fail! So why don’t you all fail so us in 1-B can pass!”

“It’s because we don’t want something like that to happen that the two classes are taking the exams in separate locations,” Sekijirou revealed, derailing Monoma’s train of thought.

Monoma stared up at his teacher with an unreadable expression for a few seconds, then let out a quiet sigh.

A smirk grew on his face as he turned back towards 1-A and declared, “Such a shame we can’t crush you directly!” That was a sigh of relief before wasn’t it?! Monoma, please stop overcompensating!

“But still… I hadn’t thought about it before now, but each school is going to be competing against
each other to get those passes. We’re only first years too,” Sero mused in worry.

Shouta responded, “That’s right. Only a minority of schools send their freshmen to try and get licenses, so you’ll be up against a lot of kids that have had more time to train than you, whose quirks you don’t know.”

Izuku turned this thought over in his head, before slapping a hand over his cheek in realization. “Aw shit!”

“So you thought of it too, huh Izuku…” Hitoshi sighed in preemptive exhaustion. He would especially be at a disadvantage, and he hasn’t even been in the hero course for a full month yet.

“Thought of what? What are you guys talking about?” Jirou questioned them both.

“We don’t know their quirks, but they must have all seen ours from the Sports Festival,” Yaoyorozu responded for them, having already figured it out.

There was a moment of silence. Then, pandemonium exploded.

“What the hell!”

“Dammit, are you serious?!”

“Sensei why would you do this to us?!”

Shouta just gave them all a mean grin. “That’s what Plus Ultra means, kiddos!”

Sighing a bit, the 1-B student Izuku vaguely remembered to be named Tsuburaba spoke up among the worried murmurs from class 1-B, “Well, at least there’s some benefit to most of us not being as noticed during the Sports Festival now…”

Still by his teacher’s side, Monoma erupted into evil-sounding cackles, “Haha! That’s right, class 1-A! How does it feel to be sabotaged by your own glory?!”
Sekijirou just sighed down at his unconventional student, “You know you showed off a lot during the second round too, right?”

Monoma stopped laughing, and Izuku felt just a tiny bit better.

The party queen Ashido decided that the best time to have Hitoshi’s welcome party would be before they took the exam. That way, anyone that happened to not pass wouldn’t feel “bummed out” during it.

Thus, during the weekend before the exam the 1-A Heights Alliance living room was decorated with a ton of colorful streamers, balloons, and party favors. Jirou’s DJ station was set up, and the combined efforts of Satou and other people’s store-bought goods allowed for a great spread of food.

Jirou’s DJ station was also enhanced with various pieces of equipment from Hizashi’s collection to allow music to play both outside and inside the building. Hizashi practically jumped at the chance to throw a party for his new son. Though, notably neither Hizashi nor Shouta have referred to Hitoshi as this yet. They could most likely tell that the sudden change in relationship would overwhelm Hitoshi, and therefore decided to wait on that.

As everyone had figured out the new family of three by now –just as Izuku predicted– Shouta and Hizashi were given prime invites to what Ashido tried to claim as a “no adults allowed” party. Hizashi acted like a parent that was trying to hang out with the younger generation. Shouta acted like he would really prefer not to be there, but put up with it as a show of support for Hitoshi.

1-A students weren’t the only ones partying, though. Kendou, Awase, and Tetsutetsu dropped by for a little to give 1-B’s congratulations to Hitoshi, as well as catch up with Yaoyorozu and Kirishima respectively. Monoma also dropped by, and honestly congratulated Hitoshi instead of picking a fight. Which was good, because Izuku would’ve thrown him out if he had.

Remembering that Togata had wanted a chance to ride his robots, Izuku informed the upperclassman
about the party. When Togata arrived, he brought with him a nervous-looking Amajiki-senpai and an extremely chatty third year Izuku hadn’t met before, Hadou-senpai. Togata squeezed Izuku in a large hug, as they hadn’t seen each other since before Izuku’s disastrous summer camp.

Once the class B students had left and Togata was accounted for, Izuku delivered on his promise to bring out the Teddydrums. They were glad to bask in the praise of Izuku’s classmates, and were ready and willing to give everyone a chance to ride. Most of the crowd cheered, especially those that had been the ones asking to ride them—mainly Kirishima, Ochako, Kaminari, and Ashido. Others—like Shouta-sensei, who watched from the back with an expression of vague amusement at the fact that his husband was obviously planning on joining in the fun as well—stayed totally neutral.

And then there was Amajiki-senpai.

“Mirio… I can’t,” the pointy-eared third year spoke in a shaky voice, and trembled at the sight of the giant teddybears, “Look at how big they are, and you saw how high they flew during the festival—He almost died falling off! I don’t want to die!”

Togata-senpai placed a gentle, strong hand on Amajiki’s back. At first, Amajiki instinctively tensed in response, before his body naturally relaxed itself all at once.

“Tamaki, I promise that you won’t die riding the Teddydrums. Midoriya has harnesses now to keep people from falling off. And if you want, we can ride together! I think that would be really fun!”

From his slouched posture, Amajiki looked up to see Togata smiling brightly at him. He glanced away with a faint blush of embarrassment and gave a small nod of agreement.

The Teddydrums seemed to be a party favorite. That being said, Izuku’s reason for offering his robots wasn’t as straight-forward as he presented it…

“Alright everyone! Since Teddydrum Black and Teddydrum White are doing all of us a huge favor, I’d like you all to pay them back in some way!” Izuku instructed to his crowd of eager classmates.

Walking up to Teddydrum Black, Izuku opened his arms wide, and Teddydrum Black took his cue to hug Izuku. Izuku brought his arms as much around the Teddydrum’s much larger body as he could, embracing the automatic warm and comforting feeling it gave him.
“After every ride, I want you to hug the Teddydrums just like this! They really like hugs, so this would be the best way to let them know how much you appreciate them!”

With that said, Izuku stepped back and allowed his classmates to haphazardly form a line. He moved to stand next to Hitoshi and Shouto in the back, who were both giving him questioning glances.

“Having them hug the Teddydrums seems like an awfully specific form of payment…” Hitoshi trailed off suggestively.

Izuku nodded, and turned to pay attention to the robot antics. “I– may have an underhanded reason for letting everyone ride them. You remember how you fell asleep when Teddydrum Black was holding you?”

“Yeah…? Does this have anything to do with why I felt like I was on drugs when it was cuddling me?”

“Well, the Teddydrums have this feature where they provide a comforting presence to people. This feature is exaggerated by physical contact and when the person in question needs comforting. People in need of a lot of comfort usually end up falling asleep like you did.”

Hitoshi raised his eyebrows at that, and Shouto let out a sound of realization. “You’re testing everyone, then,” Shouto stated, “To see if you need to help someone emotionally.”

Izuku’s smile turned sheepish. “Yeah, it’s just that I’ve been finding that a lot of people have problems with their Fruit of Fate that I can’t see because it’s only on the inside of the Fruit, but for some things they’ll still be affected by the Teddydrums. Though there is a certain extent those problems need to reach before they would be affected like that, I think. Not sure if this is the best way to handle it, but…”

Shouto just nodded back nonchalantly, probably thinking of his own problems that he was facing. Izuku had already talked to Shouto about how he felt being under his sister’s care instead of his father’s. He had said that while things were awkward, it was also nice to finally feel like he was actually getting to know his sibling and to finally be out of Endeavor’s control. His brother Natsuo had even visited before Shouto left for the dorms.

His sister had also said that their father had given some serious thought to his actions, but Shouto wasn’t interested in giving the man a chance to fix their non-existent relationship.
A yawn broke Izuku out of his thoughts, he refocused his attention to see one of Shouji’s large hands covering his mask, assumingly covering his mouth as he gave a deep yawn. The boy had just finished stepping out of his hug with Teddydrum White.

“Oh, that’s right. Shouji mentioned before that people have said he’s creepy. That might be why he wears a mask,” Shouto commented, cupping his chin in remembrance.

Hitoshi scowled sympathetically. “Mutant type quirks do tend to have that affect if it makes the person look too unconventional.”

“Something to look out for then…” Izuku mentally marked Shouji down on his “To Help” list.

Things went on like that. Most of his classmates didn’t show any signs of drowsiness, but he made sure to remember those that did.

Tokoyami rubbed at his eyes a bit, but Izuku already knew he had a problem with Dark Shadow. While they had come to an agreement under Izuku’s advice during the workplace training, Dark Shadow going on a rampage during camp probably set them back. There might not be anything more Izuku could do for them at this point, but he put him on the list anyway.

When it was Hagakure’s turn, Izuku realized he didn’t have many good cues to tell if an invisible person was sleepy, since he couldn’t use her expression as a reference. She seemed to stumble a little, so—maybe she was? But her flight had been particularly disorienting since she was directing Teddydrum Black all over the place. Her Fruit was still gold, so there was no good way to tell if that had just been a fluke or not.

Aoyama definitely wasn’t a fluke. He seemed to get pretty close to drowsing in Teddydrum White arms, mumbling a little in French when he stepped away. Izuku put him on the list.

Many of the others waited through the line and had their turn, even the more timid classmates Izuku thought would have declined flying on a giant robot like Kouda. It seemed like everyone wanted to try it at least once since they had the opportunity.

—Izuku made a mental note to himself to invite Kouta over to try flying Teddydrum Black once the Pussy Cats were less preoccupied with the tragedy that occurred with Ragdoll—
There had been a large streak where there were no notable effects on anyone, so Izuku had let his guard down. It was then, of course, that the most notable reaction came from a source that Izuku hadn’t even been planning on investigating.

Togata exclaimed in worry, “Tamaki?!”

“Amajiki-kun! Are you okay– Woah, he fell asleep? How did that happen?! Those teddybears must be cuddlier than I thought!” Hadou rambled.

Izuku blinked at the sight of the dead on his feet upperclassman. Amajiki had only been in the hug for maybe three second before he fell right asleep, a ridiculously fast reaction time. A concerning reaction time, paired with a concerningly strong response. Teddydrum White picked him up to hold the pale boy in his arms properly, and gave Izuku an intense look with its glowing red eyes.

Izuku turned on his quirk Conductor, and inhaled sharply at the sight.

“That bad, huh?” Hitoshi quietly asked.

“Yeah. This is… pretty bad.”

Amajiki’s entire Fruit of Fate was covered in the purple sheen of poison, with the only exception being a small halo of gold showing through right at the top. He instantly moved to the top of Izuku’s list.

Hawks didn’t know what he thought he was doing, popping himself over to Izuku’s world for the night. He knew that the kid would want to know what was wrong, and that he wouldn’t be able to tell him what was wrong, but…
He had managed to track down the general area of one of the League members, Dabi, by following the trail of ash and missing criminals that he seemed to be leaving in his wake. Why the villain was violently doing the heroes’ job for them and cleaning up the streets Hawks didn’t know, but he suspected that Dabi was a Stain enthusiast and that had something to do with it.

Regardless, Hawks’s orders were clear. He was to ignore the blatant acts of murder and future victims Dabi would surely burn off the face of the Earth, and use this as his chance to initiate contact with the League. From that point on there was no going back.

In his time as a hero, Hawks has had to get his hands dirty occasionally, but this… whatever he does for the League and whatever he lets them get away with during this time would surely stain his hands deeper than anything he’s done previously.

He tried to tell himself that this was fine, that this was the right thing to do. That he’d help more people later by abandoning the less-than-innocents that Dabi was currently targeting now. But not matter how he spun it, it all felt like lies in his head, even when they weren’t.

--He doesn't want to do this. He doesn’t, but he must. He doesn’t have a choice. Because in the end, even as the Number Two hero, he’s still just a pretty bird singing from its golden cage--

So it was in this moment, where his cage was the hardest to ignore, that he wanted to fly in the brilliant sky in the Garden of Eden once more. He wanted to dive into that fake sky and fake freedom, so that it would be easier to pretend that his cage wasn’t there.

Having a real conversation with Endeavor helped a little by reminding him that what he was doing was for the greater good. That he was still a hero that even his own hero felt deserving of respect, when before Hawks had never seen the man respect anyone at all. But Hawks still felt uneasy.

And so, here he was, staring at the reflection of Izuku’s image when he wasn’t even here. Momoka glowered in displeasure, seeming to see right through him like the mirror she was. Izuku had told him that her mirror could see “truth” or whatever, so Hawks guessed that she knew about his situation. Hopefully she would keep her mouth shut about it though, at least she’s been proven to be good at keeping secrets from even Izuku.

“Those people are going to drive you into the ground, Takahiro…”
He didn’t ask if she was referring to the League of Villains or the Commission. He would rather not know. “You don’t need to worry about that, I’ll be fine. I just wanted to stretch my wings a bit.”

“I think you need more help than you’re willing to admit. You’re a good person, Takahiro, acting like a villain won’t come naturally to you,” Momoka explained with a frown. She was acting more serious than Hawks was used to, it made her look more like Izuku. “I can probably help you with that, though. I’m more in-between than I am good.”

Hawks just sighed and tried to wave her off, “I’m not going to involve either you or Izuku in this. I’m not some saint like All Might– I’m sure I can pull this off. So unless you have some advice or information that could help me deal with the League, particularly the villain Dabi, then there’s nothing I want from you.”

Momoka stared at him with her piercing pink eyes, before looking away awkwardly. “Well, actually…”

Hawks raised his eyebrows at her and spread out his wings with his arms. “Are you serious– never mind. I don’t want to know how you know all this shit. Just… what is it?”

Momoka glanced her eyes back at him in a judging expression. “There isn’t really a good way to put this, and you don’t really need to know everything, so… Just know that Dabi is actually Endeavor’s son and while he’s devoted to changing what he sees as a flawed hero system, his main goal is simply to kill Endeavor. That should be enough for you to know how to work with him.”

Shock punched Hawks in the gut. His entire body froze for a long moment of silence.

After his worldview had been reoriented slightly, his mouth falling agape, he rose his voice in incredulous disbelief, “…Okay. I’m going to need to you to back up like, ten mental steps. Dabi, the murderous villain, is the Number One hero’s kid?”

“That’s correct.”

“And he wants to murder his father?!”

“That’s also correct.”
What was Hawks even supposed to say to that? What the hell was even going on? What…

A sense of almost knowing anxiety filled Hawks’s chest as he frowned to himself. “What happened that would make Dabi want to kill Endeavor?”

Momoka just stared right through him. “I don’t think you want to know the answer to that question.”

*Because that’s the way it’s always been, hasn’t it? The less Hawks knew, the more he could lie to himself, the better he could tell himself that he was fine with the way things were and the sacrifices he made for people that didn’t care—*

“…No. I want to know,” he decided, and much like his job as a double agent there would be no turning back, “But I don’t want to hear it from you. I’ll get the full story from both sides, somehow.”

Momoka shook her head at him in almost a fond manner. “That sounds even more difficult than infiltrating the League of Villains.” But then, she gave him a once over, and her lips quirked up in a knowing smirk. “But… I suppose that along with being Icarus, you are also quite the Beauty.”

*He’s not even going to ask what the hell she’s talking about. “It probably is, but I’m not the type of person to half-ass important things.”* He turned his back to way out the door and finally head to the garden, but his eyes were firmly focused on the floor in thought.

*While what he heard was… disturbing, at least he had a good idea of what angle he should play when approaching Dabi.*

Chapter End Notes

References from this chapter:
The teachers’ opening speech and part of the students' dialogue about the exam is from bnha
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was finally time for the first years to try their hand at the provisional license exam. On the same day that they left to take it, Toshinori decided to take advantage of their absence to get through some meetings he had been putting off.

His first one of the day placed him in the rigid silence of a small conference room. The tension between Toshinori and Nighteye was so thick, that if Izuku had been here he could’ve impaled a sword through it. Despite the fact that Nighteye had been the one to scout out Togata as Toshinori’s potential successor, he had a complete change of heart on the matter now.

He was scared of what fate could have in store for Togata, should the boy choose to accept One for All.

Toshinori also worried over this; the punishments he had been told of thus far seemed to range from “life changing but not too horrible” to “death would’ve been kinder”, and there was just no way to tell which path fate would send the next One for All holder down.

But even still… his quirk was still needed in this world, was still needed by society to help maintain the peace– Toshinori could feel it. The precarious position of Endeavor at the top of the hero ladder reinforced it. The unforgettable but hidden presence of Shigaraki Tomura, now the holder of All for One, confirmed it. It made him think of something that Izuku once said Momoka had told him…

“All miracles in this world are built atop someone’s sacrifice”

The ability to pass on One for All was a miracle, that was why it came with a cost. That was why Toshinori was still missing parts of his lungs and stomach. So this was a risk he, as the current holder of the quirk, had to take.

Whether or not Togata would also accept that risk remained to be seen. He was the one that would be doing the sacrificing this time, after all. It was why they were here in the first place.

The silence was broken by the creak of a door opening. “Oh– Sir, and All Might! It’s nice to meet you! Why did you two call me here?”
Togata stepped in with a wide smile, giving Toshinori a firm handshake for his introduction. Even in his true form Toshinori was rather tall, but Togata’s natural build almost rivaled it. Perhaps he might even grow to be just as tall.

Toshinori did his best to smile back. “I thought it was about time to meet the student that my old sidekick has been praising so much. How about you sit down and tell me a bit about yourself while we have tea?”

They conversed for a long while; Toshinori learned that Togata had been inspired to become a hero due to being saved by one as a child. Togata got some insight into Toshinori’s struggle to continue acting as the Number One hero even with his injuries and weaker body. The boy was a very easy person to get along with, friendly and positive to a fault. Toshinori could see a lot of himself in him.

It was no wonder that Nighteye considered him worth of One for All, the resemblance in personality alone would’ve caught his eye.

—But perhaps, he was a bit too much like Toshinori. After all, Toshinori had ended up so hurt because of the same need to save people that Togata also possessed, hadn’t he?

Maybe that was why Nighteye was so scared for Togata’s future now?

“It’s been really great to have the chance to talk with you, All Might-san!”

“Please, call me Toshinori.” Depending on the way things go, we’ll become more familiar with one another.

“Toshinori-san, then,” Togata casually amended. The way Togata said Toshinori’s name reminded him of Izuku.

The boy’s smile didn’t waver, but Toshinori could tell that he was being carefully examined. “The point that I wanted to get to was… Well, as great as this has been, I’m getting the feeling that this wasn’t the real reason you wanted to meet me.”

“It seems you managed become skilled in observation while under Nighteye’s care. I’m not
Toshinori side-eyed his old sidekick. The man grimaced at him.

Nighteye cleared his throat, before giving his intern a serious look while explaining, “I’d like to preface this talk by saying that you are in no way obligated to take any sort of action based on All Might’s request. If you decline the offer, there’s a whole school full of future heroes for him to choose from—there’s absolutely no pressure for you to accept it. Actually, I would prefer if you declined.”

