and the pain of my mother will not let me go

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| Additional Tags: | Characters will be added as they appear - Freeform, Child Abuse, Canonical Child Abuse, Genderswap, Genderbending, Alternate Universe - Gender Changes, hoo boy there's a lot of tags for genderbend idk which one to use so take 'em all, Female Todoroki Shouto, Female Midoriya Izuku, this is like, focused on exploring abuse and Todoroki's storyline through the lens of a female Todoroki, especially in how she chooses to rebel against this destiny chosen for her against her will, basically: im a big ol gender studies student and i will do what i want, Sexism, seriously im just GOD we stan fuyumi as the oldest sister forced into the role of mother, she didn't deserve that burden and was forced to take it on, Makeup, Sisters, Female Friendship, no beta we die like men, Dabi is a Todoroki, Touch-Starved Todoroki Shouto, Implied/Referenced Self-Harm, Forced Marriage, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, OCD, Quirkless Todoroki Natsuo, Yorashi Inasa Goes To UA High School, Misogyny, Todoroki Enji | Endeavor's Bad Parenting, Slow Burn, Bisexual Midoriya Izuku, Lesbian Todoroki Shouto, Trans Asui Tsuyu, Trans Jirou Kyouka, Trans Hawks (My Hero Academia), Lesbian Uraraka Ochako, Internalized Homophobia, Internalized Misogyny, Lesbian Asui Tsuyu, Trans Bakugou Katsuji, Gay Bakugou Katsuji, Gay Kirishima Eijirou, Bisexual Jirou Kyouka, Lesbian Ashido Mina, Bisexual Kaminari Denki, Gay Iida Tenya, Nonbinary Aoyama Yuuq, Bisexual Hagakure Tooru, Trans Tokoyami Fumikage, Gay Tokoyami Fumikage, Lesbian Yaoyorozu Momo, Bisexual Shouji Mezo, OK THAT'S MOST OF THE RELEVANT SEXUALITY TAGS, most of these are minor - Freeform, Deaf Bakugou Katsuji, Underage Drinking, Drinking to Cope, the person drinking to
and the pain of my mother will not let me go

by koisurufortunecookie

Summary

He insisted her hair be cut short, long locks cropped to her ears. Shouko’s childish complaint that she looked like a boy was met by a harsh slap across the cheek by her father, her young body skidding across the floor from the impact.

She didn’t complain about it again.

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Female rebellion, the clashing love for your mother and the terror that you'll end up just as she has, childhoods denied- and the way Shouko Todoroki starts to heal.

Notes

Hello...... It's me again....... Rubbing my little lesbian hands on all your favourite works.........

But in all seriousness! Todoroki is one of my favourite BNHA kids, and his story is FASCINATING. While it's highly compelling as is, I also started wondering what it might be like had she been a female character? Like good god, Endeavor had Todoroki because he wanted a tool to defeat the No.1, and clearly views Todoroki as belonging to him based of something (his powers) he can't help! Holy hannah, being told your body doesn't belong to you and you're defined by how you can be used? I could yell about how a female Todo in that situation suddenly becomes a parallel to real world objectification for the next eight years (not to say male Todo doesn't knock it out of the park!). How would her worldview + her dynamics with the world and people around her + other people's perceptions of her change? So I decided I'd start writing and see if I could come to that conclusion myself!

Quick notes:
- I'm not really an expert on Japanese gender roles? I mean, I've studied them intensively, but I'm not Japanese. My knowledge is based mostly on my own experiences as a girl born and raised in Canada, so they may not be completely accurate/might sway more towards more familiar experiences. Please bear with me!
- I know naming her Shouko wrecks the kanji pun but pwease. Pwease. I love kanji and just couldn't find a way around it without leaving her with an expressly masculine name.
- Tododeku is coming later! Midoriya's not even here yet haha.
- Stan Fuyumi or perish by my hands.
See the end of the work for more notes.
sins of my father

It was a peculiar thing, Shouko thought, being a girl.

At home, it was rarely mentioned after her Quirk manifested. As a child, the women of the household matched the men in numbers. Mother and Fuyumi would dote on her in her earliest days before she'd gained her power- Fuyumi was seven when she was born, nine when Shouko was old enough to play fashion models with her. The two of them would strut down a fake runway in far-too-big high heels and dresses, Shouko having no clue what was going on but eagerly mimicking her sister’s motions as she spun and twirled, their mother laughing and clapping for them. Those memories were her favourite, much preferred to the times she would walk past the training quarters and hear Touya and her father in a screaming match before the heat of flames picked up and a maid would materialize out of seemingly nowhere to scoop her up and move her away. No, the memories of being young, dressing up with Fuyumi, having her hair pulled into high pigtails by her mother, running outside and squealing in joy when Natsuo would pick her up and spin her around—Shouko preferred those.