Toshinori’s own face slipped into a grimace. Though he wasn’t sure if it was in response to Nighteye’s words or the dreaded reasoning behind them. *He’s really trying to put the boy off this, huh…*

Togata furrowed his brows and blinked at Nighteye in confusion. “Okay, Sir. But, I would still like to know what this offer is…”

Taking a page out of his sidekick’s book, Toshinori started with, “I’ll start with the exclaimer that there will most certainly be some confusing things that I refer to, which I personally have no way of giving you a practical demonstration of to make it easier to accept. So I suggest that you just think on them for now, and when Izuku returns from his exam, you ask *him* about it. He’s the expert on the matters that I am referring to.”

“Uh… Okay?” Togata’s confusion visibly increased. They might be being vague, but it was important to get this out to the way. There’s probably no way for Toshinori to adequately explain the system behind Children of Fate and Fruit of Fate to someone that’s never seen the Fruit.

“Now that that’s settled—” Toshinori leaned forward with his elbows on his knees. “Let me tell you the story behind my quirk, One for All. It’s a story that happened long ago, involving two brothers…”

The location for their exam was at the Takoba National Stadium. Carrying his hero costume in its metal suitcase, Izuku was pleased by the large size of the stadium.
Outside the stadium, they got their first look at some of the competition. A cheer of “Plus Ultra!” included the unexpected, loud voice of a Shiketsu first year, Yoarashi Inasa. After his boisterous apology for interrupting—which was given with a bow so deep the boy literally slammed his forehead into the concrete—as well as his claim to love UA, Shouta-sensei explained that he had placed first in UA’s recommendation student entrance test, but ended up declining the acceptance for some reason.

“I don’t get it. He says he loves UA, but tosses his chance at entering?” Sero mused as they all watched Yoarashi rejoin his schoolmates.

Ashido echoed his sentiment, “So weird…”

“He may be weird, but make note; He’s the real deal,” Shouta reminded them firmly.

Izuku turned to see Shouto eyeing Yoarashi. “Since you took your exam with him, you must’ve met him right?”

“Yeah, but… I only vaguely remember him. I think.” Shouto narrowed his eyes in dissatisfaction at his lack of memory. “I wasn’t paying much attention to the other examinees, to be honest.”

“Ah… Well, you had more things to be worried about at the time. Your heart was still stuck, too,” Izuku dismissed Shouto’s concern. Unconsciously glancing at his boyfriend’s chest, he remembered seeing that only a third of Shouto’s Fruit of Fate was iced over now that he no longer had to live with his father.

*He’s still not completely free of it, though… What will it take to get the rest of it thawed?*

Shouta was about to continue leading them inside when a woman’s voice called out, “Eraser? Is that you?! I saw you on TV and at the Sports Festival, but’s it’s been forever since we ran into each other like this!”

His teacher tensed and immediately gained an annoyed expression. Shouta eyed the smiling and waving hero with light green hair that was approaching as though a door-to-door salesman had appeared at his home. Izuku recognized the woman to be the Smile Hero: Ms. Joke.
The first thing out of Ms. Joke’s mouth once she got closer was, “Let’s get married!”

What?

“No thanks.”

“No.”

Shouta blinked in surprise at the addition answer. Both him and Ms. Joke turned to look at Hitoshi, who was standing next to his adoptive father and glaring at the other hero. After blinking in surprise herself, Ms. Joke brought a hand to her mouth and chuckled at the sight, “Your students this year are really protective of you, Eraser! How cute!”

“It’s not cute, it’s just common sense!” Hitoshi growled out, crossing his arms defensively, “He’s already taken! Even if this is a joke, it’s a bad one!”

Poor Hitoshi. Just got his family and already he has to be on the lookout for homewreckers. Though from what Izuku remembered looking into both Shouta and Hizashi’s Fruit, they were of the impression that the woman wasn’t serious about it at least…

“Oh! That’s what you’re worried about!”

Ms. Joke leaned forward to give Hitoshi a conspiring wink. “No need to fret over that, kid. I know better than to ask Eraser to leave his darling husband– but polyamory has become pretty popular these days!”

Hitoshi choked on air. Shouta’s exasperation at the situation increased, and he deadpanned, “Against all odds… you somehow managed to make that joke even worse.”

Ms. Joke burst out in laughter, “You’re such a riot, Eraser!” *Is she purposely ignoring that Shouta didn’t mean that as a joke? Or is it because it wasn’t a joke that it’s funny to her? For someone named “the Smile Hero” and “Ms. Joke”, dealing with her is actually sort of complicated.*

She managed to regain control of herself shortly. Despite his attitude, Shouta must not think too
badly of her, because he continued the conversation by asking, “So your school’s here too?”

“Yeah!” She glanced over her shoulder to look at a group of kids who were already on their way over. “Come on over, everyone! Come meet UA!”

Looking back at Shouta, she explained, “This is class 2-2 of Ketsubutsu Academy! Say hello to my students.”

“Whoa! It’s really them!” a black-haired boy called out.

A girl with spikey blonde pigtails chimed, “Wowee! All those guys from TV!”

A more reserved boy with shoulder length hair commented, “Taking this test as first years? Pretty fast-paced, huh? Well, with everything that’s happened, it’s no wonder they’re so capable.”

Izuku couldn’t help but fidget a little at the attention they were receiving. The first one who spoke, a black-eyed boy with fluffed up hair similar to Izuku’s, came directly up to him with a smile to grab his both his hands in a handshake. Conductor automatically activated to show a golden Fruit in the older boy’s chest.

“My name’s Shindo Yo! UA’s been through quite the string of trouble this year, huh? It must’ve been tough! But even so, you’re all still aiming to be heroes! That’s wonderful!” Shindo proclaimed while looking at all of Izuku’s classmates individually, though he stayed in front of Izuku for the moment. With a wink, he finished off with, “A heart of fortitude is what I believe all heroes should have from now on!”

“Too bright… Another charming pretty boy type!” Kaminari quietly whispered.

Glancing up at Shindo’s eyes, Izuku thought that the piercing look he was receiving was more like that of a predator looking for weaknesses in his prey than a peer looking at him in admiration. A scoff from Kacchan backed up his assessment.

Regaining his confidence, the Prince smiled back and pulled Shindo forward with the other boy’s own grip to that his head was closer. He leaned forward himself so that his face was right beside Shindo’s, and his mouth could whisper in Shindo’s ear–
“Your heart may be pure, but your intentions for us aren’t. You should work harder on masking your expressions. Just showing off a smile doesn’t cut it for those who are looking into your eyes, you know…”

Izuku released Shindo, who stumbled a bit and stared at him with a dumbfounded expression. For some reason, there was also a faint blush reddening his ears. A smattering of loud whispering was going on behind Izuku.

“Eh?! Why is Midoriya flirting with–”

“It wasn’t on purpose. You know how much of a prince he is, he probably didn’t even think of how that could be interpreted…”

“Still, he needs to gain some self-awareness! Someone’s going to take it the wrong way one day–”

“Should we stage an intervention–”

Huh? Flirting? But Izuku was literally just threatening the guy and giving him constructive criticism all at once! Though, it’s not like they could hear that part…

A gentle hand grasped at Izuku’s shoulder, and he looked over to see Shouto staring at him with an unreadable expression. Concern bubbled up at the thought that Shouto thought he was flirting as well.

However, that wasn’t the case. Despite being the certified strange one in their relationship, Shouto still somehow managed to catch Izuku completely off guard. Blunt as always, Shouto actually had the nerve to say right in front of everyone, “You know… I know that you’re not flirting with him or anything like that, but if you ever do become interested in someone else, just know that I don’t mind including another person. But you can probably do better than that guy, at least.”

“S-S-Shouto-kun!” he squealed, face heating up in embarrassment.

“…Huh? What’s so wrong with me that I’m not good enough for him!?” Shindo exclaimed in offense, outright glaring at Shouto. The bright but slightly meek personality he had shown off just a
minute ago was nowhere to be found.

“No one is good enough for Izuku, he’s on a different level to us entirely,” Shouto stated as thought it was fact, “But just based on looks alone, I think you’re a bit too plain to be considered a good enough option for him.”

“Too plain?! Are you messing with me?! I’m your senior, you know!”

With a face of annoyance that perfectly matched their teacher’s, Hitoshi groaned, “Ugh, I just knew something like this would happen one day with these princes…”

Ms. Joke burst out laughing once more. She had to curl up on herself and hold her stomach from the strength of it. “Ha! Oh my God, Eraser! Why didn’t you tell me your class this year was so great?! With them around, we don’t even need to use my quirk to get villains laughing! Hahaha!”

Shouta looked like he would rather be in the middle of fight said villains than dealing with this. “I’m sorry, but “so great” is not how I would describe this!”

It was too early in the morning for a late-nighter like himself to be proctoring an exam focused around high school children beating each other into submission with superpowers, but Mera would’ve quit his job long ago if he couldn’t handle the tiredness he was feeling at the moment.

That being said, when looking out over the crowd of thousands of colorfully costumed teenagers, there was no hiding the tiredness in his voice, “Ehem… Right, so let’s begin. The provisional license thing…”

He got many questioning stares from that opening. Why on Earth had he ever thought he was cut out for government work? “Umm… Hello, my name is Mera Yokumiro from the Hero Public Safety Commission, and my favorite kind of sleep is non-REM sleep. It’s a pleasure–”
Cutting himself off as a chill went down his spine, Mera was suddenly wide awake from the familiar feeling he was experiencing.

Before he joined the Commission, it hadn’t ever been something he had felt before, but he had soon learnt of it right from the start of his new career as an overly optimistic young adult who had been looking to see if he could help society in his own way. It was the feeling of anxious awareness, the paranoia of thinking that you were being watched, because someone was watching you.

Not in the way all of these students had been doing all this time, but with the hard eyes of a person who felt anger at the system that had failed them. They were easy to pick out—just a single mention of being a worker in the Hero Commission and all of a sudden any form of politeness or apathy would vanish, replaced with a glare and coldness to act as their barrier. An attempt to protect themselves from a second betrayal by an organization that was expected to help enforce justice and safety for them.

And that was something that Mera had to figure out soon into his time as just another groundwork lackey— the fact that to the people at the top of the Commission and government in general, their goal of enforcing “justice” and “safety” for everyone was not the same as enforcing those things for each individual person. The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few, in their eyes, and Mera supposed that they had to have that perspective since it was impossible to keep everyone in society safe. Second best would be to work for the needs of as many people as humanly possible instead.

But it was because of that that the Hero Commission occasionally makes shady decisions that screws individuals over in the name of society. And because of that, the eyes of those individuals that were sacrificed or cared for someone who was sacrificed had a weight to them that made it impossible for Mera to ignore.

He hoped that no one noticed that his body and tone was much more alert now as he carefully tried to focus on and search individual faces in the crowd. “I’ll explain how the exam will be conducted. Gathered in attendance are precisely 1,540 examinees who will all be vying for victory at once.” Way too many to have to look through… “In the present age, in our so-named “hero-saturated” society, there has been no shortage of voices raising in doubt over the state of heroics since Stain’s apprehension. The idea that heroes shouldn’t want to be compensated, and that the title of hero should be granted following acts of self-sacrifice.”

With the mention of Stain, Mera’s eyes just so happened search for the hero-in-training from UA that had been involved in his takedown—his hero name was Prince Deku, right?— And it just so happened that it was the far away eyes of “Prince Deku” that were giving him the nastiest glare he had ever witnessed. Even nastier than the monochromatic glare of Endeavor’s son, who stood right next to the black and white garbed boy.
Shit. He just knew that Endeavor showing up to meet UA at the headquarters that day meant nothing good. What the hell had the Commission done this time? And did they have to project their anger onto him? He was only mid-level in this organization! He swears he had nothing to do with whatever the Commission did regarding Endeavor!

Then again, considering the prince boy seemed to be even angrier at the Commission than Endeavor’s son, maybe it wasn’t just whatever was going on with Endeavor that he was upset about? Had the Hero Commission done something else to him? Mera doesn’t get paid enough to deal with the shit the higherups saddle onto him, unintentional it may be.

“But well… If you ask me, regardless of their actual motives, telling people who’re risking their lives out there to save people not to want anything in return… It’s hard not to think that’d be a bit merciless, given the realities of the modern world.” How the hell Stain thought that people would still be able to dedicate their time to hero work when they weren’t getting paid for it, Mera would never understand… “In any case… no matter whether it was for material gain or for the valor of it, at the end of the day they applied themselves diligently to rescue operations and villain cleanup.”

At the mention of having a personal opinion outside of the Commission’s generic statements, Mera felt the glares solder down into more of an intense evaluation rather than outright projection of fury. Thank God. It would’ve been hard to go through this whole exam if they continued looking at him liked he had killed their dog...

“The time that elapses between a case materializing and its resolution has become very swift. When you obtain your provisional licenses, you throw yourselves into that raging torrent. To be blunt, it will be very harsh on those who can’t keep the pace. As such, it’s your speed that will be tested! Only the first 100 to clear the terms of the exam will make the cut!”

As expected, the crowd burst into outrage.

“Wait wait wait! There’s 1,540 of us ain’t there?! That ain’t a 50/50 pass rate!”

“Well, a fair bit has happened in the world… so those are the breaks. Do as you do,” was his unempathetic response.

“No way!”
With the lead up out of the way, schematics explaining the set up of the first exam appeared behind Mera and he moved on to explain the rules.

It was a fairly simple premise; three targets on their body they need to defend, if all three get hit with the balls and their out. The person who hits the third and last target on the defeated examinee takes the kill and each person starts with six balls, get two people out and they pass. It’s a set up that makes it seem like it’s all about getting two people out as quickly as possible, when really what they need to do if take control over their opponents fast enough so that they can securely hit the targets and pass without losing all their ammo too early.

Mera opened the walls surrounding him and the examinees to reveal to them the vast, expansive, and diverse environment of the area. As expected, just about all of them gazed around their new surroundings in awe.

But notable… that Prince Deku – Midoriya Izuku, if he remembered the reports and Sports Festival correctly – had the most excited and slightly menacing grin on his face at the sight of it.

*Why does he feel like this is about to be a very anxiety-inducing testing period?*

As everyone prepared for the first test to start, Izuku popped into his world and retrieved both of the Teddydrums, the Champion of the Rose Bride, Izu-pingu, and Penguin Yagi. Having all of his forces out like this was almost overkill, but as this would be a school group-oriented test Izuku didn’t think it would be good for him to try to sequester his own marks into the Crystal World to take them out there. It would be better if he stayed out in the arena to coordinate with his classmates and defend against the inevitable mob that would target them, and the best way to do that would be to have everyone out from the start.

Bringing part of the Crystal World out to the arena was also an option, but Izuku wanted to save some of his skillset for the next part of the exam. Passing the first portion without giving too much away would surely be a benefit in the next round.

There was still the chance that one of the hero teachers in the crowd would recognize Yagi as being
similar to Sir Nighteye, but as long as the penguin stayed on the down low and never obviously used Nighteye’s quirk, it would be a hard connection to make. Because of this Izuku felt much better about bringing him out compared to the Sports Festival, and Penguin Yagi was willing to help him out, so why not?

That being said, when he mentioned to his classmates that they should stick together, the responses were a mixed bag.

“If there’s too many of us it’ll be too fucking hard to round up enough extras for everyone to pass! I’m strong enough to go on my own!”

“H-Hey! Wait up Bakugou!”

“Tch– Fine. Shitty hair can come too, I guess!”

“Wait! Me too!”

With that, Kacchan, Kirishima, and Kaminari rushed away from the group.

On the other hand, Shouto glanced at him with a worried, guilty look. “The larger a group I’m in, the less leeway I have to use my quirk. But…”

“Todoroki, with his robots, puppet, and penguins, Izuku’s got like five bodyguards not including me.” Why is Hitoshi including himself as one of his “bodyguards”? “He won’t keel over if you leave him for the test.”

“But what if a villain goes after him when I’m not here?”

“Usually I would say that a villain showing up to a hero licensing test would be impossible, but this is Izuku we’re dealing with, so I’ll accept that there might be a small chance–”

“Wha– Guys, there’s no chance at all! What are you talking about?!!”
His protest was completely ignored. “–but even if a villain is here right now, the rest of us will be here with him too.”

“Hitoshi-kun’s right, Shouto-kun!” Ochako presented a confident thumbs-up to Shouto. “We’ll definitely keep a look out for villains during the exam too, so don’t worry about Deku-kun!”

“Guys, seriously! This is an exam, there won’t be any villains– ”

“As long as a couple of us make sure to stay with Izuku-kun, no cunning villains sneaking in will have the chance to prey on him, Todoroki-kun! Do what you wish to give your best effort!” Tenya declared with a firm knife hand.

“Guys!”

With that, Shouto rushed away to venture out on his own. However, Izuku didn’t like the thought of Shouto being completely without backup, so he sent Izu-pingu off the watch over him and give assistance if needed. Even with a few of their members missing though, the majority of the class planned to stay together.

But once again, fate proved that it could never let any plans Izuku was involved with go the way they’re supposed to.

When the countdown ended, a flurry of balls were sent at 1-A by the Ketsubutsu students. They were all able to defend against their attacks fairly easily. The trouble came when Shindo, who looked very determined to prove something for some reason, caused the rock beneath them to erupt into an earthquake that scattered everyone apart.

Izuku, riding Teddydrum Black, managed to avoid the entire ordeal, but he lost sight of his friends amongst the dust and rubble. He also had no idea where the Champion or Penguin Yagi ended up.

“Teddydrum White, search that side of this part of the arena! We’ll go in the opposite direction!”

Teddydrum White nodded in affirmation, and they parted ways. Izuku had Teddydrum Black fly at a mid-range, low enough to make out some details of people, but high enough away that it’d be hard to target him unless they had a person that was capable of flight as well.
The intercom came to life and the proctor from the Hero Commission—who Izuku was still wary of simply due to his affiliation with an organization that had caused trouble for both Shouto and Takahiro—announced, “Ah. Finally, somebody’s cleared it—What? 120 examinees are now out! 120 have been taken out by a single person, who thereby passes the exam!”

Seriously?! And people say that Izuku is intense—

“Ah! Wait—Down here! Down here!”

Following the faint sound of the call, Izuku found the small form of Ochako waving her arms frantically to catch his attention. Huh? It’s good that she got him to notice her, but she’s making herself way too noticeable!

As though to prove his point, a small crowd of opponents started to close in on her. Izuku had his Teddydrum make a swift dive while firing its cannons randomly at them. They didn’t hit anyone, but they pushed them back enough for Teddydrum Black to swoop down and pluck Ochako from the ground. With their new passenger, they flew away from the other examinees.

Ochako seemed to give a sigh of relief, and raised her voice to be heard over the roar of the rockets, “That was a close one! Thanks for the save back… What… Why am I… No!”

Izuku was instantly alarmed by the drowsiness that had entered Ochako’s tone, and quickly glanced downward just in time to see her exclaim with conviction. With gritted teeth, she evasively wormed her way out of Teddydrum Black’s grip to go falling through the air.

Ochako hadn’t been affected by hugging a Teddydrum before

“Shit—That’s not Ochako-chan! They probably can’t catch themselves! Teddydrum Black!”

The Teddydrum dived once more, and caught the fake Ochako by her leg with a single rounded hand. The imposter apparently judged the ground to be close enough now, because the boot of Ochako’s hero costume dissolved into some sort of mucky substance to allow them to slip away from the robot’s grip again. As Izuku approached the ground, they managed to stick the landing in a fluid motion.
“What a cute but affective trap your teddy has. Did you know right from the start that I wasn’t Uraraka Ochako?” their voice changed to be one that was still feminine, but deeper than Ochako’s. The rest of what almost looked like a shell of mud enclosing them dissolved away to show the face of one of the girls that Izuku had seen with the Shiketsu students.

She was also naked, but Izuku didn’t pay any mind to that. He had already turned on Conductor to get a real look at her.

“Are you… Are you really a hero-in-training?” he questioned with doubt clear in his voice. His eyes hardened as he stared into her chest.

After all, it would be hard to find a person that truly wished to be a hero and was accepted into a prestigious hero school who also had a Fruit of Fate that was almost entirely blackened of rot like hers was.

The scattered places that weren’t black were covered in purple poison. If they were red instead of black, it would have looked remarkably like splattered blood.

Eyes widening in shock, the Shiketsu girl who probably was not truly from Shiketsu stared at Izuku for just a second, before her face scrunched into a pout. She turned and dashed away over the rocks while saying, “I wanted to be able to talk with you about your friend, but it looks like it’ll be dangerous for me now!”

A frightening intensity burst in Izuku’s chest. If that was a person impersonating a student to infiltrate the exam, it’s almost certain that they’re a villain! They’re a danger to Izuku’s friends, he needs to detain them, maybe even more–

“Deku-kun!” the real Ochako called out. He swerved around to see that Teddydrum White had collected her and Sero. They were sharing its back to ride on.

When he turned his gaze back behind him, the girl was gone.

Dammit!

Sighing in defeat, Izuku admitted, “I… I think I just ran into a villain that was pretending to be a student, guys…”
“You… Wait, are you being serious?! What are the chances of something like that happening?! And we’ve been separated for fifteen minutes at most!” Sero exclaimed incredulously while clutching the sides of his helmet.

“If they weren’t a villain, then they were the most suspicious hero trainee that I’ve ever seen. They fled when I called them out on it, too.”

“Oh Deku-kun…” Ochako furrowed her brows in concern. “There’s always trouble waiting right around the corner for you, isn’t there? That this point it’s not even fair…”

You could say that again, Ochako-chan…

Chapter End Notes

References from this chapter:
Part of the dialogue from Aizawa, Ms. Joke, Shindou, and Mera is from bnha.
What Does it Mean to Be Normal?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Please don’t be headed towards me, please don’t be headed towards me, please don’t– Fuck

Shouta took the note Teddydrum Black held out for him and read it with a sense of foreboding exasperation.

It stated, “Possibly encountered villain infiltrating as a Shiketsu student, please notify security – Thanks, Prince Deku”


Shouta turned back to examine her with a serious expression, and placed a hand on her shoulder. “Joke, listen… While I hesitate to mention it normally, I do consider us to be friends.”

“No, it’s too late for me, already…”

“Too late– Are you dying?!”

“But it’s not too late for you. That’s why, as your friend, I need to tell you– ” He leaned forward to emphasize his words, and said with a completely serious tone, “If you ever have a student that shows up on the first day with giant teddybear robots as part of his quirk, quit your job as a teacher and go back to doing hero work fulltime.”

“…Huh?”

“Or, better yet, if you ever have a student that has had three or more villain encounters in less than half a school year, you should also quit. No amount of money Ketsubutsu pays you will ever be
worth the anxiety that student will give you.”

“…Are you joking?”

“No, but I wish I was.”

With that out of the way, Shouta immediately rushed to report the incident to the heroes working for the exam. Predictably, the “Shiketsu student” that was noted as having disappeared from the field was nowhere to be found.

“Well… since no alarm has been sounded or anything, they’re probably handling the situation covertly so that the exam can continue,” Izuku commented after Teddydrum Black returned from his reporting. Teddydrum White congratulated its counterpart with a firm pat on the back for a job well done, but they were still missing the Champion of the Rose Bride and Penguin Yagi.

“What does it say that at this point we have to outright ignore villain encounters in order to get our schooling done with...” Sero responded with a despairing rhetorical question. The answer was that it says nothing good at all, of course.

“Since they aren’t stopping the exam, we have to get back on track,” Ochako confirmed. She glanced over her shoulder in the direction Sero and her had come from. “I saw a crowd of other examinees headed this way; should we avoid them to meet up with the others, or target them to pass?”

“How many were there?”

“They had at least ten more people than the three of us,” Ochako paused as she refocused her gaze on the Teddydrums. “Though, I guess there are technically five of us instead of three.”
Izuku brought a hand to his mouth as he muttered, “I think we could handle that. You guys have quirks that are great for immobilizing opponents, and we probably won’t make the cut if we spend time trying to find everyone. The Teddydrums and I will be decoys.”

Their plan to combine Ochako’s and Sero’s quirks to release a web of tape to capture all of the examinees at once was a success. He hadn’t thought about it before, but Prince Deku as a hero was practically made to be a distraction. The sight of Izuku brandishing his sword in his prince-like hero costume while riding a giant teddybear robot was one that no one could ignore just due to the sheer absurdity of it. The entire group was so preoccupied with trying to focus on combating Izuku despite the weirdness, that they were completely unaware of the trap until it was too late to do anything about it.

The proctor from the Commission sounded off on the intercom just as they finished their capture, “We’ve arrived at 76 examinees who have cleared the first phase. The full 100 is on the horizon, folks!”

“You guys are freshmen, right? Can’t you show us some mercy, we’ve got to get our provisionals here, or…” One of the trapped examinees pleaded.

“Preventing you from starting your careers on the field before you’re truly ready for it is mercy,” Izuku declared without hesitation. As he pressed one of his balls to the other student’s target, he heard Sero give a hissing wince at his almost harsh bluntness.

Another examinee that Ochako was working on was still too busy eyeing Teddydrum White. “Okay, I’m sorry, but if I’m getting taken out by teddybears, tape, and a prince I just have to ask– Why teddybears?”

“Why not teddybears?” Ochako casually replied in place of Izuku. He felt a conflicting mixture of warmth at his friend’s acceptance of his eccentricities and resigned acceptance that he’s officially distorted Ochako’s sense of normality.

Sero tapped on his tape dispenser shaped helmet. “Getting defeated by tape isn’t as weird as getting defeated by a prince with teddybears, right?”

“I don’t think I’m the right person to ask that kind of question,” Izuku quietly admitted with a sheepish smile.
Overall, Izuku’s time in the first round was rather average – *if you discounted him running into a villain, at least…*

From the hiding spot behind some rubble that he shared with a collection of eight classmates, Yo felt a mean grin crawl on his face at the sight of the battlefield’s desperate chaos.

“I may have rushed a little myself, but now that I think about it, you can’t argue with the results– When you’re given eight hours to cut down a tree, you spend the first six sharpening the axe!”

Hands steepling together in thought, Yo’s grin grew slightly wider with every word, “Their heads are swimming with the number of places left, it’s all they can think of. So they’re running around like headless chickens totally exhausting themselves in the process! They’re all stuck with tunnel vision for the enemies they’ve got intel on; UA. That makes them easy pickings for the rest of us!”

“Finally giving that fake smile a rest? You’re so sneaky, Yo-kun. If the UA students saw you with that kind of smile on your face, they definitely wouldn’t think that you’re plain!” Tatami chimed in with a small but teasing smile. He couldn’t help the automatic twinge of annoyance he felt at the reminder.

“Too plain— Honestly, the nerve of that Todoroki. I guess it’s only to be expected from the child of a top hero, though…” he muttered through a lightly tensed jaw.

Toteki sighed at Yo from behind his red scarf, “Shindo-san, I really think you’re taking his comment too personally. Todoroki-san didn’t even seem to mean it as an insult, and you literally only just met Midoriya Izuku. Why would you care whether his boyfriend thinks you’re suitable for him or not?”

“Yo’s just bitter that he was rejected by a cutie because of another pretty boy–”

“I wasn’t rejected!” he defensively clarified, “There was no *rejecting*, rejecting implies that I was actually interested in Midoriya but was shot down! I’m not, I wasn’t, and that’s not what happened at
Tatami gave him an unconvinced look. “Uhuh, sure that’s not what happened.”

“It’s not! There was nothing going on between me and Midoriya! He was just practicing psychological warfare by using the appearance of intimacy to strengthen the shock of him seeing through my intentions and threatening me for them. It was a wonderful tactic.”

*To see straight though Yo’s façade like that, and to be able to subtly pressure him about it without even saying an outright threat… Regardless of any “romantic” feelings, he had captured Yo’s interest at the very least.*

His blond friend snorted a bit in amusement at his expense, before snickering, “That just sounds like something that would actually make you like him. You *would* be into that kind of conniving subterfuge, was it enough of a turn on that you have a crush on him now?”

Face reddening drastically, Yo could only sputter in offended outrage at Tatami’s *inappropriate and totally untrue claim. How did she even have the nerve to say something like that straight to his face? “N-No! Stop being ridiculous! This has nothing to do with a crush or anything like that! I’m just insulted by the principle of some UA kid thinking that I’m not good enough for a hypothetical relationship with someone that would obviously be well-suited for me.”*

“You think Midoriya’s *well-suited* for you, huh– ”

“That’s just based on simple observation from our interaction. It doesn’t *mean* anything.”

“Can we please go back to focusing on the exam…” one of his classmates, the blue-faced Makabe, finally complained. Yo internally thanked him for putting him out of his misery.

Clearing his throat to buy some time to calm down his embarrassment, Yo returned to his train of thought. “In any case, we and everyone else here are out to realize our dreams and prove our worth. There are no high or low ranks in that struggle…”

As a couple of injured examinees limbed their way, Yo grinned once more at their approaching figures and reached for a ball. They were struggling for their dreams just as he was, and he didn’t look down on them for that, but that also didn’t mean they weren’t his *prey.*
“It’s just the way that we go about doing those things is what will earn us our places in the world of heroes!”

“Eight more examinees have passed at once. Only ten slots remain,” the sound of the proctor’s voice echoed through the roaring sounds of battle. Despite Iida’s best attempts to find any straggling 1-A members to help them pass, all he managed to find was Yuuga.

Dodging desperate attacks left and right as they found themselves a cleared area, Yuuga thought that it was a shame. Iida definitely had what it took to go on to the next test and earn his license, but he chose to stay behind for the good of his classmates that may or may not be there. With only ten spots left, it was only a matter of time before they both lost their chance…

“Papa, Mama, why am I so different from everyone else?”

Yuuga knew that he wasn’t at the same level that his classmates were. He had a major biological disadvantage just from the fact that his quirk couldn’t function properly without support equipment, a quirk that most would consider “defective”, and he was a coward to top it off.

Hiding during the USJ incident when everyone was fighting. Hiding in the bushes was all he could do during the same villain attack where everyone else had rushed bravely after the villains to save Midoriya and the others. Shying away from going against the rules for the sake of rescuing their classmate.

It hurt to think about, but the hero “Shining Knight” was simply the hero that Yuuga wished to become, not who he was. He was far from being that knight right now.

He knew he wasn’t that hero yet. And maybe he would never be…
It was with that thought in mind that Yuuga bent backwards to allow his bright blue laser to shine like a beacon into the sky. It almost seemed to go on forever, just like the sky itself.

“Huh? What are you doing?”

“Standing out!”

“Yes, I can see that! But why?!”

“Two of my targets have already been hit,” Yuuga explained through the strain of continuously using his quirk, “This is my gift to you! When people come to take me out, sneak up on them and pass.”

“What are you saying?!” Iida cried out with more emotion that Yuuga expected of him, leaning in close as though he was trying to figure out what was wrong with Yuuga.

Yuuga whispered his confession much quieter than he usually allowed himself to be, “This might sound strange. But I always wanted… to be equal.”

“I wonder, will I truly be able to shine when the stars around me are so blindingly bright? But even so— I still reach for that image anyway”

Yuuga always wanted to be as marvelous as everyone else around him seemed to be. He wants to have the kind of shining, brilliant radiance that people like Midoriya seem to carry naturally. That was why when Midoriya suggested a different hero name for Yuuga, he accepted it without hesitation.

—But all men are not created equal. That was why Yuuga would have to try so much harder than the rest of his classmates to be a hero, and that was why there was no point in dragging Iida down to his level—

Iida seemed to take in a sharp breath in shock, Yuuga ignored it to continue, “Now get ready, they’re coming.”
“But Aoyama-kun!” Iida still tried to argue. However, it was too late. A swarm of enemies were upon them, and with only Iida and Yuuga there was no way–

Before the wildly colored figures could get too close, a swarm of birds was upon them instead. They cluttered the space and sky with dull brown and gray, only leaving scattered areas visible.

“Pigeons?!” someone from the crowd exclaimed. Others exclaimed in surprise at they pushed aside or pecked at by the brash birds.

Iida’s posture straightened up at the same moment that shock filled Yuuga’s system. “This is Kouda-kun!”

Iida was proven correct of course, when Kouda’s high-pitched voice called out from beside the swarm, “Birds, continue to circle that spot!”

And from within the flock, the shadowy limbs of another bird appeared. Powerful claws effortlessly swat away handfuls of opponents at a time. “Black Abyss: Covert Black-Ops Arms!”

Kouda-kun… Tokoyami-kun…

A deep, unfamiliar voice called, “What are we going to do?!”

“Does it look like I know–”

A masked male examinee cut himself off as the tension left his body. The black-coated Shinsou slinked up beside him to say, “Simon Says: Why don’t you just sit down and stay still for us?” The examinee moved to comply.

Beside him, Ojiro chose a more forceful method to down his opponents, whacking three of them in the head with his thick tail in a spinning attack. “Hit every target you can before anyone else gets them!”

Shinsou-kun… Ojiro-kun…
“Warp Refraction: Say Cheese!”

“My eyes!”

Releasing his quirk and relaxing his position, Yuuga eyed the sight of Sato pushing another examinee into the ground with a piece of rubble. “Why…”

“When we all broke apart, we started freaking out and couldn’t tell friend from enemy! It was a real mess!” After finishing splashing acid everywhere, Ashido turned towards him to give a bright thumbs up and smile. “But when we spotted your naval laser, we were able to meet up again!”

From within his classmates’ fighting, the blurry figure of Midoriya’s Champion sped around, long pink hair flowing behind it. It knocked examinees out with the hilt of its sword so that the remaining members of 1-A could use them to pass. It must have stayed on the field even after Midoriya, who had surely passed by now, left.

A squawk from beside him caught Yuuga’s attention. He looked down to see the glasses-wearing penguin Midoriya had brought out slick out his flipper towards Yuuga, as though to give him a thumbs up. Yuuga gave the penguin a small smile, then leaned down to pat his head. “Je vous remercie, monsieur pingouin.”

After standing talk once more, Yuuga went in to join the fray. One after the other, the remaining members of 1-A took out target after target. Until the last spot was taken by Yuuga himself…

“It’s over! One hundred examinees have successfully passed!”

“Aoyama-kun… I don’t really understand why you don’t see yourself as being our equal.” Yuuga turned back to Iida, who started speaking once more after the fight was officially called. “After all, from what I’ve heard you were part of Midoriya’s rescue effort, weren’t you?”

Yuuga felt his body still in surprise. Shinsou lowered his mask to raise an eyebrow at Yuuga and confirm, “That’s right, I saw it myself. You saved Izuku, you know!”
“I– I didn’t really, monsieur Todoroki was the one– ”

“Todoroki was the one that grabbed him, yeah, but he would’ve ended up with nothing just like me if you hadn’t used your laser on that villain,” Shinsou insisted as though it was an order he was enforcing with his quirk. The somber look he gave Yuuga seemed to solidly look through him, similar to the way Midoriya’s did so often.

“That’s right! What’s all this nonsense about not being equal to us? You’ve already rescued someone in need of help! If anything, most of us have some catching up to do with you!” Iida rallied behind Shinsou’s support. He powered walked at a brisk speed, arms pumping up and down in a robot-like manner, to stand in front of Yuuga.

Iida removed his helmet to give Yuuga a confident smile and hold out his hand towards him. “You’re really living up to your name, Shining Knight!”

“You should follow your own advice and shine in your own way! We can become our own grand, shining heroes together!”

Aoyama stared at his hand in shock for a moment. Then, he returned his smile and grasped his hand for a handshake.

He tried to force down the swell of awe that he felt. If he let it loose, he might start crying.

This moment was very Déjà vu, but… he was quite glad to experience it a second time.

And for the first time, even though he still wasn’t “normal” or the same as everyone else, Yuuga truly felt like he was at the same starting line as them.
After entering the waiting area, Shouto looked down at the small penguin walking beside him. “Sorry you had to follow me around for no reason. I ended up not needing help just like I thought…”

Izu-tingu shook his head at Shouto while waving his wing at him. Shouto knew that he was probably thinking about how much more secure Izuku felt about Shouto splitting off from the rest of the group knowing that Izu-tingu would be right there just in case. It wasn’t a waste considering that.

*But still… despite Izuku staying with everyone else, Shouto still had a bad feeling about leaving him. It was like his boyfriend was fated to always run into trouble even when there shouldn’t be any.*

A loud and booming voice distracted Shouto from his worries. He glanced up just in time to see Yoarashi Inasa happen to look over in his direction. The other boy cut himself off in surprise, before slipping into a heavy glare.

When Yoarashi looked away from Shouto to continue his conversation, he could only blink in confusion and wonder what his problem was.

A low growl caught Shouto’s attention. He looked down in disbelief at Izu-tingu, whose feathers were bristled in anger. If looks could kill, Yoarashi would be dead on the floor right now via being murdered by a penguin.

“Izu-tingu… I swear that penguins are physically incapable of growling. How are you growling?”

Izu-tingu just continued to growl at the unknowing Yoarashi, paying no mind to how he was violating the laws of nature.

*Why does this give Shouto a bad feeling?*

In his mind, the image of Izu-tingu growling was replaced with one of Izuku growling.