Then one day in late December, Touya left. He was there, and then he was not. There were no answers for her.

Six days later, Shouko’s Quirk manifested at dinner, fire and ice bursting from her head after she sneezed. Her father’s face lit up, and her mother’s dropped in anguish.

From that point on, gender was a non-factor. There was no difference between male and female on a battlefield of unbelievable superpowers, nor was there in her father’s training room (at that time, at least). He insisted her hair be cut short, long locks cropped to her ears. Shouko’s childish complaint that she looked like a boy was met by a harsh slap across the cheek by her father, her young body skidding across the floor from the impact.

She didn’t complain about it again.

Her days consisted of training until she was ill, tears falling down her face as fire and ice shot from her body erratically. She was three when her Quirk came in, four when she started training, and five when her last point of female contact was removed from her life in a flash of pain and tears, of screeching tea kettles and melting flesh. Fuyumi was hardly allowed to talk to her anymore, not since that fateful late December dinner, and now her mother was gone. Shouko had nothing but her power and her father, two things she was rapidly learning to despise. Her heart started to grow cold, cold, ever colder.

Her elementary school was all-girls, very much an elite affair for wealthy daughters. Shouko didn’t stand out much, ignoring the other students entirely. Why should she care about joining in on soccer games, choir clubs, lunchtime chats? She lived in a different world from all of them. These girls who talked too loud, laughed and cheered for each other, had access to frivolities like dolls and game consoles—Shouko couldn’t relate. Comments about her physical appearance and gender never started until middle school when her schooling became co-ed and boys became a part of the scene.

Shouko didn’t care about boys in the same way she didn’t care about girls—they weren’t a part of her world, her world of pain and burns and a father she loathed so much that she had stopped using his power entirely. Her first year of middle school was the one that made her remember that ah, right, she was female. The stares in elementary school had been ones of confusion and irritation, often born of Shouko brushing everyone off without even a verbal response. The ones she got now, though… they were leers. Suddenly, she was the one staring in confusion as male classmates eyed her body
over, often stopping at her chest or legs where her sailor uniform skirt rode up a bit past her knees. It was both surprising and enlightening- she was different from her father in this way, different from the overpowering and intimidating giants he saw as the ideal heroes. The leers may have disgusted her, yes, but Shouko had a weapon stronger than her ice now.

“I need a bra.” She said one day before training, about a month after middle school started. Internally, she whooped in laughter at the way her father’s face tightened up in discomfort. *Didn’t see that one coming, did you, you piece of trash?* “All the other girls wear them now. I need one too.”

“... Then we’ll tell a maid to get you one.” Endeavor looked like he didn’t know what else to say, something Shouko relished in. She didn’t need a bra that badly- though she was on the tall side, a mix of intense training and a highly monitored diet meant she’d remained almost entirely muscle, her sturdy yet lean body looking more androgynous than anything else. A few nights after that particularly harsh session, a maid sent to measure her confirmed that all she really needed was a training bra. Fine by her. That by itself was what set off a lightbulb in her head- her femininity was something she could use to get back at her father, the bastard who’d robbed her of her childhood.

Slowly, she started growing out her hair. The boy’s cut she’d worn since four years old gave way to chin length locks, and Shouko relished in the subtle twinge of irritation her father wore after her hair finally brushed her shoulders, long enough for her to tie back with a pink elastic- not a colour she particularly cared for, really, but wasn’t it supposed to be for girls or something? Her ultimate goal was to grow it to the length she’d remembered her mothers’ being, rib length or so. The more she could resemble the parent who’s Quirk she planned to use for her entire life, the better. The more she could remind him which parent was allowing her to succeed.

It was all out of spite, frankly. Shouko’s heart remained coated in frost, barring any sort of real happiness. Her world was still so harsh and violent that she knew a moment of genuine softness would mean her downfall. She’d seen what had happened to her mother. All she knew about Touya was that he’d had a meltdown and run off. And most of all, she pretended she was asleep on the nights a shaking Fuyumi would crawl into her bedroom, nestle up next to her to whisper sobbing apologies and ask the air why it had to be like this. The Todoroki bloodline was full of wires ready to snap at any moment, and Shouko knew she was being pulled taught. This would not happen to her, not if she had anything to say about it. She didn’t particularly want to be a hero defined by her gender- people like Midnight always made her roll her eyes- but if it could be something that would separate her further from her glorified sperm donor? Then she’d happily adjust her appearance. God knows her behavior wouldn’t change- that was beyond Shouko’s realm of ability. The thought of wearing big smiles and making squealing noises at cute things and acting cheerful was just undoable. But if she could emulate the subdued aesthetics of an elegant woman- *oh, her mother was elegant, I miss you I miss you I miss you* - then she would achieve her goal.