*Oh– that’s right… Hopefully Yoarashi won’t do anything when Izuku was around, or the other boy will have a lot more to be worried about than any grudge he has against Shouto…*
He was soon joined by other members of his class arriving in groups. Shouji, Asui, and Jirou passed under the leadership of Yaoyorozu, which Shouto had expected given her skill in strategy that he witnessed during their final exam together. Having a readymade set of equipment like Izuku now possessed just made her a more formidable opponent.

Then Izuku arrived with Sero and Uraraka – or Ochako, as she wished to be referred to now. Shouto had been pleased that she wanted include him in her efforts to reaffirm her friendships with everyone as she did with Izuku – at roughly the same time that Bakugou arrived with Kirishima and Kaminari. Shouto was less wary of Bakugou interacting with Izuku now that Bakugou had proven himself to be serious about trying to do right by him, but Shouto still had an eye on them just in case. Bakugou had only given a solid nod in response to Izuku's joyful congratulations, but from a person like Bakugou the gesture meant a lot. As Izuku was aware of that, he was suitably pleased.

When it got down to the final ten slots, everyone was concerned that the rest of 1-A wouldn’t be able to pass, but almost miraculously they all came together under the guidance of Aoyama’s beacon to take all of the remaining spots. Izuku muttered a comment about how fate really loved its dramatic last minute wins, but was glad that his friends could benefit from it. Izuku was especially pleased that Shinsou had passed, since they both knew that Shinsou had been stressed by the fact that he was behind in his hero education compared to the rest of 1-A and that he would get left behind in the exam because of it.

Shouto tried to ignore Yoarashi’s loud voice in the background of everyone’s joy, but caught some segments of his conversation with the very hairy Shiketsu second year.

“Shishikura-senpai really failed?!”

“That drama queen dashed out alone and tried to do it solo! The rest of you too! I expected it from you as a first year, Yoarashi, but ever since Camie parted from us I haven’t even seen her! I’ll have to ask sensei if he knows where she is...”

Izuku seemed to be listening in as well, because he tensed up suspiciously at that. When Shouto side-eyed him with narrowed eyes, his boyfriend glanced away with a nervous laugh.

“What happened?” was all Shouto asked, in a tone that was more like a demand than a question.

“Uh– nothing that we should talk about with other people around? But I wasn’t hurt! Don’t worry!”
Shinsou, who had been standing close to them, rolled his eyes and shook his head at Izuku. He groaned, “There’s always something going on with you, Izuku. Never a dull moment when you’re around.”

“That’s a very accurate statement,” Shouto agreed. He unconsciously moved to stand closer to Izuku, as though he could protect him from a threat that had obviously already passed. When Izuku took his hand, Shouto let him take it with ease.

“Now, will all of you please watch the screen?” the intercom sounded with the Hero Commission member’s voice. Shouto wasn’t sure how he felt about the Commission’s involvement in this. As they were a major part of the government running’s concerning heroics, he should’ve anticipated that he would personally run into them eventually, but it had caught him off-guard.

It was hard to accept that the organization which had aided his father in hiding the abuse of his family was an established, legal organization that was involved with making real decisions concerning how heroes did things. He hadn’t thought a lot on it when Fuyumi had explained their part in that to him, but now that he was confronted with it in his journey to become a hero, he wondered if he would actually be okay with working under them in the future.

–They were probably part of the reason why Touya decided to become a villain, too. The villain’s “revolution” must sound good when you’ve seen firsthand how change is needed–

“Most heroes don’t work directly for the Commission unless there are special circumstances at play, but they can police how heroes work in the field to some extent. Or choose not to police them when they should, as with Endeavor,” Izuku had explained to him when Shouto asked about his thoughts, around the time that Fuyumi had officially taken custody of him. Izuku had glared at the mention of the group. “But it’s important to be aware that they, as a flawed organization, are one of those who lead our society, especially when it comes to heroes. Even though they are the law, they are not always lawful, and you shouldn’t take them at face value. They aren’t afraid of taking advantage of people.”

Shouto understood this. So far, their proctor Mera hadn’t done anything suspicious or offensive. But he knew that Izuku was still wary of the man, Shouto was as well.

Suddenly, though, Shouto was ripped from his distracting train of thought by the sound and sight of the field they had just been on literally exploding into a city of fiery ruin. He jumped slightly at the very alarming wakeup call.
After the dust settled, a scattering mob of people who looked like civilians, both young and old, walked towards the wreckage.

“Round two’s the last one! You examinees will venture into the ruins as bystanders, and prove your worth when it comes to rescuing innocent victims. You will not act as ordinary civilians, but as those who have hypothetically earned their provisional hero licenses. You’re being tested on how well you respond in rescue situations.”

He went on to explain the “professional rescuees” on scene as being from the Help Us Company, or HUC, and that they would be pretending to be injured civilians caught up in a disaster situation. He also said that they would be scored based on how well they did.

Izuku frowned and somberly stated, “They’re basing the test off of what happened at Kamino Ward…”

“That makes sense,” Yaoyorozu commented. She cupped her chin in thought while glancing from her spot a little ways away to where Izuku was standing with his friends. “What happened there is still fresh in the minds and worries of the public, and was a disaster of unprecedented consequences. Not necessarily in the loss of human life, though that was extensive, but in the loss of All Might as a hero. It would be foolish of them to not make sure that those attempting to gain licenses are aware of the current climate heroes are working with.”

“We were only focused on getting Bakugou away from the villains and keeping out of the pros ways… We couldn’t actually help with this part of what was going on even though so many people died.” Ochako was looking at the screen with intense focus and partially clenched fists.

It reminded Shouto that her entire goal was to be a rescue-based hero. She was surely thinking of this as her first real test for that.

As people were using the ten minute break to prepare themselves for the next test, other examinees reached out to interact with UA. And it was no surprise to Shouto when the exact scenario he thought of previously concerning Yoarashi ended up happening.

The hair quirk Shiketsu student walked up to where Bakugou was by Kirishima with the rest of his schoolmates to inquire, “Excuse me Bakugou-kun. Did Shishikura, the shifty-eyed guy, go after you?”
“Yeah, I crushed him,” Kacchan replied bluntly, glaring at the other examinees with eyes narrowed in suspicion. And after a moment of thinking, he tacked on, “With sparky and shitty hair’s help.”

Kirishima immediately perked up with pride. The intensity of his grin was only matched by the stare of his adorable puppy eyes at Bakugou’s figure. Kaminari grasped his chest and gave a startled gasp, before whispering, “He gave us credit!”

The Shiketsu student seemed to ignore what he would most likely see as strange reactions to continue. He introduced himself as Mora Nagamasa, explaining that the aforementioned Shishikura often tries to force his views on others and apologizing for it. He also explained that Shiketsu wanted to maintain a good relationship with UA. Shouto thought it was rather convenient that they only brought this up after it was confirmed the schools wouldn’t be working against each other for the second half of the exam, but there was nothing to be done about that. The very nature of this exam and the hero industry in general encouraged competition over cooperation, so both the Shiketsu and UA examinees had reacted accordingly.

–That was the reason why a person like his father could go so far as a hero that he reached the Number One rank. The thought of that, and the situation with the Hero Commission, made Shouto wonder if they could change this set up once he became a pro hero. Without turning to villainy like Touya had, of course–

Mora’s words also increased Shouto’s confusion about the unfriendly look Yoarashi had given him early, though. And so as Yoarashi walked away along with the rest of Shiketsu, Shouto turned towards him to question, “Yoarashi, right? Did I do something to offend you?”

Yoarashi stopped in his tracks. Then, turned towards Shouto to glare down at him with a judging expression from over the fur of his hero costume’s collar. He turned around to fully face Shouto with straight, confrontational posture. Scoffing slightly, Yoarashi simply stated, “Well, I’m sorry, son of Endeavor–”

A twinge of anger sparked in Shouto at the address, he tried to ignore it but failed.

“–but I hate you guys. You’ve changed a bit since then, but your eyes are the same as Endeavor’s.”

It felt like the words impaled his chest, but the only outward sign of it that he showed was the slight widening of his eyes and a sharp intake of breath that he couldn’t suppress.
He already knows this – he already knows that he shares some physical features and part of his quirk with that man, he knows that he had been cold and ignoring of others like that man had in the pursuit of his spite, he knows –

“His left side… sometimes I look at him and think it’s unsightly”

“Something wrong, Yoarashi?” Shouto could vaguely hear Mora call out.

“Nothing – ”

“Yes, there is.”

Both Shouto and Yoarashi jolted in place at the sound of Izuku’s voice. Shouto blinked himself out of his shock to see that Izuku had at some point placed himself in between him and Yoarashi. Shouto could only see Izuku’s back, but from the way Yoarashi scuttled back with wide eyes, he was most likely showing off his I-look-like-I’m-calm-but-my-eyes-show-I’m-about-to-kill-you-with-words face.

Mora also seemed to blink in surprise at Izuku’s interjection, but it was hard to tell with all the fur covering his face. He walked back over to ask, “Um… You’re Midoriya-kun, right? What seems to be the problem?”

“The problem is that your first year thinks that your resolve to get along with UA is all just a big joke,” Izuku replied in a solid inflectionless tone. He wasn’t even looking at Mora, the sole focus of his piercing gaze was the one he was talking about.

Yoarashi’s nervousness immediately turned into offense as he glared with less intensity at Izuku. “Listen, I was just being honest! He asked and I gave him an answer. You don’t need to be involved with this – I don’t have a problem with UA, just that guy alone! ”

“You were putting down one of my friends who I also happen to be in love with; I’m involved.” Izuku ignored the jaw drop Yoarashi gave to that statement to go on the tirade Shouto figured was coming, “Who the hell do you think you are? You have no idea just how bad what you just said was, because you have no idea what you’re even taking about. You hate Endeavor – fine. Who doesn’t, really? You hate Shouto because of who his father is – What the fuck?!! As if Shouto chose to have Endeavor as his dad! You might as well just hate him for having hair that’s two colors instead of one, that would have just as much logic behind it as hating him for who he was born to.”
Visually bristling, Yoarashi crossed his arms and defended himself with, “It’s not just that! I gave him a chance, but he proved that he had the exact same cold attitude that Endeavor does! He wouldn’t look at me during the entrance test for recommended students, and he clearly had no intention of getting along with his future classmates! Heroes should be passionate and warm, I won’t acknowledge someone like him!”

“You don’t know the first thing about him! And you turned down the chance to go to UA, the top hero school in the country, just because you didn’t like one guy’s personality?”

Izuku roughly tapped his index finger against Yoarashi’s chest. Even though the other boy towered over him in height, from the way Izuku pushed him back just by moving forward it was like he was looming over Yoarashi instead. “That just proves that you really do think this a joke. Do you know how many people would die to go to UA? And you threw away that chance because you let one person stand in your way –What kind of flimsy, half-assed hero are you trying to become?! I’ve met villains who have more conviction in a single finger than you have in your entire body!”

“Excuse me?!”

“Alright, Alright! That’s enough of that!” Mora’s steady voice interrupted the brewing argument. He pulled Yoarashi back by the collar of his costume, then forcefully push the boy into half-hearted bow to match his own more polite bow. “We’re very sorry for the offense that Yoarashi has caused Todoroki.”

“But he was the one who –Ugh!” Yoarashi let out a startled sound as Mora’s hair wrapped around his middle in a tight hold.

Mora repeated slowly in warning, “I said, we are very sorry about the offense you caused.”

Yoarashi grit his teeth while staring at his upperclassman. After a moment of tense silence, Yoarashi averted his eyes and lied, “Sorry.”

Rather than absolving him, Izuku responded, “Don’t let it happen again.”

“It won’t.” Mora nodded to Izuku, before pulling him and Yoarashi out of their bows to head as far away from the UA group as possible. Izuku watched them leave with the intensity of a hawk.
“I can see why they put that guy in charge, he’s good at compromise. That will get him far.” Izuku nodded to himself before turning back around to look up at Shouto with his brows furrowed in worry. He clutched Shouto’s hands with both of his own.

“Are you alright, Shouto-kun? Don’t pay any mind to what the idiot said– he has no idea who you are as a person. You’re nothing like that man, you’re much too gentle and kind to be!”

The residual anxiety that emerged with Yoarashi’s claim was calmed by the warmth of Izuku’s hands and voice. Shouto returned Izuku’s hold to clutch his hands tighter, and gave him a slight nod. “Thank you, Izuku. I know that, but sometimes I forget…”

Izuku graced him with a small, saddened smile. “It’s only natural for that kind of thing to happen. That’s why I’ll always make sure to come be by your side, so that I can remind you that!”

Shouto was actually able to form his own small smile at that thought. What on Earth did he do right for someone like Izuku to love him?

—Especially considering that, for as much as he wasn’t like his father, there was also still some truth to what Yoarashi said—

Himiko had known right from the moment that she laid eyes on Shinsou Hitoshi what kind of child he was– He was unwanted, unloved. Just like her.

Or at least, that’s how it used to be for him, it seems. He had such a strong reaction to Midoriya Izuku being taken from him that Izuku-kun must be very precious to him. She wondered if that relationship –whether it was platonic or romantic or anything in between– was one-sided, or if Izuku felt the same way.

Because if Izuku loved Hitoshi… If Hitoshi had managed to get someone to love him despite having a quirk that would most certainly be hated by others, then Himiko wanted to know how he did it.
How he had managed to become chosen.

Because she had tried, oh– how hard she had tried to change herself to be someone that another person could love. She had been devoted to it her whole life before she had set herself free.

Because Toga Himiko was a child that had been born abnormal, a child that had been born during a moment of death and misfortune. And so she had been born a forgotten and unwanted child.

Himiko was the only child of her parents, but it wasn’t supposed to be that way. No– they had had another daughter before her, one that they had loved from the bottom of their hearts. Toga Ringo had been a wonderful, loving child. All the way up until the day she happened to die in a tragic train accident.

To lose their child at only ten years old, it was no wonder her parents fell into despair because of it. Any parent who loved their child would.

But that’s why it was such a cruel coincidence, such a cruel twist of fate, for Himiko to have been born on the same day that her sister had died. Perhaps her parents would have loved her properly as well if that hadn’t been the case.

“Are you saying it’s my fault?!”

“No, I’m just saying I need a new beginning!”

“A new beginning?!”

“Yes! Himiko is starting to understand things, isn’t it sad that her birthday will always be a day of mourning?”

“So what?! It’s our duty as parents to remember Ringo forever!”

“We’ll pour our love for Ringo into Himiko –Isn’t that what we agreed on four years ago?!”
She had happened to overhear her parent’s argument, and it made her realize that both of them were being held back from loving her completely. Her mother couldn’t move on from her daughter’s death, her father wanted to move on from his broken family entirely so that he could have a new, unburdened life.

It made her think, *If I can become my sister… Mommy and Daddy won’t fight anymore, right? We won’t split apart, right?*

Himiko had known that her sister had been born with a quirk that would’ve been perfect for this situation. It had allowed her to transform into any person that she loved. And Himiko’s quirk had yet to reveal itself yet. So that night, she had wished to any God or gods that exist in this universe that she would one day wake up and find that she had been blessed with Ringo’s quirk, so that she could become a daughter that her parents loved.

Of course, like everything in Himiko’s life, her miracle had turned *twisted*. They soon found out that while her quirk did let her transform into people, it required her ingesting the person’s blood to do so. What should’ve been a normal transformation quirk was twisted into a *creepy, abnormal* quirk. One that couldn’t even be used to let her turn into her sister.

But even so, Himiko didn’t give up. Even if she couldn’t literally become her sister, she had tried her hardest to become her in every other way.

She liked the things and food Ringo had liked. She liked the type of boys that Ringo had liked. She wore her hair down just like Ringo had worn hers. Her father was a lost cause—her quirk had been *the final straw that convinced him he would be better off divorcing her mother and making a new family for himself*—but her mother’s reaction had encouraged her. With every similarity to Ringo that Himiko forced herself to have, her mother seemed to love her just a bit more. She loved that she could remember Ringo through Himiko, that Himiko could almost become her replacement for Ringo.

But it wasn’t meant to be. Because Ringo had been a normal girl and Himiko, by society’s standard’s, wasn’t “normal”.

There are still many things unknown about how quirks work, but one thing that occurs occasionally is that the nature of an individual’s quirk seems to have an effect on their personality.
Himiko’s quirk was one that was based off of blood, maybe because of that she was fascinated by it. She loved looking at it, the way that its beautiful deep red contrasted so nicely with pale skin. Loved watching it drip slowly off of a person’s or animal’s body, as though they were losing a bit of their life with each tiny drop that leaked out. Maybe it was because Himiko was born on a day of death that she had a fascination with the concept of death as well.

This was no good for Himiko; Ringo was normal, so to become her, Himiko had to be normal as well. And so she had lived years of her life pretending to be normal. Pretending to be a person that no longer existed in this world.

But it was too hard. She couldn’t handle it; she couldn’t force herself to look away from bloody injuries on her classmates, or from petting the carcasses of roadkill left to decompose on the side of the road. The bloodier they were, the cuter they looked. The tastier the blood looked.

One day during her middle school years, her mother caught her sucking the blood out of a tiny, dead bird. And with that, the illusion was broken. What she had said years ago was still true– Himiko isn’t Ringo. Both of them pretending otherwise didn’t make it true. After scolding her and signing her up for quirk counseling, her mother avoided her as much as possible from that moment on.

That’s when Himiko was forced to admit to herself that she could never be happy this way, that she could never be like Ringo or even any of her classmates. That she would never be chosen by her parents, because they would always choose the memory of their beloved “normal” daughter over her.

And it had hurt just to accept that, to accept that the way she was born made her inherently unlovable. That no one would choose her. But it was something she had to accept, or she would never be happy at all.

So when the opportunity came to be true and free, to be herself and indulge in the blood of a boy she liked, she allowed herself that freedom. Then she promptly fled her “normal” middle school life. It was only afterwards, when she tried out transforming into that boy that she had a realization.

Her miracle had been granted. She had been given a quirk that allowed her to transform into the people she loved, just like her sister’s. But it was only when she allowed herself the freedom to do so that this was the case. It was only when she indulged in the blood of the people she loved that she could become them.

It was only when she accepted her “normal” over society’s “normal” that this was the case. Because for society, it was monstrous to want to drink the blood of a person you loved, but for her,
that was normal.


–Perhaps it was because of her wish that she felt the need to drink their blood in the first place–

From that point on, she was conflicted. She wanted to be herself and jump headfirst into her normal, and paint the streets with beautiful pictures of gore and pain, but her wish to be loved and wanted was still there. And at the same time, she also found herself wanting to become more like the people she loved, maybe even literally become them. She liked the feeling of wearing her crush’s face. It made her feel like she was a more lovable person.