“Onnee-san. Please teach me makeup.” Fuyumi jolted up from her homework in the dining room, eyes widening at the sight of her sister. The older girl was a second year in university now, studying hard at something or another- Shouko didn’t really talk to her that much. Didn’t get the chance, aside from those nights when she’d crawl into her room, and that was just Fuyumi talking to herself next to Shouko. The bicoloured girl stared blankly ahead as Fuyumi struggled for words.

“I- That’s um- Oh, right, you want to learn cover up for yourself?” Their few interactions over the years had often involved Fuyumi covering bruises and burns for her little sister, something she’d learned to do for everyone else in the house. Shouko briefly pondered over the fact that Fuyumi had essentially become the mother to the children at barely ten years old before shaking her head.

“No. I want to learn makeup. Real makeup like you have. The other girls wear it now.” That was a
slight stretch, but now in her second year of middle school, the other female students certainly seemed to at least be interested in it. Fuyumi looked like she didn’t know what to say before offering a hesitant smile, tapping her phone screen once and checking something.

“Okay, um- yeah, dad won’t be home for a few hours. I can show you some.” Getting up, Fuyumi brushed off her jeans before leading Shouko to her bedroom. It wasn’t as big as her own, but it was more furnished, a few posters from what Shouko vaguely recognized as a popular singer decorating the walls. She also didn’t have a vanity like her older sister did, small and covered with products. “So I don’t really have that much in regards to fancy makeup, but dad’s business associates usually bring gifts for everyone when they meet here, so- ah! But you probably know that already, haha. I bet you haven’t touched yours much.”

Shouko furrowed her brow in confusion. “Wait, what do you mean about ‘yours’? They bring gifts?”

Now it was Fuyumi’s turn to look confused. “Um, they do. You know, like… Like when he had that meeting with Gang Orca and his PR team last month?”

Shouko did remember that, actually. Their estate had a meeting hall built into it, so meets with other pros weren’t uncommon. As per usual, she and her other two siblings had been ushered in to greet Gang Orca and exchange pleasantries with a few people before being told to scuttle back to whatever they were doing beforehand- just routine etiquette, honestly. The hero had seemed nice enough, though Shouko didn’t really care that much about the whole ordeal. “I remember.”

“Yeah! Like how dad passed those courtesy gifts along to us? I got a really pretty set of teacups, Natsuo got this neat little phone speaker, and I think they got you… oh! You got that nice pink lip gloss!” Fuyumi snaps her fingers as she recalls it. “Remember? The thing in the silver packaging?”

“I literally didn’t get anything. I’ve never gotten a present from any heroes before.” Shouko blinked, confusion turning into hard understanding. “… Father must intercept anything meant for me.”

“That’s- oh. Um. Maybe, uh. Never mind.” Fuyumi’s face fell, awkwardness resounding throughout the room until she let out a nervous chuckle and clapped her hands together. “Alrighty! Let’s show you how to use makeup, then.”

Shouko’s anger over this revelation turned into an opportunity for spite. So he was denying her the chance to choose the type of person she wanted to be? Not fucking shocking. That had been her entire life. But the shitty old bastard wasn’t here right now, and she was going to wear makeup no matter what. Allowing Fuyumi to guide her over to the vanity, the older girl pulled Shouko’s hair back into a loose, low ponytail before pinning back her bangs. “Um, yes. So I’m gonna do your makeup so you get an idea of how it goes on. S-So first things first, we’ll get your hair out of the way. It’s gotten really long! It’s past your shoulder blades now.”

Fuyumi was trying too hard to make the atmosphere light again, but her efforts were commendable enough to get a response out of Shouko. “I’ve been growing it.”

“It looks so pretty!” The pitch in Fuyumi’s voice indicated her relief at getting a reply. Shouko knew too well that she didn’t always indicate that she’d heard people past a nod or flick of the eyes. “Okay, so I’m gonna start with a primer. That basically gets your skin ready for makeup and ensures it stays on.”

Fuyumi talked Shouko through all the steps, the younger girl content simply to listen to her sister as she spoke about different products and how each one went on. The only small pause was during the application of foundation, Fuyumi’s voice trickling to a pause as the makeup started to reach the edge
of her scar. Shouko knew it wouldn’t be enough to cover it- if the chemical products developed by Japan’s best skincare specialists could hardly fade it despite how hard her father had pushed for it in her youth, it wasn’t going anywhere. “Just go around it. Eye makeup can go on it normally, but it’ll be too hard to cover it up.”