–Was this because of her quirk affecting her mind again, or was it because she had been trying to be loved by being someone that she would have loved for the entirety of her life? She’ll probably never know the answer to that–

But in the end, there was no need to keep things complicated. The whys and hows behind what she wanted didn’t matter, the only thing that mattered was that she wanted them. So she decided from that point on she would simply do what she wanted however she could, even if those wants were sometimes conflicting and confusing.

She would both be herself and be like the people she loved.

The only problem had been that those “people she loved” had suddenly decreased to zero. She had left her parents and classmates behind her to start a new life, and she had moved on from any love she had for them as well. She had to settle for picking out strangers that captured her interest, both men and women, and most of the time she would end up killing them and impersonating them for a short time. Sometimes they were very loved, and she would allow herself the indulgence of pretending that she was the one being loved instead of them. Sometimes, they were as alone as she had been, and she would move on from that life quickly. Only leaving the promise that she would carry the burden of their memory, since they had no one else to remember them in this world.

She had honed her skills for quite some time this way, until that fateful day when she had first seen the video of her new crush– the Hero Killer Stain. One thing led to another, and she joined the League of Villains so that she could both be like Stain and live freely. This led to her getting even more crushes, like the cute heroics student Ochako, and finally, Shinsou Hitoshi.

Himiko wanted to know more about Hitoshi not only because she liked him, but also because she wanted to know how he had succeeded where she failed. Was there something she was missing? Was there a way to both be her normal and to be chosen? He also had a quirk that was rejected by society, and yet he seemed to have people that cared for him. Perhaps his story would give her the
answer to those questions.

The main issue was that Hitoshi had a quirk which made talking to him difficult. Even when infiltrating the provisional license exam like she had been just previously, there was too much risk from the possibility of him realizing she wasn’t supposed to be here and brainwashing her halfway through any conversation she might attempt with him. She didn’t get by on the streets by making poor decisions like that, so when she happened across an injured Hitoshi after the Ketsubutsu student had split up UA, she just silently collected some of his blood off the rock that had cut through his arm and left.

But not all was lost, because there was still another person involved in Hitoshi’s story that might be able to give her answers; **Midoriya Izuku**. She knew that Tomura-kun had his sights set on the boy, as well as a pink diary which he claimed was in Izuku’s possession that he said he’d explain after he attained it. So she thought that she might as well kill two birds with one stone and start a talk with Izuku, while also seeing if he had this diary on him and if she could manage to steal it.

Unfortunately, she wasn’t able to do either of those things. She had successfully gotten Izuku’s attention as Uraraka Ochako, but once she was in his robot’s arms she started falling asleep. It was only due to her keen instincts and sense of danger that she was able to force herself awake once she realized what was occurring and release herself from its grip. Falling asleep in this situation would mean getting caught for sure, and **Himiko never let herself get caught**.

There was a reason why, out of all newly joined members of the League that were still around, she was the only one besides Magne to have killed people before joining and gotten away with it. By her very nature she was violent, but she was also allusive and cunning– she had to be in order to impersonate people and pretend to be “normal”.

Even after this unexpected set back, she fell back on the ruse of being the Shiketsu student Utsushimi Camie, Izuku had no reason to think she wasn’t Camie. And yet… somehow, **he knew**.

She could tell so immediately. It was like he had looked into her soul with judging eyes and was able to see that she wasn’t “normal”, that she was the type of person that was incapable of being a hero-in-training. And if she wasn’t a hero-in-training, he knew that that meant she wasn’t supposed to be there.

The arrival of his friends distracted Izuku enough that Himiko could decrease her presence and slink away. But she couldn’t continue her self-appointed mission, Izuku would be sure to report his suspicions. She stealthily exited the building in the middle of the test and dropped her disguise.
Well, at the very least I got one heroics student’s blood—and good for Hitoshi-kun to be promoted like that! She thought to herself as she answered her cellphone.

Compress’s voice sounded through the receiver, “You finally picked up! Where are you and what are you doing, Toga?!”

Himiko felt a smile crawl onto her face—*it the same smile that her parents had once called creepy, but it was her smile.* “I just finished a fun playdate!”

Chapter End Notes

References from this chapter:
Part of the Ketsubutsu student’s conversation, the UA students conversation with Aoyama, and Todoroki’s and Yoarashi’s dialogue are from bnha.

Himiko’s parents’ dialogue and “If I can become my sister… Mommy and Daddy won’t fight anymore, right? We won’t split apart, right?” are from Mawaru Penguindrum. The specific details behind the context are spoilers:
(Himiko’s backstory is based off of Oginome Ringo’s, who is a major character of the show. Oginome Ringo was actually Momoka's little sister, who was born the same day that Momoka died. A lot of the show’s plot revolves around her attempting to “become her sister” by fulfilling what she believed to be her sister’s destiny. I felt that Ringo’s distorted view on her thinking that she needed to become someone else and that doing this was a way for her to earn back her parents love (though they weren’t as bad about it as Himiko's parents, it was more like she got that impression when she was younger and it turned into an obsession) matched Himiko’s character a lot, so I decided even before the chapters on Himiko’s backstory to incorporate that into this Himiko’s character. Ironically, Ringo was also a creepy, obsessive stalker of the person she "loved", so that was also a match though she never tried to suck his blood or anything...
Someday My Prince Will Come

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After the confusion with that first HUC worker –where Izuku got points deducted for being too over the top with his comforting, of all things. The HUC worker pretending to be a kid had to be convinced that Izuku wasn’t outright acting and that that was just how he was, but apparently he still thought Izuku needed to be more moderate about things– Hitoshi thought that 1-A sorted themselves out fairly well. Everyone split up into smaller groups to work on rescue efforts in areas suited to them, while Izuku flew off to the first aid and evacuation center that Ketsubutsu and some other examinees set up. Those from Izuku’s Crystal World also split up between the groups, with Todoroki receiving Izu-pingu again.

Hitoshi had traveled with Izuku to the first aid station to drop off the HUC worker quickly, using one of the Teddydrums to fly there in hardly any time. They then left to go back to the ruins of the city to see if more people needed to be transported over.

It was sometime during these trips, when they had yet to head back to the evacuation center, that explosions started occurring all over the place. Yaoyorozu happened to be nearby, and observed the situation at the evacuation center using a pair of newly made binoculars.

“It appears that a group of villains is attacking the center, and Gang Orca is leading them!”

“Gang Orca! They got the Number Ten hero for this?!” Someone from another school cried in dismay. In comparison, Izuku wasn’t fazed. But Hitoshi supposed that this situation would pale in comparison to having to fight against the Number One hero for a final exam.

However, Izuku did stare heavily into the distance in concern, muttering, “Gang Orca… oh dear. I wonder…”

“What’s wrong now?” Hitoshi questioned, trying to hide his worried tone. If Izuku was concerned about something, that could mean nothing good.

“Oh, it’s not that big a deal really, just– ” Izuku paused in an attempt to organize his thoughts into words, tapping on his chin lightly, “I don’t think the penguins have ever had to deal with a predator before…”
“…What?”

“Cause, you know, killer whales eat penguins.”

While Hitoshi tried to process what Izuku was implying, Izuku had already moved on. “Well, that doesn’t matter. I’ll just make sure to give Izu-pingu a big pep-talk. Right now we have to make a plan and gather all my fighters.”

Izuku hopped back onto Teddydrum Black. Then, held his hand out to Hitoshi. “Want to come help?”

Hitoshi smirked slightly, and grabbed Izuku’s hand to let himself be pulled up. “As if I’d let you go after villains on your own– even if they’re fake.”

Katsuki was trying, he really was.

He was accepting of his classmates offers of help –mainly from shitty hair and sparky, who both decided to follow him around for the hell of it apparently. He did his best to not murder that damned annoying Shiketsu student who thought he was the scum of the Earth for no fucking reason. He actually participated in helping to rescue civilians for the chaotic second portion of the exam, even though that wasn’t really his thing and there was really no place for an explosion quirk in rescue and relief work.

But even when he was doing these things, he was still Bakugou Katsuki. So he wasn’t nice about it.

“We hurt our arms, save us! It hurts so bad!”

“If only your arms hurt then that means you can still fucking walk! I’m not carrying you when I
don’t need to!” Katsuki jabbed his thumb behind him to point towards where the nearest first aid station in the mountain zone was. “We’ll take you to get looked over, get moving!”

Kaminari looked at him with a raised eyebrow. “Dude. You really shouldn’t shit talk the rescuees!”

“I mean, for Bakugou he’s actually being pretty okay I think. He’s not actually cursing at them, he’s just cursing in general,” Kirishima commented with a shrug. Thank you, Kirishima. At least someone besides Deku understands how Katsuki functions!

The HUC actors had a conversation between themselves. “Well… In this situation, we’re supposed to be low priority rescues with light injuries…”

“Was he able to tell in just an instant? At the very least, carrying someone when it isn’t required is really a waste of energy that could be better spent on other rescue victims!”

Fuck yeah it is. And also Katsuki was not carrying anyone unless their fucking legs were broken or something! He doesn’t do that kind of shit because there’s no point in meaningless acts are only done to comfort people. In his opinion, the best way to show a person that everything will be alright is to just prove that it is by getting rid of the danger and winning.

–But in a situation where there’s no one to win against, does that really work?–

“Heroes and villains are two sides of the same coin. I’ll show those glaring eyes of yours what makes someone a hero”

This whole scenario made Katsuki think back to the time he spent under Best Jeanist. He couldn’t be a prim and proper hero like Best Jeanist had wanted to change him into initially, but he thought he could still better himself by controlling his anger.

And that’s what he was doing! He was cooperating with others, keeping the victims’ interest in mind and making sure they were safe. Hell, he hadn’t even cursed at them like shitty hair had mentioned, other than that one brat because fucking really? He lost points for just calling him a brat? That guy needs to grow a spine–

“But using that tone is no good. Minus points!”
“For fuck’s sake!”

That’s around when explosions went off everywhere around the arena, including the area that they were in. The need to swiftly find and rescue everyone increased as it was revealed that villains were launching another wide-scale attack. Said villains, though, were nowhere near the region that Katsuki had wandered off to once everyone had split up, so he couldn’t even benefit from the situation by fucking off to go actually fight someone.

“Hurry up, dammit! We can only get you to safety if you haul your asses!”

“Uh– really, young man, you’re doing the right things but your execution is all wrong! We already told you not to talk like that, too. Keep in mind what kind of mindset actual disaster victims would be in!”

He was doing his best, so why did Katsuki have the sinking feeling that his best wasn’t going to be enough?

They were just getting the hang of things, so it was only fitting that the test makers introduced a new variable to make their lives more difficult in the form of a “villain attack” on the evacuation center. The place that Izuku had dropped off the kid and by now had probably flown far away from– but it was still a place he had been, further supporting a pattern all of 1-A and their teachers could see. Frankly, Shouto has made other theories based on less evidence.

Izuku must be some sort of villain magnet! Shouto thought as he, Tokoyami, Ojiro, and Ashido made their way over to where the “villains” had burst in. Izu-lingu was piggybacking him so that the small penguin didn’t have to try to keep up. Even when the villains are fake, he attracts them like moths to a flame. That can’t be normal!

They arrived just in time to see Shindo Yo get paralyzed by Gang Orca. His gang consisted of somewhere between thirty to fifty uniformed members. It seemed in tune with the rest of the
outrageous exam conditions that they would actually force the examinees to fight one of the top heroes while continuing to perform rescue and relief simultaneously.

As the others moved to aid the evacuation of the rescuees, Shouto made a tidal wave of ice to freeze the villains to the ground. Gang Orca was able to use his ultrasonic waves to break apart the ice, but the rest of his subordinates were stuck from their shins down.

That is, until a gale of wind swooped down and broke that ice as well. Orca's gang was blown back, but in Shouto's opinion it was a step down from them being immobilized.

“A villain attack? You guys prepared some pretty hot developments!”

Not this guy again...

Yoarashi caught sight of Shouto right then, and his expression went from boisterous excitement to soured anger. “To have shown up at the same time as you of all people…”

“That’s my line,” Shouto huffed. If only Izuku had had a bit longer to talk some sense into Yoarashi—as it is currently, Yoarashi won’t work with Shouto, and Shouto can’t work with a person who both doesn’t want to work with him and actively hates him.

—But even more than that, Shouto can’t work with a person that thinks he’s the same as his father—

“Why don’t you help evacuate the area, your quirk is suited to that, isn’t it? I’ll take care of these…guys…”

It was only then that Shouto registering the trembling he felt moving though his body.

Looking over his shoulder in confusion, Shouto was able to see that it was Izu-pingu shaking in fear. The penguin stared with wide, beady eyes at Gang Orca’s hulking figure.

A random fact popped into Shouto’s head that seemed to explain the situation. “…Izu-pingu, are you afraid of Gang Orca because he’s like an Orca?”
A squawk of terror confirmed Shouto’s suspicion, and Izu-pingu buried his face into Shouto’s back to look away from his potential predatory and cry into Shouto’s hero costume. The feeling of Izu-pingu’s tears—*such an easy crier, just like his human*—dampened the frustration Shouto felt from Yoarashi’s arrival with concern.

*What are the chances that the test would use one of the only heroes who resembled a natural predator of penguins?*

Shouto’s resolve to deal with this as efficiently as possible increased. He sent out a burst of flames towards the villains. “Don’t worry Izu-pingu, Gang Orca’s a human being. And I’ll keep you safe—!”

A burst of wind diverted the path of his fire towards nothing. He could hear one of Orca’s gang question incredulously, “Where are those guys even aiming at?”

“Why did you use fire?! The heat made my wind rise!”

Yoarashi glared down from the sky at Shouto, and Shouto felt himself glare back as his frustration came back full force.

“Because he was able to block my ice before! Didn’t you do that on purpose? Your wind blew my flames away!”

“You’re the one that did it on purpose to keep me from getting all the glory!”

“Huh?! Why would I do something like that?!”

“Wouldn’t you?!” Yoarashi glanced over him with a judging look. “After all, you’re *Endeavor’s son*!”

This isn’t right. Shouto is supposed to be over this, *he’s supposed to be over Endeavor*. He’s using his fire. The man can’t control him any longer, Shouto’s on his own path now. They don’t even live in the same house anymore. *He never has to see that man again*—Fuyumi assured him. So why? *Why—*
Why does Shouto feel like he’s still frozen in place? Why is it that part of his heart is still ice cold?

“His left side… sometimes I look at him and think it’s unsightly”

Finally, Shouto turned his body toward Yoarashi to scream at him, “My father has nothing to do with this—!”

One side of Shouto’s body was hit hard by a blob of a gray and wet substance. Its heavy weight made him faulter, but it was balanced out by Izu-pingu hopping off his back just in time to avoid getting hit as well. The penguin scurried off somewhere behind him, going somewhere Shouto couldn’t see.

“Cement gun! You won’t be going anywhere once it hardens!”

From his place still standing in front of Shouto, Gang Orca shook his head and huffed “This is outrageous! I can’t believe you two would start arguing here…”

As a volley of cement started shooting his way, Shouto put up a wall of ice to block them. Yoarashi used his wind for evasive maneuvering around the shots aimed at him.

“He’s got everything to do with it!” He’s still continuing the argument? Seriously? This guy is a hothead through and through! “Its like I said before! Heroes are all about fiery passion— so it was such a shock to me that a hero like him had such cold, angry eyes! And when I saw you at the entrance ceremony, I knew immediately who you were because you had those very same eyes!”

Shouto felt fire slowly grow out on his left arm. Yoarashi’s words helped him finally remember clearly when he had first met the boy and how he had brushed him off just like everyone else. Just like how his father did. But this wasn’t new information, it didn’t really change anything.

Ignore him! Concentrate on the test! Just focus on winning without his help–

“You two are the only ones I’ll never accept as heroes! End of story!”
Ignore how much you still hate your father, how much you still can’t get past everything he did and everything he made you—

Again, Shouto sent a burst of fire at Gang Orca, and again Yoarashi’s wind got in the way. It’s just that this time, the wind carried it off towards where Shindo was still kneeling on the ground.

Shouto’s gut dropped to the ground at the sight, and he gasped quietly in shock. But just as he realized what was happening, Shindo was saved.

By the form of a small penguin wearing glasses.

He was the one called Penguin Yagi, who Izuku said was made in the image of Sir Nighteye. Sir Nighteye must be a very strong man, if his tiny penguin was able to haul a person three times his size out of the way so fast, but Shouto would expect nothing less from the man who used to be All Might’s sidekick.

“I was saved… by a penguin?” Shouto could hear Shindo question at the same time Yoarashi let out a confused *Huh?*

*These poor souls, this is only the beginning of the chaos coming.* Because if Izu-plingu had left to regroup, and Yagi was in the area to save Shindo—

Gang Orca sent an ultrasonic wave at Yoarashi, knocking him out of the sky, and held Shouto up to give a direct hit that left him paralyzed as well.

However, Shouto wasn’t worried in the slightest.

Gang Orca seemed to notice his change in demeanor, because the hero narrowed his menacing eyes at Shouto while he dropped to the ground. “What’s with that look… This is a pretty horrible situation you landed yourself in!”

“While Big Fish finishes with those guys, let’s mess up the evacuation—*Argh!*” An earthquake from Shindo halted the gang. Shindo must not have been as immobilized as he was acting.
But as the ground broke apart, it also began to look strange. The surface turned from a rocky brown-gray tone to that of a reflective mirror. It spread quickly underneath the feet of Orca and his gang, as well as where Shouto, Yoarashi, and Shindo were stuck on the ground in their respective places.

It was an obvious enough change to let Gang Orca realize something was up. “What is this…” Head tilted to the side, and he yelled, “Quiet! I hear something!”

After the various villains calmed down and the ground settled, a voice revealed itself.

“…And contrary wise, what is, it wouldn’t be. And what it wouldn’t be, it would. You see?”

Large eyes widening drastically, Gang Orca tilted his head upwards towards the sky directly above him where it would be impossible for him to see if he wasn’t purposefully looking. High in the sky, only a dot of color could be seen, but it was clear who it was. An ultrasonic wave burst from Orca’s forehead. “He’s above!”

The falling form of the Champion of the Rose bride impeded the path of the wave. Its body broke apart into pieces from the force of it, but it successfully prevented it from going further. Gang Orca was forced to dodge as the remainder of its body fell to the Earth.

“That world is my Survival Strategy!”

The mirror beneath them shattered into a million pieces and burst up, but they all just phased through everyone like they were only an illusion. The floor hidden under the mirror was a familiar white tile.

But of course, the biggest change that occurred was the Crystal Palace appearing out of nowhere, somewhere to the side of Shouto. Its glimmering towers reached high into the blue sky, but the area of the giant arena still managed to dwarf it.