“R-Right!” Stumbling a bit, Fuyumi fell back into rhythm shortly afterwards, moving onto contouring and explaining how to seal the makeup. Shouko watched in content silence as her face changed gradually, internally realizing how she couldn’t recall the last time she’d blushed as the pink powder of the same name was applied to her cheeks. She wasn’t too interested in the makeup itself, but for a little… it was nice. Doing something an ordinary girl her age would do. Did her classmates have big sisters of their own to show them how eyeliner is applied? Did they also shirk in caution away from the eyelash curler until it was explained? This was a world of normalcy, one she’d been denied her entire life- one Fuyumi had been denied. The older girl looked like she was actually having fun, making little jokes about the names of the products (Shouko had no idea what ‘Deep Throat’ meant or why her sister giggled at her saying it, but it did sound like a bad name for a blush) and chatting idly about her day. Turns out her major was childhood education. Shouko was learning more about her older sister in the span of an hour than she had in the past seven years.

At one point, Fuyumi had excused herself for a minute, coming back in with a small black speaker in her hands. “This is that speaker Natsuo got from Gang Orca and his firm- he let me borrow it!” Turning it on and fiddling with her cell phone for a minute, the room soon filled with music. It wasn’t anything special, some pop song, but Shouko found herself tapping her foot nonetheless. Maybe it was just because she was enjoying this entire atmosphere- comfortable, lighthearted, with hands on her skin that touched her softly with no intention to harm. It was… nice. Really nice. Despite herself, her lips curled up slightly, small smile on her face as Fuyumi returned to her makeup.

“It’s almost done, Shouko-lat.” There was a pause as Fuyumi realized what she’d done, the girl making a ‘meep’ noise and pulling away even as Shouko missed the feeling of the hand on her cheek. “I, uh- I’m sorry! Th-That slipped out, I-”

“No, Onee-san. It’s okay.” Shouko’s heart had jumped at the nickname. God, how long had it been since she’d heard it? At least six years, probably more. It came from Natsuo originally- as a very small child, Shouko’s love for zaru soba was only tempered by her love for chocolate- milk chocolate specifically. Given how much easier it was to be given a piece of chocolate than it was to be cooked a full meal, she ate it a lot more, too. Having noticed her adoration, Natsuo teasingly knighted her ‘Shouko-lat’ because lookie Fuyumi, lookie momma, doesn’t it sound like chocolate when ya say it fast?! Let’s call her Shouko-lat! And it had stuck up until her cursed Quirk developed, until she was pulled away from that love and warmth and forced onto a strict diet with no room for sweets.

… God, she hadn’t eaten chocolate since she was five. “Please. You can call me that.”

Fuyumi looked hesitant. “I… If you’re sure, then… Okay. Shouko-lat.” Hiding the warmth that spread through her body at the name, Shouko settled back into the routine of makeup and chatter, occasionally interspersed with a word from herself. It wasn’t like she had much to say, not much of a life to talk about, but she did recount a story about a boy from her class pranking the teacher with a blackboard eraser over the door only for the teacher’s laser eyes Quirk to instantly disintegrate it. Though she hadn’t found it particularly interesting at the time, Fuyumi’s overjoyed belly laughs brought that small smile back to her own lips.

Maybe it wasn’t the makeup she was after. Maybe it wasn’t the urge to spite her father that drove this afternoon. As Fuyumi offered to style her hair, Shouko’s agreement stemmed from something entirely different. Maybe… Maybe she just wanted to experience an ordinary moment of happiness.
As she actually *chuckled* due to the way the hairspray made Fuyumi sneeze, Shouko could forget her burden as an object created to overcome the current Number One. She was a normal kid having fun with her sister.

All good things, though, must come to an end. And in the Todoroki household, it was always an end of flames and tears. Just as Fuyumi was digging through her vanity drawer to find the perfect accessory for her newlystyled hair (which now barely brushed her shoulders due to how the loose ringlets shortened it, but Shouko didn’t particularly care about that), the music was just loud enough to drown out the stomping footsteps. Loud enough to ensure neither of them heard Fuyumi’s phone buzz with Natsuo’s warning text. Loud enough that they didn’t suspect a thing until the door slammed open, shattering their happy moment.

Fuyumi yelped and Shouko jumped at the sudden noise and heat. Endeavor stood in the doorway, blazing gaze looking down upon both his daughters. Eyes flickered around the scene seemingly stopped in time- Fuyumi frozen in shock, bent over her vanity drawers, diamond hair clip in one hand. Shouko, deathly still with her hands in her kneeling lap, face done in full makeup with her hair curled. The music played on, too cheerful for a situation of this level.