“What the hell is this?!”

Comically, the intercom chimed in along with Gang Orca’s men, “Hey guys, I’m sorry, but I think I need that nap more than I thought. Can we find someone on short notice to replace– What? You mean that fairytale castle over there is real? I’m not hallucinating? Whose quirk did that?!”
“The penguin– !”

Shouto brought his view around back towards Orca just in time to see the hero exclaim in surprise at Izu-pingu, tear tracks still fresh on his face, appearing out of nowhere to latch onto his leg. He gave a squawk of forced courage as they disappeared in a blur together.

“That Midoriya kid’s penguin just kidnapped Big Fish!”

“How is that possible?! It’s like a tenth of his size!”

“Don’t worry, Izu-pingu just dropped him off in the Crystal Palace. He’ll probably manage to find his way out soon—so time is of the essence.”

Gracefully descending from the heavens, his red cloak billowing around him as though he were a messenger of God and not a teenager riding on the back of a black teddybear, the Prince of the Crystal gave them all a cutting smile. Then as he got closer to Shouto, gave him a soft one instead. The Champion of the Rose Bride’s reformed body appeared from the doors of the castle, and blurred to Shouto’s side to receive its master.

“Your Prince has come, my dear Cinderella.”

At first, Inasa thought he knew what was going on. He let his anger get the better of him and fucked everything up as a result, becoming exactly the kind of man he hated Endeavor and Todoroki for being. That was how he ended up literally falling from grace to land flat on his face in the dirt. That was why another student had been in danger from his carelessness.

“What kind of flimsy, half-assed hero are you trying to become?!”
When the penguin with glasses appeared to save the Ketsubutsu student Shindo Yo, he was taken back, but not completely lost. Todoroki had been carrying the other penguin around that Inasa had recognized from the Sports Festival, talking to it about something he hadn’t paid attention to since his anger had still been burning hot then. So Inasa had known that penguins were going to be a thing with this exam, since Midoriya Izuku was present. That and teddybear robots. The bar for strangeness had been high.

When the ground turned into mirror, only to break and turn into tile, and a large European-style castle appeared, Inasa realized that actually—*he had no idea what was going on.*

Then Midoriya’s tiny penguin kidnapped the Number Ten hero, and Midoriya appeared in a costume that vaguely resembled his hero costume, but was definitely not it—*because Inasa would’ve remembered if the guy had been wearing tiny shorts and a crown before*—and Inasa realized that actually; *This was beyond having no idea.* He might as well just have been transported to another world like in anime for no reason whatsoever, and it probably would’ve made just as much sense.

“Your Prince has come, my dear Cinderella.” *Cinderella? Is he talking about Todoroki? “Sorry I’m late, I had to collect everyone and set up the plan.”*

“Izu… ku…” Todoroki weakly answered, just barely able to get the name out under his paralysis. “*Sorry...*”

“It’s understandable why you weren’t thinking clearly, Shouto, Izu-pingu told me everything. It’s okay.”

As Midoriya landed in front of Todoroki and allowed the mannequin with long pink hair to lower him in its grip, his white and black robots guarded him. They seemed to have taken a large pieces of the rubble Shindo caused from his vibrations and were using them as shield to block the cement shots. The penguin with the crown—*Who looked much more like Midoriya now that the other was also wearing a crown, how hadn’t he made the connection before with those freckles?*—reappeared, and was climbing onto the black robot at the same time as the one with glasses was climbing onto the white one.

“It’s okay for you to make mistakes, because I will be here to help you make up for them ten-fold. Because that is what it means to *love.* Rose of the noble castle– Power of Dios that sleeps within me, heed your master and come forth!”

A bright white light emerged from Midoriya’s chest, followed shortly by the hilt of a sword. But Inasa could hardly pay attention to the spectacle.
He was too busy staring at the look in Todoroki’s eyes as he gazed up at the Prince. They were warm, soft, in love—everything that he hadn’t seen that day of the entrance exam and more. He looked like he hardly cared that Midoriya was literally performing a miracle and pulling a sword out of his chest, he was just thankful that Midoriya was here.

“You don’t know the first thing about him!”

Yeah, guess he hadn’t any idea at all. From the very beginning.

_He hadn’t known who Todoroki was now— No, even more than that. He hadn’t even known who Todoroki was before when he first met him. He just assumed based on being talked down to once._

_But everyone has bad days, don’t they? Inasa was having one right now. Inasa had just heatedly jumped right to his assumption as soon as it appeared in his head, like he did with everything else._

_And sometimes, too much heat wasn’t a good thing, as Inasa was coming to realize._

“But as I’m aiding Shouto, I’ll be giving it my best effort! Sword of Dios: grant me 100 swords of justice!”

The puppet pulled the sword out of Midoriya’s chest in a flurry of light and wind, then handed it off to Midoriya. The crowned boy brandished the black blade to point it towards the crowd of still firing and almost panicking villains, motion so fluid Inasa wondered for a moment if he might be an actual prince.

Midoriya announced, “With a group this large, any one hero would have a hard time dealing with it on their own.” Pushing back one side of his cloak with a flourish to billow behind him, Midoriya raised his sword into the air. “But as I’m aiding Shouto, I’ll be giving it my best effort! Sword of Dios: grant me 100 swords of justice!”

Countless white swords appeared in the air above the heads of Orca’s gang, all pointed down at the lot of them like an executioner’s guillotine.

“Oh shit!”
Many of the villains cursed and started firing at them to cover the blades with cement. But they could only get so many of them.

“I’ll have to fully concentrate on this to make sure I don’t skewer any of them, Shouto-kun, so please try to keep a look out for Gang Orca,” Midoriya absentmindedly noted.

Then, he swung his black sword down in time with a large number of the white swords. They were aimed for not the actual bodies of the gang, but the wide cement guns on their arms, specifically targeting only a few at a time. As they pinned them down into the ground, the seasoned heroes were smart enough to try and remove their arms from the gun to free themselves.

That plan was ruined as soon as a blob of cement was shot at their arms, the cement forcing them to stay connected to their guns. Many exclaimed in outraged shock.

_Huh?_ Inasa glanced over to the robots to see that they had each taken a single, unconscious member of the gang in their grip, forcing the arm with the gun out and towards their comrades. The penguins were on the arms of the robots, aiming and firing the gang members’ gun towards each pinned villain as fast as they could. _Oh… Damn. That’s smart!_

The source of the unconscious villains proved to be the puppet that had handled the sword before. Inasa could see it flitting around the edges of the group, corralling any that tried to regain their ground by leaving the area. A silver sword gleamed in its hand. The teddybear and penguin duos and floating swords also occasionally shot at those who were too close to escaping while the mannequin was in another area of the field. They couldn’t even attempt to leave in the direction towards their goal, the evacuation center, because the ground in that direction was still busted up from Shindo’s attack.

“Hiding yourself to completely change the battlefield in your favor, and not only come at them with overwhelming force, but also use their own weapons against them to take them out as efficiently as possible! Such a wonderful plan, I’m glad your penguin let me know what you wanted from me so I could be a part of it!” Inasa could hear Shindo call out, he could just barely turn his gazer to the corner of his vision to see the other boy looking over the battlefield with what might be sadistic glee, “Midoriya Izuku, you are truly beyond expectation!”

“Thanks, Shindo-san! Your plan was good too! You were lying in wait that whole time to surprise them with your quirk, right? Under different circumstances, that would’ve worked perfectly,” Midoriya casually answered back, though he was still carefully watching as each sword came down and into someone’s gun.
Shindo gave a nervous smile. “Ah, that wasn’t much, really! Just some basic playing dirty!”

“There are some heroes that refuse to play dirty at all, though. The fact that you can do so and do it well, so that you can be a better hero and save more people is a thing worthy of praise in my eyes!”

When Shindo’s face turned pink with a faint blush in response, Inasa realized that Midoriya Izuku was just very good at charming people, which explained how the ice prince Todoroki ended up falling for him. *Your Prince has come*, indeed…

But before the Prince was finished with taking out the numerous fodder –because really, that’s what they were at this point– a hole was blasted through the side of the crystal castle wall facing them. The broken shards refracted more rainbows in its opaque surface, somehow looking even more beautiful in the destruction. From the rubble appeared the black and white figure of the Gang Orca.

The hero-playing-villain gazed over the chaos somberly. “You’ve really made a mess of my gang, Prince Deku. I gotta say– I don’t know whether I’m impressed or pissed off! I’m rather attached to my men, I’ll have you know!”

“Yes, I know. The fact that you maintain a strong bond with your “gang” is well known,” Midoriya responded simply, “That’s why I know you won’t leave them behind to cause more trouble. You have to stop me from harming them first, so you can’t leave even though you could continue your goal to impede with the evacuation without them.” *Wait– doesn’t that make them his hostages?*! *That’s kinda too dirty, isn’t it?*

It was only then that Inasa saw that Todoroki had started up his fire again. He was only just able to light it around himself, not having the control necessary to do anything else. Inasa made eye contact with the other, who had a piercing but pleading stare.

Seeing his chance to help make up for his mistake, Inasa stirred up the wind around him. He was hit from further away, so he still had some control over his quirk even if he couldn’t put strength behind it.

Gang Orca yelled at Midoriya, “That plan wouldn’t work on an *actual* villain!”

“It would if the villain was loyal to or cared about his underlings. You’re the same as you are when you’re a hero, it’s just that you have villainous goals now. Therefore, right now you’re a villain that
cares about his underlings.”

Gang Orca mulled that over, taking a long look at his subordinates. Then, he charged at Midoriya.

“Yeah. Guess I am!”

A wall of fire carried by Inasa’s wind rose up before him, blocking his path. Inasa then swirled the fire around him. It was only a gentle wind, but the power of the flames being stirred up by the air turned it into a fiery tornado. Inasa would’ve been worried about accidently torching the villain, if their opponent hadn’t been a top ranked hero.

“Thank you for the help, Shouto-kun!” Midoriya chimed, completely ignoring Inasa’s involvement. He must still be pissed at him. After seeing what he can do, Inasa thinks that getting into an argument with Midoriya was a very poor decision. Yikes…

“Big Fish! He needs help before he dries out!”

“Dammit– we can’t even do anything!”

Gang Orca’s loyalty was clearly mirrored by his gang. Those that were still free make last minute attempts to leave the range of fire and approach their boss, and those that were captured frantically pulled at the cement and swords that were keeping them in place, but to no avail. Soon every member of Orca’s gang had their movement sealed one way or another.

However, the Number Ten hero was not so easily taken care of, of course.

The wind and fire dispersed with an all-encompassing ultrasonic wave. He was dripping wet, so he probably kept himself from completely drying out with a water bottle prepared beforehand for that exact reason.

Gang Orca spread his arm out like he was offering himself. “What now, heroes?!”

*Shit! He and Todoroki don’t have anything left to give– can Midoriya really take on a top hero by himself?*
“Big Fish, what do we do?!?”

“Stop panicking! Just find a way to break apart the cement for now—”

Gang Orca cut himself off abruptly. His body went from tensed in preparation to fight to laxed, and he stared blankly into space.

“Good job, Hitoshi-kun!”

It was only then that Inasa caught sight of the black hooded person who appeared from the shadows of one of the castle’s balconies. The hood was pulled down to reveal the purple hair of Shinsou Hitoshi, the UA student who had been in gen ed during the Sports Festival. The look in his eyes made Inasa think that he was smirking behind his metal mask. In a voice that defiantly wasn’t the voice that had sounded out just before, he declared, “And that’s checkmate.”

“Big Fish!”

“Someone needs to snap him out of it!”

“No one can move though!”

The jarring sound of a buzzer rang through the arena.

“Ah– Alright everyone, the last of the HUC members were rescued, so the test is officially over. It actually should’ve ended a little while ago, but I was distracted by the fight going on so… sorry about that. And also, all of the villains were technically defeated? We hadn’t even thought you could do that in this timeframe, so– Congratulations, I guess?” the proctor Mera sounded like he had no idea what just happened, Inasa was glad that it wasn’t just him that was still confused.

“The best plan to take down a powerful fighter… is to not fight him at all! Yes! To keep your trump card until the last second to use as a surprise attack–!” Breathing heavily, Shindo grabbed at his bare chest and muttered more quietly, “I’ve really got to calm down or I might actually start falling for him…” What exactly is this guy’s type?! Midoriya’s sneaky strategy is impressive, but to find it romantically attractive?!! Inasa is all for people being passionate about what they like, but even he
finds that a little weird!

Shinsou must’ve released Gang Orca from his brainwashing, because the hero suddenly jolted in place, before sighing, “Looks like this was our loss…”

“We’re so sorry, Big Fish! It’s all because we messed up! We made you look bad!” one of his sidekicks cried out.

“That’s right! You had to wear restraint gear and everything, but we couldn’t even properly support you without our quirks!”

“That’s enough of that. There’s no use having a pity party!” Gang Orca shouted while shaking his head, “Even with our limitations, we underestimated the strength of our opponents and lost because of it. That’s all there is to it.”

As Midoriya’s castle and swords began to vanish in sparks of light and shards of glass, Gang Orca walked up to him. “Even as just a student, you’ve already come this far. I look forward to seeing how high you go, Midoriya Izuku. Also, sorry about breaking your… castle.”

Midoriya smiled bashfully, a blush coloring his cheeks at the praise. “It’s not a problem, the Crystal Palace was made to regenerate back to its original set up.” He gestured slightly towards the wall that Gang Orca had broken through, which had only just started dissolving. It was completely intact without a trace of a hole having been put through it. “And it wasn’t just me alone that won.”

Midoriya knelt down before Todoroki to help him to his feet, and Shinsou Hitoshi approached to stand by them. Todoroki still only had eyes for Midoriya, though.

“When the old order has fallen, a new one will have to replace it— that is what revolution means. I believe that revolution is upon us, Gang Orca-san, but not because of the villains.” Midoriya’s posture straightened, and he stuck out his chest slightly in pride. “It’s because revolution will be brought by the next generation— our generation. And not just from UA.” Midoriya glanced at Shindo before continuing, “We are the ones who will change the fate of society for the better, since we are the future of society!”

“…Wise words from someone so young. The point of the exam set up this time was to encourage unity between future heroes, in order to help make up for the loss of the Symbol of Peace. But it seems that that was a lesson you already knew the answer to. If all of you can go forth with that in
mind, then society has nothing to fear for their future.”

Gang Orca nodded once, then turned his back to help his sidekicks up off the ground. Their group left the battlefield after a bizarre conversation where Gang Orca seemed to convince the penguin that he wasn’t a real killer whale, and the penguin started getting along with the hero. After everyone had cleared off the field, it was time for the results.

Inasa hoped that, despite his self-sabotage during this step on his journey to being a hero, he would also eventually be part of that “revolution” Midoriya was talking about.

Shouto’s name wasn’t on the list of examinees who passed. He hadn’t expected it to be, after that disaster with Yoarashi Inasa in the middle of a fight against villains.

Izuku’s warm hand covered his own. “I’m sorry, Shouto…”

“Don’t be. It was my past actions that lead to this conflict, so these are the consequences I have to deal with. And also… this helped me realize that pain from the past doesn’t go away just because you get a happy ending. I can’t pretend like I’m not affected by my father anymore just because he’s been dealt with legally.” Shouto brought up Izuku’s hand to kiss the back of it, thinking of the prince-like behavior Izuku usually indulged him in. “They said that we could retake the exam after remedial training, I’ll just make sure to pass then.”

Izuku scowled in displeasure. “But it was hardly your fault! Perhaps you weren’t kind to people before, but you were dealing with traumatic experiences that no one was helping you with, and Yoarashi just brought that up for you again. Considering all of that, of course you couldn’t deal with it! You shouldn’t be expected to…”

Izuku trailed off as his eyes sharpened to focus on something behind Shouto. Turning his head revealed that Yoarashi was approaching him.
Izuku blocked his path, glaring down at Yoarashi somehow despite being shorter than him by far. “What do you want?”

Yoarashi flinched back slightly, before straightening once again. He then slammed his head straight into the concrete with a deep bow.

“I’m sorry, Todoroki! It was entirely my fault that you didn’t pass! My pettiness is to blame! I’m sorry!”

“That’s right it is,” Izuku intoned spitefully. But really, Shouto thinks that’s enough of that…

“I forgive you.” Shouto hadn’t decided on it beforehand, but here and now, he found that he has. Yoarashi hadn’t done something unforgivable like his father had, so Shouto would forgive him. “But it was how I thought of things before that lead to this, so forgive me for that as well…”

Yoarashi raised his head off the ground. “I do forgive you, though– looking back there’s not much to forgive in the first place. Me messing up your chance to get a provisional license was much worse.”

“That’s right it is– ”

“Izuku,” Shouto cut him off, squeezing his hand gently to get his attention, “It’s alright. I don’t want to fight about this with him any longer.”

After observing Shouto for a moment, Izuku’s eyes finally softened. “Okay, if you’re sure.”

Yoarashi laughed nervously. “Ah– well, I’ll see be seeing you during the training course, Todoroki!” As the boy turned to fast walk away, he looked back to wave at Todoroki and exclaim, “But, um– Please don’t bring your boyfriend! He really scares me– Arg!”

Mora respectfully bowed towards Izuku and Shouto, as though he wasn’t holding Yoarashi in a vice grip with a bundle of hair. “As the one in charge of him, I also must apologize for his behavior. It was very disgraceful and won’t happen again.” Before he could begin his retreat on his own terms, Yoarashi was unceremoniously dragged away by a lasso of hair around his neck courtesy of the Shiketsu student leader. Yoarashi pulled at the prison to no relief.
“I gave my word, my word– and what do you do? Make a mockery of both me and the Shiketsu name! Unbelievable! You’ll be lucky to see the light of day ever again with the extra training and studying I’m giving you, Inasa! I’m going to teach you how to cool that hot head of yours even if it kills you! This is personal now!”

Yoarashi choked out through his strangling, “P-Please have m-mercy, Mora-senpai!”

“He’s right to be scared of Izuku, but his upperclassman also seems pretty scary in his own right…” Shinsou commented while watching Yoarashi get dragged away. He had been standing close to Izuku and Shouto, but not so close that he was an outright “third wheel” as he called it.

As Shindo Yo stopped by to give a quick goodbye to Midoriya before parting, Shouto thought about his upcoming training course. He didn’t know how he felt about seeing Yoarashi again, but well… at least he can take solace in knowing he wasn’t the only one in his class who failed and will be at the training.

“Oh my God! Have you seen Bakugou’s score sheet? The test scorer literally wrote “If you just cursed less and had a better attitude you probably would’ve passed. We can’t in good conscious pass a person that would behave poorly with disaster rescuees, it’s completely inappropriate for a licensed hero” –Can you believe that?!”

“Sparky, if you don’t shut up right the fuck now I will kill you!”

If only it wasn’t Bakugou…

Toshinori’s phone pinged with a notification. He knew it was rude to check your phone when in a meeting, but the distant looks on Best Jeanist and Edgeshot’s faces –an obvious symptom of Post-Penguindrum Astonishment– at Toshinori’s condensed explanation on what happened at Kamino tell him they won’t have the mental processing ability to talk for probably three more minutes. He left out some important details such as the secret behind One for All, as he can fill them in later on it if need be, but even just the base explanation on Izuku’s power and how Momoka and All for One are involved was a lot to take in. Knowing this, he checked the message on his phone.
A large smile bloomed on his face at the picture that was sent. “Ah– Young Midoriya has just received his provisional license! Unsurprising, but still great news.”

“Unsurprising indeed, based on what you’ve told us…” Best Jeanist was the first to collect himself. He unconsciously glanced down at the bandage over his gut and chest, which covered a scar in the shape of a flower that he now knew to be from Izuku’s spell. “Do you think what he says is true– That we should expect Endeavor and Hawks to “fall”? And what exactly does that mean in this context?”

“Both Izuku and Momoka are rather good at predicting these sorts of things, so I’d say it’s a safe bet. But I have no idea what the context would be or even if they know what it is. It could mean anything from dying to just falling from the ranks, if I’m guessing. In the case of Endeavor specifically…” Toshinori couldn’t help but screw his face up in frustration. “Based on inside knowledge, it’s probably going to be in the form of a huge scandal or a consequence related to it.”

Best Jeanist nodded his head at Toshinori. “Which means that we’d be next in line to hold up order, and we’d have to make up for his bad press. Don’t worry, All Might-san, we’ll do everything we can to protect the safety and hearts of the people if it comes down to that.”

“How can you be processing this so quickly?” Edgeshot spoke up for the first time. He glanced up from his crouched position on the couch next to Best Jeanist, where he was holding his head in his hands. “I’m still trying to accept the fact that fate apparently exists and a student from UA has unfathomable power that comes from the former diary of a deceased child, and you’ve already moved onto the kid prophesizing that the current Number One hero is going to cause a scandal?!?”

Best Jeanist glanced away from his co-worker in an almost awkward manner. “That’s not it exactly… The story behind these circumstances is outrageous, so I’m focusing on what’s important. Such as the reason why All Might told us all of this in the first place, and that this Momoka most likely saved my life, or at the very least saved my lung– there will be time to worry about the details later.”

“The “details”, you say…” Edgeshot sarcastically scoffed, before what could be seen of his face fell into defeat. “My life is never going to be normal again, is it? I thought Kamino would be a one-time thing, but if that kid is joining the field, then stuff like that is going to be a regular occurrence.”

Toshinori nodded at Edgeshot sympathetically and offered, “I wouldn’t say things at Kamino’s level are a “regular occurrence”, but strange events are definitely the norm. If it’s any consolation, you get used to it …eventually.”
Edgeshot shot him a deadpan look. “A frog in water that gradually heats up also “gets used to it”, but that doesn’t mean it doesn’t *die* once the water starts boiling.”

Toshinori doesn’t think he’s ever heard that particular expression used that way. It was sort of an exaggeration, but… it was also sort of fitting.

Chapter End Notes

I added a 6th chapter to Children of Absurdity that are basically like deleted scenes/behind the scenes events in this chapter. If you want to read stuff like Izuku getting points deducted for being too comforting or Gang Orca and Izu-pingu making up, then check it out ;)

References from this chapter:
Part of Inasa and Shouto’s argument is from bnha.
“You say you want to “talk”? Give me one good reason why I shouldn’t just assume that there’s a squad of heroes hiding in wake ready to apprehend me, Number Two.”

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“Because if there was then they’d be in the middle of doing that already?” Hawks answered with a shrug of his shoulders and wings. The blue fire in Dabi palm burnt a little brighter at the movement of Hawks’s Might Wings, lighting up the back-way alley that Hawks had tracked Dabi to. “It’s not like I’m stupid enough to think that a small conversation is gonna be enough to get your guard down to a suitable degree for a surprise attack like that. I would’ve just attacked without talking to you and ruining my cover.”

“Because if there was then they’d be in the middle of doing that already?” Hawks answered with a shrug of his shoulders and wings. The blue fire in Dabi palm burnt a little brighter at the movement of Hawks’s Might Wings, lighting up the back-way alley that Hawks had tracked Dabi to. “It’s not like I’m stupid enough to think that a small conversation is gonna be enough to get your guard down to a suitable degree for a surprise attack like that. I would’ve just attacked without talking to you and ruining my cover.”

He knows what Dabi’s actual name is, now. Some digging revealed the only child of Endeavor that wasn’t accounted for. But Hawks won’t think of Dabi by that name. If the man has given it up, he’s probably not that person any longer. That’s why Dabi’s on the path he is now.

Dabi raised his eyebrow at Hawks in disbelief. “So you expect me to believe that the currently second-most top ranked hero wants to talk to a member of the League of Villains for no reason?”

This is the second time he brought up Hawks’s rank in the span of half a minute. He knew the Commission sending in the Number Two hero for this was a stupid idea... “It’s not for no reason. I’m just... looking into my options right now.”

He tried to make the last part sound vague while hinting towards something sinister. Dabi caught on fast to what he was leading towards, and let out a scoff. “You? You’re trying to sell that you want to defect from the heroes? Even if you guys don’t think highly of us, at the very least you should give us villains the credit of not being absolute morons. Why the hell would you even want to be looking into other options with the cushy life you’ve already got? Even at second place, the salary you’re getting is top notch.”

And there it is, the first hint of proof that Momoka’s claim is true. While it’s obvious the Number Two hero is a highly paid position, Dabi referred to the amount with such casual certainty. Not a “you’re probably paid a lot” but “you are paid a lot”. Like he knows from experience.

But Hawks can’t afford to focus on that right now. This is the turning point, this is where he needs to convince Dabi to at least consider the possibility of the most unbelievable lie that Hawks has ever
had to tell.

But the sad part of this was… it wasn’t really that unbelievable, if he used the truth. All he has to do is make that truth sound brutal, as though it was the Prince of the Crystal who was saying it.

All he has to do is remember that what Momoka said: Dabi wants to change the “flawed hero system”

“I’m looking into other options because I’ve never had options before. Everything’s always been decided for me,” Hawks replied, trying to keep his tone steady and unmoved.

He walked closer to Dabi with his hands spread out, as though to prove he was holding no weapons. A useless gesture when he always wears his weapon on his back. His hook must’ve been interesting enough, because Dabi allowed him to approach, though his eyes were narrowed in suspicion.

“I’m tired, Dabi.” Hawks glanced to the side at the dirty brick wall, as though he were solemnly contemplating something. “I’m tired of being a pet for the Hero Commission– If you’re trying to end the current order of heroes, then you must know they’re rotten, right? They believe themselves to be a high-and-mighty power that can judge who can be used and discarded in the name of peace.”

He kept moving forward slowly and Dabi kept letting him come closer, so Hawks must be doing this right. He couldn’t help but look Dabi over more carefully the closer he got. The patchwork scarred skin that was basically stapled onto his flesh should’ve made him a grotesque figure to look at, perhaps to other people he was, but it didn’t quite succeed with Hawks. He knew there was more to this man than just a crooked heart and bloodied hands. Underneath the ugliness, there was a story probably filled with the pain and broken innocence of what was once just another child trying to live their life.

Hawks let some resentment, old and hidden in his heart, flow into his voice, “Most would say I won the lottery with a quirk like mine, but really, I was very unfortunate. I was unfortunate to be born with a quirk that’s so valuable.”

A couple of more steps forward. Still, Dabi permitted it. He was looking at Hawks with a strange, slightly shocked expression on his face.

The thought that Dabi was probably just another victim of the system made Hawks notice other things about the villain besides the superficial “ugliness”; like the softness of his black hair, or the
way his face was just so finely angled that you could tell he would’ve been one of those pretty boy types if it wasn’t for half his face being burnt to hell and back. The way his eyes were so blue, Hawks could see it even hidden in the shadows.

“I was unfortunate to be born to parents that were poor crackheads that didn’t mind trading their child for some money. I was unfortunate to be born in a society where the government doesn’t mind buying children with “good quirks” as though they’re cattle.”

He stopped suddenly. There was no more ground left for him to move forward– he was directly in front of Dabi, looking up at him into his cold blue eyes. They really do look a lot like Endeavor’s, though the eye shape isn’t quite the same…

Those same blue eyes actually looked at Hawks, showing that the villain wasn’t just brushing off his words but listening to them closely instead. He was paying attention to what Hawks had to say, even though they were on opposite sides and he didn’t owe Hawks anything.

–It made Hawks not want to know how Endeavor was involved with this, how he had managed to push his own child over the edge. It made Hawks wonder about the kind of person Dabi would’ve been, if he had stayed just Touya–

Hawks finished his spiel with a hand grasping his chest. He couldn’t feel the smooth material of his hero costume shirt through the thickness of his worn glove. “Maybe you don’t know anything about what I’m talking about, and that’s fine. All you need to know is that I’m tired of the way things are. I just… want to choose something else– anything else. And maybe finally slow down and enjoy my life for the first time ever, once it’s all said and done.”

While he still had a strange expression, Dabi seemed to reign himself him. His face lost its softness and hardened into something made of ice. “If that’s true, then why would you take down the Hero Killer? He doesn’t like the way things are either.”

Hawks prepared for this question. It was actually an opportunity to gain ground in Dabi’s view of him– though saying the answer that needed to be said would hurt.

“He didn’t aim high enough,” Hawks answered without hesitation, “I mean– on the hunt for crooked heroes in the same vicinity as Endeavor, and he goes for some no-name instead? Come on. If someone really wants to revolutionize the world, they need to aim higher.”
Hawks tilted his head in a bird-like manner. He knew that his eyes must look like the piercing ones of the bird of prey he was named after, based on the intense breathlessness he was feeling. “The League is aiming higher, aren’t they?”

A moment of silence passed, the two of them just looking at each other. Then Dabi finally averted his eyes.

“We are.”

He brushed past Hawks, and the moment their arms came in contact it was like static electricity surged between them. The feeling continued to permeate the air in the space between them. “Leave a number for me to contact you with, and I might get back to you. Don’t think that I buy your story just yet, but well…”

Dabi turned back to give Hawks one last look-over, before growing an almost pitying smirk. “It certainly does seem like they did a number on you, at the very least. Because of that I’ll give you a chance to prove yourself.”

Dabi’s steps echoed cavernously in the silence of the now darker alleyway, Hawks listened to them fade away. A numb feeling settled in his body. It wasn’t even night out, but it still seemed so dark…

The vibration of his silenced phone got his attention. Hawks checked the screen to see a texted picture of Izuku’s new provisional license, proof that he had just passed his test. Hawks hadn’t doubted that he’d pass for a second. He sent an appropriate smiley face and congratulations on the victory.

Hawks should be feeling victorious now, too. He got Dabi’s attention enough for the man to agree to a potential second meeting instead of moving straight to a fight.

But he doesn’t.

*He feels like he lost.*
I lost, is all Katsuki can think of after the exam is said and done, Even after all of that, after everything that’s happened and all that I’ve realized, I still lost.

The rest of the day passed in a haze of repressed rage. He barely comprehended the concerned look shitty hair gives him and his request to “talk” with Katsuki. Even though it's never just a “talk”, if there’s one thing Deku has proven it’s that talks are never just talks.

Katsuki led them outside the dorm building into the night. The only light was from the moon and uniform streetlamps along the side of the roads, but they had to come out here even with the dark. He was pretty sure that with the way he’s feeling now, he’s going to start yelling.

“Bakugou…” Kirishima started out, before he paused to mull over his words a bit, and restarted, “I just wanted to tell you that… even if you didn’t get your license, I think you did really good today.”

“…Huh? The fuck are you talking about?! How the fuck did I do good if I didn’t pass, idiot?!” Katsuki waved his hands at Kirishima, trying to convey how stupid his idea was without setting his palms on fire, “When you fail an exam it means you did bad! That’s what happened!”

Kirishima winced a bit, but then stood up straighter with regained confidence. “By the testers’ standards you didn’t handle the HUC workers well enough for a license, yeah, but that doesn’t mean you were awful. You did a lot better than I think you would’ve at the beginning of the year, and that means a lot! So don’t let yourself be discouraged by it…”

“How can I not be discouraged when everyone else is leaving me behind except for half ‘n’ half—who was apparently dealing with some damn internal crisis if Izuku’s reaction was anything to go by?! Hell, even that fucko with the superiority complex in class B passed his exam!”

Katsuki had to stop himself from grinding his teeth into dust. He turned away from shitty hair, unable to face the worry and pain that he saw on the other’s face. It was only with his back turned on Kirishima that he was able to let himself be honest.

“…This is just more proof of how weak I am; Both physically and emotionally. I wasn’t strong enough to fight the villains, so I got kidnapped and All Might had to retire. I was the end of All Might! And now during the test I wasn’t strong enough to be able to do anything when there wasn’t
anyone to fight!” Katsuki glared down at his trembling and clenched right fist. “I’ve only ever cared about heroes that win against villains, I never cared about rescuing people. But what kind of hero doesn’t rescue people? You might as well not even be a hero at that point, but I hadn’t even thought about it until now!”

“And that’s fine!” Kirishima shouted at his back. Katsuki didn’t turn around, but it seemed like he moved closer. “That’s why we’re in school, we’re still learning about how to be real heroes! Of course you couldn’t do anything about getting kidnapped, and of course you still have things you’re figuring out!”

“There’s figuring things out and there’s being a fucking dumbass! Guess which category I’m in! You don’t get it because you’ve already got the right attitude to be a hero!”

Kirishima actually sounded hurt by that statement, “Wh– What?! Where is this even coming from Bakugou?! What happened to that manly confidence you always had before?”

With Kirishima’s reaction, it was like the wind was blow out of his sails. Katsuki deflated along with his anger to sigh tiredly, “That wasn’t confidence– that was arrogance and fear. I thought that I had to be the best, and I was scared of not being the best. So I did and said stupid shit. That’s not real confidence.”

“…Midoriya told me before we went to rescue you that you’re still “learning how to love yourself even when you lose”. And that you were scared to admit that we’re friends because you don’t want me to be disappointed in you.” Katsuki stilled at those words, and stilled even more when Kirishima came close enough to weakly hold onto the bottom of Katsuki’s shirt behind him, as though he were trying to keep Katsuki from running from him. “I don’t know what’s going on with you right now, but–”

Katsuki felt the hand holding his shirt tighten. “Bakugou… I love you especially when you lose!”

After a second to process that sentence, Katsuki involuntary whipped his body around to stare at Kirishima in wide-eyed shock. The stupid grin that Kirishima usually showed off around him was replaced with a deep-set frown and almost watery eyes.

With his grip dislodged Kirishima brought his hand up to grasp at his own chest instead as he yelled, “I don’t care that you don’t always win! That’s not what I admire about you! What I admire is that even though you might fail, you always try to win with everything you have, no matter what it is!”
“You say that I’ve already got the right attitude for being a hero, but really I spent so much of my life just assuming that I would never be enough! Up until I applied to UA, I never even bothered to try and win in the first place because I didn’t think there was a point when I’d just fail anyway!”

Kirishima averted his eyes to glare down at the ground. “But even though you fail– even though you know that people have high expectations for you and you have high expectations for yourself, even though you’re so scared of failing and it’s painful for you when you fail, you still try your very best anyway! I can’t think of anything braver than that! That’s why I want to be friends with you, and why I ended up falling for you…”

Katsuki… couldn’t even think about what Kirishima was talking about, when he says that he loves him. He’s had confessions before, of course, as the popular guy at school with an impressive quirk. But he never gave a single shit about any of those girls, he never even knew their names. He doesn’t know how to react to someone that he actually respects having those kinds of feelings for him.

He hesitated for a while, but even if he didn’t know what to say about Kirishima’s feelings, he could at least address everything else that came with it. “…It’s not like I’m the type of person that can handle failure well. Before UA, I never even failed because I was never challenged enough. Losing is new to me. I’m only reacting this way just because I don’t want my failures to be permanent.”

Kirishima finally glanced back up at him to pierce Katsuki with determined eyes. “That doesn’t change any of the things I just said.”

“I’m not a good person. The reason why I’ve been such a moody bastard lately is because our teachers found out about how I used to treat Izuku. I was a bully– I hurt him and even told him to kill himself, and now I’m upset about having to actually face consequences for what I did when that’s a normal thing that happens! You can’t tell me that’s the kind of person you want to have as a friend!”

Kirishima didn’t even hesitate to answer, “You’re right, but you’re not that person anymore! The fact that you’re sorry about what you did means that you’ve already changed! I think the way you are now– even if you’re still rough around the edges, you’re a good guy now! So don’t assume that I don’t know what I want! I want to be your friend, and I want to love you! That’s that!”

“…Fuck. You’re so single-mindedly stubborn that it’s like I’m talking to a loud Izuku.” Katsuki had to look away from Kirishima’s earnestness. “You can’t seriously not give a shit about everything I just mentioned.”

“It’s not that I don’t care about the people you’ve hurt, it’s just that I also care about how you’ve changed yourself and how you’re hurting yourself.”
It seemed that Kirishima had enough of the distance between them, because he pushed forward to wrap his arms about Katsuki’s torso, planting his face firmly into Katsuki’s shoulder. Katsuki tensed up automatically. Kirishima’s voice was slightly muffled as he said, “It’s fine if you feel the same, just don’t push me away. And give yourself a break once in a while. I hate seeing you hurt like this…”

Katsuki hated seeing Kirishima so hurt over this too…

All of the fight suddenly left Katsuki in a deep breath out. Kirishima’s hold on him wasn’t something that could be described as soft, but it was warm. Both the hug and Kirishima’s words gifted Katsuki a strong feeling of relief, as though there was now a pillar beside him to help hold up the pressure he placed on his own shoulders.

Katsuki lifted a shaky arm to wrap around Kirishima’s back. It was about time he stopped giving the other mixed signals. He sighed, “As if you would even listen to me if I told you to leave me alone. You’re too good of a friend to do that.”

Kirishima tensed in response to Katsuki’s last sentence, before he tightened his hug even more.

“Thank you…”

“Don’t thank me for something like that…”

They just stayed like that for some time, before All Might approached to usher them back to the dorms. As it turned out, the teachers were able to detect that the two of them had broken curfew. It was embarrassing to know that All Might of all people had overheard their conversation, but it was because they were working through emotional issues and hadn’t been making any trouble that they got off with just a warning to stay inside next time.