“... Shouko.” Endeavor spoke evenly- never a good sign. “Get changed. We’re training in twenty minutes.”

“You’re-” Shouko’s voice caught in her throat for a moment. “You’re home early.”

Her father’s eyes turned harsh. “Work ended early. And I don’t see how that negates my previous order. And as for you,” Endeavor’s gaze turned to Fuyumi, who was visibly trembling under his stare. “I need to talk to you.”

“It- Father, it was my idea.” The reality of the situation crashes down on Shouko all at once, and she’s scrambling to get to her feet and get between Endeavor and her older sister. “You can’t- I asked her to do this, don’t-”

“And she chose to agree to your *childish whims*.” A hand wraps around her wrist, and Shouko bites back a scream as she feels the heat burn right through her sailor uniform’s long sleeve and onto her skin. “This is not your world, Shouko. This is *not* the life you were created for. Now wash the crap off your face and meet me in the training hall before you make this worse for all of us.”

“Shouko, honey, please just go.” Fuyumi pleads, and Shouko can feel her own heart break at the tone in her voice. “It’ll be okay, please, please just go.”

She can’t even bring herself to look back as the shame as to what she’s put Fuyumi through hits her. Yanking her hand away from Endeavor, she steps around him and out into the hall. As soon as she’s out of sight, she books it for the furthest bathroom from this wing of the house. Shouko learns that it’s harder wiping makeup off when you’re crying from something other than immense physical injury for the first time in maybe four years. She learns many things that evening. She learns Endeavor is not above threatening to ‘burn that goddamn hair off’ if she doesn’t understand her position as his creation. She learns his attacks become infinitely harder to block when there’s anger fueling him. She learns the healing Quirk user employed privately with the vast funds belonging to the Todoroki family can keep an unaffected face while puttering away at the fabric that melted into her skin from the sheer force of her father’s fire.

And the next morning, Shouko learns crushing guilt as Fuyumi, poorly concealed black eye and all, hugs her and apologizes for not being more careful. *Shouko-lat, I’m so sorry, I didn’t protect you.*

Shouko’s hatred for her father grows like a pillar of ice. She’ll never let that bastard win.
i've pushed this girl as far as she could go

Chapter Notes

Chapter two, AKA: I Wax On And On About The Todoroki Family For Like Six Hours (alt title: Wow All The Chapter Titles Are [Sometimes Edited Slightly] Lyrics From Songs About Abuse Because I'm Not Creative)

But really, thank you guys so much for the positive feedback! It seriously did warm my heart whenever I got a comment or kudos. Not to get too personal, but I'm kind of in a dark place right now, and people appreciating my work is genuinely such a beacon of joy. Thank you!

Ok, so I WAS gonna introduce more Class 1-A kiddos, have the first convo between Tododeku, actually progress the plot, y'know. But why actually write the story when I can write more random Todo family interactions because I'm real emo about all of them? For real though, this chapter is mostly just Shouko musing and some sweet Todosib interactions 'cause I'm weak. Their dynamic isn't super clear in canon, and I really wanted to expand on what growing up in a home as messy as the Todoroki one might do for the bonds they have together. We're actually gonna get into some action + plot soon, don't worry!

Quick notes!
- I'm basically running on headcanons at this point esp. in regards to Natsuo (cause he's neat and we don't know much about him in regards to the others). If you see something that isn't confirmed or doesn't line up, I probably did that on purpose! [meguca voice: my canon now. fight]
- There's mentions (very brief!) of self-injury at one point! Namely, skin biting. Just a quick heads up! If you need to avoid that, stop reading at "Now, washing her hands and staring into the mirror, Shouko is alone with her thoughts." and start reading again at "Natsuo got it worst of all, obviously."
- Don't worry, grape bitch won't be here for long.
- It looked as though the entrance exams were divided by gender in canon, meaning Shouko and a certain windy boi wouldn't have had a bad interaction leading to one of them not attending UA! We literally just learned today who the second recommended Class 1-B kid is (Tokage), and she'll still be included! We'll just say she got in during the normal exam like everyone else, haha.

Oh shit this author's note is getting too long, better end it here. Please enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Months pass, and it was more of the same. More isolation, more acts of rebellion that lead her to violence, and more charred skin Shouko hid under her uniform. Idly, she wondered if the fact that most of her father’s violent attacks were aimed at her upper body was a coincidence, or if it had something to do with the way UA’s skirt wouldn’t cover much of her legs.