Before letting Katsuki walk through the doors to follow after Kirishima, All Might placed a hand on his shoulder to keep him back. “Young Bakugou… it was my decision to use up my power in Kamino, you have nothing to feel guilty over.” As Katsuki glanced up at the lanky man, All Might gave him a smile.

“Just know that even though you may feel like you aren’t progressing, rest assured that every day you are getting closer to becoming the hero and person that you want to be. In some respects, you may even be further along than you realize. Champion, the hero that never gives up so that they can always win in the end… that’s the one of the best kinds of heroes there are, I think!”
Katsuki shook off the hand to walk inside, but he did so feeling lighter than he had before.

Hitoshi involuntarily jolted when the door behind him slammed shut. The night they returned from the exam, Aizawa had led him to the apartment suite the teacher’s dorm building provided for him without explaining what they would be talking about. As a result, he had been a nervous mess underneath his carefully crafted façade of apathy, the slamming door just made his nerves worse.

“WOAH! Here comes the newest addition to the world of heroes! Only a couple weeks in the heroics department and already taking the industry by storm!” Present Mic’s voice, filtered through his usual support gear, burst out behind him. Turing around, Hitoshi stared dumbly at the chocolate cat-themed cake and bright grin Mic presented to him.

“What you accomplished is a real achievement.” A firm hand placed itself on Hitoshi’s should, glancing to the side revealed Aizawa-sensei looking at him with a slight smile. “Hizashi thought it would be a nice idea to get you a little something and have a small get-together. But don’t tell the other kids, they might try to get a cake out of us too…”

“Oh— you could probably tell Izuku though! He likes it when we give you special treatment!” Mic winked at him, and Hitoshi couldn’t help but blush at the attention.

With stiff movements Hitoshi sat down in the wooden chair that was pulled out for him. Mic set the cake down on the table and as Aizawa made to cut the cake started yammering, “So, what’s this I hear about you brainwashing Gang Orca? That would’ve been cool to see, I’m so jealous of Shouta!”

Aizawa casually responded while placing a slice of cake in front of Hitoshi, “It wasn’t too long of a moment. The fight was over an instant later, since the proctor probably saw that as a finishing move for the villains. Midoriya had already contained the rest at that point.”

“That just makes it even cooler! And come on, Shouto, call the kid Izuku when it’s just us. I already
know you called him Izuku to his face once.”

“And where exactly did you learn that?” Aizawa narrowed his eyes at Mic.

“Izuku of course!”

After a couple seconds of him just staring at Mic, Aizawa gave a defeated sigh as he plopped down into his own seat. “That kid has no sense of priority. He won’t give important, relevant information, but of course he’ll make sure to spread gossip as soon as he can.”

“It’s not gossiping if he’s just telling one person that’s already involved!”

“I’m pretty sure that’s still gossiping, actually,” Hitoshi unconsciously cut in. Despite the fact Hitoshi was disagreeing with him, Mic’s grin got a little brighter.

As they eased Hitoshi into the conversation, he felt himself relax. It was strange to have a celebration over something that was the equivalent of passing a test, but he felt warm at the thought that both of them would go this far for him. When Aizawa left the room with an annoyed scowl to call All Might, stating he needed to sic the man on some of 1-A that was out past curfew, Hitoshi didn’t feel intimidated by being left with only Mic for company.

“Really Hitoshi-kun, just call me Hizashi already! And start calling Shouta Shouta!” Mic leaned forward with one hand covering the side of his mouth, as though he were whispering a secret, “Even if he hasn’t said he’s okay with it, it’ll definitely make him happy.”

“Uh… I’d rather wait until he’s actually told me that himself, Mic– sorry, Hizashi-sensei.”

Hizashi leaned back to roll his eyes. “You can drop the sensei too, you know! But if you don’t want to that’s fine. If you wait for Shouta to tell you, though, you might be waiting years! I love him, but that man is as awkward with progressing intimate interactions as Izuku is smooth at seducing Todoroki.”

“From what I saw at the exam, he’s also smooth at seducing people other than Todoroki. Unintentionally at that.”
With a sudden burst of energy, Hizashi shot forward to lean towards him in intense interest. “What?! What happened?! Tell me *everything*— God, I swear Shouto purposely leaves out all the good shit when he’s relaying stuff to me!”

“I wouldn’t put it past him,” Hitoshi responded with a smirk, before going on to gossip about the two-faced Ketsubutsu second year who apparently had a thing for strategic thinking and playing dirty. When Aizawa came in, he rolled his own eyes at the topic of conversation. When he sat back down though, Hitoshi though he seemed pretty content to just watch them discuss what must seem like pointless dribble.

It made Hitoshi wonder if this was what it was like to be part of a family.

“It’s all of you who will inherit this society… Nedzu– I mean, Principal Nedzu gave a really impactful speech to start off the semester,” Izuku muttered to his friends just before class started.

Hitoshi replied in agreement, “It sounded like what you said to Gang Orca after the exam, but it was more succinct and used less flowery wording.”

“You’re right…” Izuku cupped his chin in his hand as he looked down in thought. “Maybe I should go to him for tips on writing speeches…”

“Please don’t. It’s really not necessary.” Hitoshi scowled at what was probably the mental image for Izuku being tutored by Nedzu, and he didn’t even know about the mouse-bear-dog’s *murder plot* like Izuku did.

“Shinsou’s right, and personally I like the way you talk,” Shouto stated simply.

Izuku beamed. “Really?! Then I’ll always make sure to speak this way, my beautiful prince!”
As Shouto’s cheeks reddened in a faint blush, Hitoshi rolled his eyes and sighed, “God, did you have to make it even worse?”

“Settle down everyone, and flirting time is up, Prince Charming.” Shouta-sensei suddenly reemerged from whatever hiding spot he had sequestered himself away in. He didn’t even glance at Izuku as he called him out. “It’s time to get back to work!”

Shouta went on to explain another portion of Nedzu’s speech, internships. Izuku had already herd the gist of how things worked from Togata, but the rest of the class got to learn for the first time how, with their provisional licenses, they would have the opportunity to intern in hero agencies to gain real-world experience. Similar to the workplace training, but they would be doing actual work instead of just being guided and they would have to secure the internship for themselves. It wasn’t something that everyone would get to do.

“I’ve invited the top three students of UA, the big three, to tell you from firsthand experience the usefulness of internships and how they differ from workplace training. Conveniently, no introductions should be necessary as you’ve already met them.”

Through the door strutted Togata, Amajiki, and the girl they brought with them to the party, Hadou Nejire. Togata tried to wave and greet them, but Izuku had already jumped out of his seat in shock. “Togata-senpai, you’re one of the top three students?! Why did you never tell me?!”

Izuku guessed he was one of the best due to Togata being considered as a candidate for Toshinori’s successor, but to know he was so high up and had never mentioned it was surprising.

Togata blinked, before giving a sheepish grin and chuckling, “I guess I just didn’t think about it cause it never came up!”

This must be what people felt like when Izuku accidently withheld information from them…

After a failed attempt to speak by Amajiki-senpai, who was just shy of being a nervous wreck when it came to public speaking, and aimless rambling from Hadou, Togata quickly decided that the best way to teach class way about their firsthand experience was from firsthand experience in fighting him. All of them against him at once.

Izuku immediately decided that fate never set up easy fights like this, so logically they should prepare for Togata to destroy them. He also didn’t mind trying to change that fate, though.
Ever since All Might told his story to him, Mirio thoughts have been buzzing in his head. He knew that getting to work under All Might’s former sidekick was something many would see as an accomplishment, but he had never thought that honor would extend into All Might wanting to take him on as his successor. He hadn’t even thought that was a thing that could happen.

After All Might left to go to another appointment, Sir confessed to him that the original reason he scouted Mirio out was because he had been considering him as a potential candidate, and that Mirio had proven himself to Sir throughout the course of his internship that he would be worth of All Might’s quirk, One for All.

But after Sir had discovered the truth behind One for All, as well as his own quirk, he became worried about what punishment Mirio would face if he truly became All Might’s successor.

“It’s not that I had assumed you wouldn’t face danger as the Symbol of Peace previously, but the risks of that kind of thing go down when one has the proper training, skillset, and experience,” Sir had explained to him with a solemn look, “But these dealings with fate… there’s nothing you could do to mitigate that risk. And after all this time watching over you, I don’t want to see you end up the same way All Might did. Ultimately, though, this is a decision only you could make. I recommend talking to Midoriya about all of this first— he knows of One for All, and he is much more aware of how this system of “fate” works than me or All Might are.”

Mirio fully planned on taking up Sir’s advice, not only to ask more about what he had previously believed to be a mythical concept and how quirks of all things would be involved in it, but also just so that he had someone to talk to this about. No matter what happens, this decision will affect the rest of his life. Mirio didn’t feel comfortable making a choice on something like that without getting a second opinion from a friend.

But that wasn’t what he needed to focus on right now. Currently, Mirio just needed to demonstrate to the kids of Midoriya’s class why they shouldn’t underestimate the value of experience. He knew that they’ve faced villains before, but having a couple of encounters was completely different than doing it as your everyday job.
However, Mirio can’t take this lightly either, because they do have a good source of intel on him.

“Togata-senpai’s quirk, Permeation, allows him to phase through matter. It’s going to be tough to land a good hit on him,” Midoriya informed his classmates, without caring that Mirio was right in front of them preparing for their match. While doing his stretches, Mirio watched the lot of them discuss. The only ones not participating were the two students who hadn’t gotten their licenses; Bakugou Katsuki, the student that was kidnapped, and Todoroki Shouto, Midoriya’s boyfriend. Bakugou looked like he was steaming at being sidelined but Todoroki just calmly observed them.

A spiky-haired red head spoke up while giving a thumbs-up, “That’s a hard quirk to counter, but with all of us together we should be able to get him to slip up!”

“We’ve got the advantage of knowing his quirk along with our numbers, it almost seems unfair…” the horned girl with pink skin mentioned apprehensively.

Mirio just laughed good-heartedly, “The way I see it, you knowing my quirk will just make this more fair!”

“Huh? How’s that?” The gravity girl that Midoriya mentioned was his friend, Uraraka Ochako, looked at him in a questioning glance.

Surprisingly, it was Tamaki who answered, albeit it was from his position facing the wall, “You wouldn’t even have stood a chance against Mirio if you went in blind. Even now, the chance that you’ll win is low…”

“There was once a kid that got discouraged, quit trying to be a hero, and caused all sorts of trouble! You better be careful Togata, or you might push someone over the edge!” Hadou spoke up with a much too cheerful tone for that subject.

“While I understand that you have more experience than us, we have faced our own trials,” the bird-headed kid objected with narrowed eyes. Mirio remembered Midoriya mentioning that he was the friend that also went to the Number Three hero for workplace training, Tokoyami Fumikage.

“That’s right! Don’t underestimate us and think we’re wimps!” the red head from before cheered. He pumped his fist in the air as though to increase morale.
All of the kids were in agreement and hyped to prove themselves, until they were brought down to earth by Midoriya’s flat tone, “We’re the ones that shouldn’t be underestimating our opponent. Togata-senpai isn’t some run of the mil hero-in-training, even by UA’s standards– he was chosen by the best of the best in this industry. That means something.”

“This world is divided into the chosen and the unchosen, and to be unchosen is to die…” another of Midoriya’s friends, Shinsou Hitoshi, muttered quietly. It made Mirio vaguely worried about the boy’s thought process. He also noticed that Tamaki tensed up at the words, and wondered what his friend thought of them.

A black-haired student with very straight teeth winced. “Wow. Way to kill the mood, guys…”

“I’m not saying that we can’t succeed.” Midoriya faced Mirio with a determined smile. “Remember— may those who defy their fate be granted glory!”

Mirio supposed that Midoriya’s thing with fate made a lot more sense now. He had been wondering why the kid was so dramatic…

Mirio returned the grin. “That’s a nice phrase you’ve got, now put it to the test!”

The match started with a round of combative quirks coming at him. Midoriya may know his quirk, but he hadn’t truly seen it in action before. Mirio phased through them all—and without losing his clothing, too, that time with Gran Torino was really worth it!— and dropped into the floor. Submerged in silent darkness, he angled himself to pop out behind the backline of students and punched down all of long-distance attackers. Mirio was determined to bring down all the students before Midoriya could properly organize them into a strategy.

“This– this is like how he fought the Hero Killer!” Ingenium’s brother and another friend of Midoriya, Iida Tenya, cried out, “Even though Midoriya’s said his quirk is Permeation, he can also disappear and reappear out of nowhere just like that!”

“Wait wait wait— this guy fought the Hero Killer?!! Why didn’t you start with that, Midoriya?!” The tailed kid exclaimed with a hand holding his head.

“…Uh, I guess I just didn’t think of it because it never came up?” Midoriya quoted almost word for word.
“Oh f-for fuck’s sake Izuku! A-And Togata-senpai, don’t you think that would’ve been a fair thing to warn us about?!” Shinsou groaned in frustration and pain. He was still on the ground holding his stomach where Mirio had punched him.

Mirio didn’t give them time to chat, and didn’t rise to the brainwashing bait. Again, he continuously phased down into the ground and reappeared behind his targets one after the other at breakneck speeds. Saving Midoriya for last, as he figured he would be the trickiest to handle.

Emerging from the ground behind him, Midoriya immediately predicted that Mirio would be behind him. Mirio let Midoriya’s open palmed strike phase through his head. He punched him straight in the stomach, but Midoriya pushed through the pain to grab onto the fist that was in contact with his body.

“Sur– Survival– ”

Mirio phased through Midoriya’s fist, and kicked his feet out from under him, knocking the breath out of him again.

Quieting Midoriya revealed that his voice had been covering up a bird-like squawking sound. Mirio just barely phased his entire body in time as crystal shards rained down from above to pass through him harmlessly instead of transporting him to another dimension. Looking behind him, Mirio saw Midoriya’s penguin slamming its fisted wing on the ground in resentment at his failed trap.

“I think that’s enough of a demonstration, now. This is also probably a good time to mention that, as far as I know, Togata is the closest to becoming the top hero including the pros, so I hope you learned something from this experience,” Eraserhead both ended the match and gave the most crucial piece of info too late.

A multitude of weak voices immediately chimed, “Please start with that, Sensei!”

Even if he says that… That last bit was a close call! “When did you get your penguin out?”

“B-Before we came into the gym, I only got him because the others aren’t exactly subtle and Penguin Yagi didn’t want to fight you, but– Togata-senpai…” Midoriya looked up at him form the ground, only to quickly avert his eyes. “Your clothes…”
Togata looked down to see that his gym uniform had phased through his body with that last activation of his quirk. He quickly made to put his pants on. “Gah! Sorry about that! That still happens sometimes.”

With the demonstration over, Mirio went into his explanation on how the reason why he beat all of them wasn’t because his quirk is good, but because of how much he trained both it and his body and mind. As he expected, they were more able to appreciate the tough learning that an internship could provide them after having been punched in the gut by it.

Before Midoriya left to go back to class, Mirio quietly asked him if they could talk later. The boy gave him an intense stare and nodded in confirmation.

After school ended, Midoriya brought him to his pocket dimension for the first time. Mirio glanced around to admire the stylish library they appeared in, before looking at Midoriya and noticing his wardrobe change.

“Oh– that’s an interesting outfit you got there. You really embody that “prince” theme.”

“This is a serious matter, so let’s cut to the chase– you’re here because they offered you One for All aren’t you? And you want to know more about the Children of Fate.” Midoriya guided him to sit on the black sofa, as he mulled over what to say.

“Yeah, that’s right…”

“Just tell me this, Togata-senpai, do you want Toshinori-san’s quirk?”

Mirio tensed up at the question. “I– I don’t know. I’ve just been thinking about this as wondering whether or not I wanted to become the Symbol of Peace, rather than wanting the quirk itself.”

“Do you need One for All to become the Symbol of Peace? Is that a requirement, for such an unofficial position?”

“Well… You can’t really be the Symbol of Peace unless you have the power to back it up, like All Might had. So the person holding All Might’s power becoming the next one makes sense, it’d be hard to find a quirk that’s more powerful than that.” Other than the other one the villains have, All for One. But Mirio assumed that he didn’t need to mention that.
“And what if, even with all that power, you somehow fail to become the Symbol of Peace? Or you fail to reach your goal of saving a million people? What if you’re injured and forced to retire early, or other obligations suddenly pop up? Would you still be satisfied with your decision if the quirk was all you got out of it? Because that’s truly the only guaranteed thing you’ll be receiving.”

That made Mirio pause.

“…I don’t know.”

Midoriya placed a hand on his upper arm, and pointed at the portrait of a man who looked similar to him that was hanging in front of them. “Before I was a Child of Fate, my dad was one instead.” Mirio looked at Midoriya in surprise, but the other boy wasn’t looking at him, he was staring at the portrait with an unreadable expression.

“He used to say… I hate the word "fate". Birth, encounters, partings, success and failure, fortune and misfortune in life. If everything is already set in stone by fate, then why are we even born? There are those born wealthy, those born of beautiful mothers, and those born into war or poverty. If everything is caused by fate, then God must be incredibly unfair and cruel.”

Midoriya averted his gaze from the portrait to side-eye him. “And in my opinion he was right to think that way-- fate can be very cruel. The fact that his punishment ended up being the death of his fourteen-year-old son was proof of that.”

Mirio felt more than heard himself gasp in shock, “But, but then how are you…?!”

“He brought me back to life using his quirk, Conductor, the quirk that was passed onto me when he traded his existence for mine.” Midoriya glanced down at his chest, before his green eyes returned their stare to Mirio. “During my speech at the Sports Festival, I never stated the full saying for the quote I used again today. It goes-- May those who accept their fate be granted happiness, may those who defy their fate be granted glory. To accept One for All is to defy your fate. You might get glory, but you also might not get happiness. In my opinion, you shouldn’t accept it unless you want it so badly that you’re willing to risk that.”

With an uncharacteristic frown on his face Mirio started down into his lap as he turned that information over in his head. But before he could think of how to reply, Midoriya had already moved onto another topic, “Since you’ve already learned all this, I need to give you more details of the Fruit of Fate. More specifically, the types of conditions that I can see in them using Conductor.” Mirio
glanced back up to see Midoriya still giving him a serious stare.

“Why is that?”

Mirio felt for the second time his gut drop into the ground as though he were using his quirk, when Midoriya started off with, “Your friend Amajiki-senpai… I saw something very concerning in him. Since you’re his friend, I think you should be the one to look into it…”

Chapter End Notes

FYI: I’m on vacation this week and next, so the next chapter might be late. But I hope you guys enjoyed the happy times of the exam arc, because once the Overhaul arc starts it STARTS, if you know what I mean ;) Mentally prepare yourselves

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