It had been the understanding her entire life that she would attend the most prestigious hero school in Japan just as her father had. Honestly, when Shouko thought about it, she wasn’t sure if it had even
been said aloud at any point- it had been the unspoken truth. She’d been made to ramp up her studying in her third year of middle school, growing more and more isolated. There was a joke in her school that the mysterious and silent daughter of Endeavor might secretly be a ghost considering how little they saw of her outside of class itself. Honestly, Shouko didn’t think they were too far off with that one.

In regards to her own feelings… Well, Shouko knew damn well at this point that trying to delve into the emotions she’d buried so deeply in ice would only cause her to implode. At best, she’d be a mess in a hospital ward like her mother. At worst? She’d suffer whatever fate Touya had out in the world. So if you were to ask, no, Shouko did **not** have feelings one way or another about the things that had been done to her. Her only moods were haughtiness and rage expressed through spiteful acts she knew would bring herself punishment.

She tried not to think of her afternoon with Fuyumi the year prior. Happiness was reserved for those in the other world. Her trying to cross over would only bring innocent people pain- and what kind of hero would knowingly force others to suffer?

*(You know the answer to that, though.)*

The days rolled by, and it was suddenly the UA entrance exam. She’d been recommended, yes, but that didn’t mean the prestigious school didn’t still require her to prove her worth through a specialized exam. Male and female applicants were separated- to Shouko’s understanding, the school accepted two boys and two girls through recommendations. Once upon a time, she had dreamed of failing this exam just to spite her father, to show him she **wasn’t** the perfect tool he’d tried to shape her into. But… Aside from how he’d almost certainly beat her within an inch of her life, heroism seemed like perhaps the only path on which she could reasonably go. What else existed in the world for a girl forged together with unbelievable power sizzling under her skin, someone hardened by fire and ice and hate? This was her only option. Lining up at the starting line and listening to Present Mic- one of the few famous pros she hadn’t met in person- explain the rules (and did Shouko ever realize how she was going to crush this thing), she simply mentally repeated that truth drilled into her over the years. **This is my only option.**

The buzzer went, and she was **gone** in a flurry of perfectly practiced ice, pure power soaring from her feet as she scaled the course like it was a children’s playground. There was no hesitation in her movements- after all, this was precisely the event she’d been training relentlessly for over the past month. Each step was as natural as breathing. She finished a full thirty seconds in front of the other girl, a tall dark haired beauty who… seemed to be missing her top? Huh. She forgot that, but didn’t forget the motorcycle she was riding? Whatever. She offered Shouko an exhausted smile, and the bicoloured girl simply looked away in disinterest. She had achieved her goal, and she’d done it using only her mother’s ice. She sincerely hoped they showed the tape to her father, Present Mic’s congratulations being drowned out in her spiteful thoughts. She flipped her hair over her shoulder- it reached the top of her ribcage when she pulled it in front of her ears. Exactly the same as her mother had hers the last time Shouko saw her.

Yes, today had been a victory. Even if the person she was claiming her win for thought her a monster as hideous as her father.

UA is… well, about what she’d expected.

Shouko takes her assigned seat without questioning. There’s a boy with bright red hair and a pink girl with inky black eyes chatting excitedly with each other near the front, and their conversations halt as they both lean back with an enthusiastic wave and a greeting. She nods, which is essentially the Shouko equivalent to a big grin and a hello, before proceeding to watch the others fill in with
considerable disinterest. A plain looking boy with a tail, a charmingly frog-like girl, a stoic boy with a bird head who nods at her before taking the seat directly in front of her- so these are her classmates, hm? She couldn’t remember a single name out of her middle school classmates. This seemed like it would be more of the same.

Some stood out more than others as they piled in. The other girl from the recommendation exams gives her a smile of recognition before taking a seat next to her. This time, it looks like she didn’t forget her shirt. Shouko gives a nod in return. Meanwhile, the far too loud and boisterous boy with glasses and wildly waving hands has an air about him that she can’t quite place. She certainly doesn’t think she’s met him before, but he’s familiar in a way. The next boy to come in- short with purple balls dotted along his head in lieu of hair- makes a whistling noise as he looks from Shouko to ponytail girl. Ponytail’s face scrunches up in revulsion as Shouko merely blinks. She doesn’t get it, but in any case, it seems like the last of the class was starting to file in. The glasses boy seemed to be speaking with a peppy brunette and green haired girl near the front of the room, the latter seeming wildly embarrassed over something. She’s not sure why her eyes hold onto that scene for longer than the rest or why something stirs in her chest, but her focus is quickly pulled to the strange caterpillar man shambling into the classroom.

His attitude is one Shouko can work with, and she’s one of the first out on the field in her gym uniform. Quirk assessment is chugging along easily, giving her a look at everyone’s Quirks. The other recommended girl- and she actually remembers this one’s name, Yaoyorozu, doesn’t her father’s PR firm do business with a corporation of that name?- indirectly confirms why she was missing her shirt during the exam. Her Quirk seems to allow her to create things from her body mass, which is actually pretty impressive. Negating gravity, talking to animals, explosions, leg engines- and that’s where she knows him, Ingenium has been to her estate once or twice for business affairs. He’s not old enough to have a son, so this is likely a brother or other relative. Shouko wouldn’t be the only legacy hero here, which is comforting in an odd way. She wouldn’t be the only one living up to expectations.

Speaking of expectations, the ones she’s set for the green haired girl have to be the lowest (only slightly above the strange grape boy who keeps leering at Yaoyorozu like boys in middle school would at her). She hasn’t demonstrated any Quirk at all yet, and the way she’s practically radiating anxiety reminds doesn’t say many positive things about her. There’s a brief incident between her and their teacher (Aizawa, she should at least remember that one) before his capture weapon releases and allows her to take the ball throw after a miserable first attempt. Shouko genuinely has no clue what her Quirk is or if it’s useful in any of these tests. Looks like she’ll be the fir-

Shouko’s hair is pushed back in a gust of wind as the girl launches the ball like a rocket.

Many, many years later, Shouko Todoroki will recall this as the moment she’d felt a twinge in her chest that she’d never experienced before, not knowing what to make of it at the time. For now, though, all that runs through her mind is ‘what the fuck’.

There’s shouts and cheers from engine and gravity, the rest of the class murmuring excitedly at what kind of Quirk could possibly do something like that. Aizawa has to stop explosion from charging the girl, who looks like she’s cradling a broken finger. Erasure seems like an incredibly useful Quirk when dealing with superpowered students, and it’s oddly satisfying to see Bakugou (the name Aizawa calls him as he lectures the furious boy through his capture weapon) shout and uselessly attempt to set off explosions. Despite his strong Quirk, it’s clear the boy is driven entirely by his emotions. Just another person from the other world, the world where people don’t beat the feelings out of you. Sighing, Aizawa drags Bakugou back to the group before ordering the girl (Deku? It’s what the loud boy had been calling her) back to the crowd. Though she walks meekly, head down and body crouched to make herself seem smaller- which was just odd considering Shouko doubted
the girl even reached five feet standing straight up- Deku’s shakey smile brings to mind a certain hero she was engineered to defeat.

There’s that twinge in her chest again. How odd. Shouko keeps looking her over to try and figure out why that might be.

Now that she’s within a few yards of her, Shouko can definitively say this Deku (strange name, but it could be worse) girl must be around four foot eleven at the most. That said, she’s clearly highly athletic underneath the gym uniform- Shouko notes she looks like she built herself for strength rather than endurance like Shouko herself was crafted. Her biceps are visible as she cradles her broken hand, and the bicoloured girl feels an emotion that she’s certain must be jealousy as she has no other classification for the pressure in her stomach that rose up so suddenly. All that said, the girl has a remarkable babyface, teary green eyes and chubby cheeks flanked with freckles. Her hair is a huge mop of wild green, tied up in a high ponytail that snuck all the way down to the small of her back. It was a peculiar contrast, honestly, but strength and sweetness somehow felt right on her. At some point, Deku seemed to have noticed her staring and gave the other girl a confused look, but Shouko’s eyes remained fixated on her until she awkwardly stepped behind engine boy. What was so special about this ordinary girl? Shouko honestly didn’t know, and the feeling soon passed as the tests move along.

Deku comes dead last in the apprehension test, which is just confusing to Shouko. Surely a girl with that much muscle could have bested well over half the class in the grip test and overtaken most in the running portions? Not to mention how far her pitch had gone- the fact that the invisible girl or the purple boy staring at said invisible girl’s butt in the gym pants somehow did better than her is just peculiar. Luckily (and Shouko doesn’t know why she finds it fortunate that this complete stranger wasn’t expelled, doesn’t know why she cares), it turns out the expulsion threat was entirely false. The girl is sent to the nurse’s office crying tears of relief, and Shouko pushes Deku from her mind as she meanders back to class. Whatever peculiar feeling is in her chest can be ignored in favour of the reason she’s here.

The day goes by in a flurry of teachers greeting them and syllabuses Shouko tucks neatly away in her backpack. Though much of the class sticks around after the final bell rings to chat, she has no time for that, leaving as soon as she can. There will be training tonight, she’s sure of it, and she wants time to get her homework done first- she’s learned over time that it’s much harder to focus on school while you’re trying not to strain exhausted muscles or lean against a fresh bruise. As soon as she opens the front door to her house, Fuyumi pops her head out of the kitchen at the end of the hallway.

“Ah, Shouko! Can you come here for a second?”

It’s been… a while since they were able to have a long conversation. The guilt over two years ago still aches from time to time, Shouko’s heart cautioning her about putting her sister in the line of fire (literally) because of her own selfishness no matter how much she craves a gentle touch or a chilly hand brushing through her hair gently. The words of her father on that day ring through her head like funeral bells: This is not the life you were created for. Even so, if Fuyumi is beckoning her… Shouko walks forwards, hanging her backpack on the hook in the hallway before turning into the kitchen.

The scene that greets her is a surprise in the way that finding an elephant wearing a top hat in your bathroom is a surprise- completely unbelievable and entirely unprecedented. Fuyumi is beaming at her, pink apron tied over her work clothes. Natsuo is seated at the kitchen table behind her, and he’s smiling and offering a wave too. Three beautifully presented bowls of zaru soba are set out on the
table, and one is right in front of Shouko’s chair as if it’s waiting for her.

“You tryin’ to catch flies or something?” Natsu (the Natsu she hasn’t seen or spoken to in almost nine months) teases, and Shouko belatedly realizes her mouth has been hanging open in shock. The girl quickly closes her mouth, but the bewilderment over the whole situation is still leaving her wide eyed. It takes her a moment to even allow her eyes to flick to Fuyumi in search of answers.

“Surprise!” The older girl chuckles. “Dad got a call today- they needed him for a situation way up in Miyagi. He’s gonna be gone until tomorrow, so I figured we could have dinner together to celebrate your first day at UA!”

Shouko wants to pinch herself. How? How is all of this happening? Her siblings (all but one) are here, it’s her favourite food, the night is free of the bastard, they’re all smiling at her, smiling like she isn’t a cursed child who lead to their neglect and loss of their mother and-

“Shouko?” Fuyumi’s voice breaks through the spiral, and Shouko realizes her hands are trembling. It’s real. All of this normal family life is real and it’s happening to her.

“It’s… It looks really good.” It’s only her years of practice that allow Shouko to speak without her voice wavering and cracking. “Really good. Onee-san, onii-san. Thank you.”

“Ah, good!” Fuyumi wipes her forehead, giggling. “I thought you were upset or something. How about we get to eating?”

Natsu waves his hand in the air with a grin. “Is UA still as crazy as I remember? Is Recovery Girl still there?” Both her siblings had gone to UA too, Shouko remembers this, but they were both in General Studies thanks to a number of factors. Their father had forbidden them from trying for the Hero Course- there was going to be just one heir to the Todoroki legacy, and it was going to be his perfect creation-, neither of them had much desire to be a hero in the first place, and despite Fuyumi’s ice Quirk being on par with their mothers’ in sheer strength, in Natsu’s case…

Well, there’d never been a Quirkless hero before. Sometimes, Shouko wondered if perhaps it was better to be the isolated child turned into an object for her father’s prideful goals instead of the shameful burden kicked out on his eighteenth birthday and forced to change his surname to his mother's so that he would no longer taint the family line.

It wasn’t the time to dwell on that, though. For now, Natsu (Natsu Hikawa now, she thinks idly) was back in the house, and they’d get to be a real family if only for a little bit. Taking a seat next to him and across from Fuyumi, Shouko hides how she wants to freeze time and stay like this forever when Natsu ruffles her hair affectionately. She’d spent less time with him than even Fuyumi, the boy wisely choosing to hide himself away from their father’s rage by either locking himself in his room or avoiding being home at all. Honestly, that and the fact that he was funding his own way through university might be the most she knows of Natsu past their childhood playing. Even so, he’s always been affectionate and kind, giving hugs and big smiles, and Shouko marvels at the fact that her siblings emerged from this cursed household so kind, so full of life, so loving.

(Why, then, is her own heart so twisted?)

Over the taps of chopsticks, a scene from nearly two years ago replayed. Natsu became less of an acquaintance she sometimes saw around the house and more of a proper big brother over the slurping of noodles. She learnt that he was attending the same university Fuyumi did and that he was majoring in kinesiology, minoring in psychology. He wanted to become a physical therapist eventually. He has a girlfriend who was all the way from Nagasaki, and her Quirk let her change her hair colour to whatever she liked. Recently, he’s been learning sign language because it seemed
interesting. Shouko could only listen, taking it all in. In turn, she offered what meager information she had on herself (it wasn’t like she had much of a life to speak of, really). She hung a bird feeder outside her window lately to watch the robins. Her new teacher is a pro she’s never heard of. One of Ingenium’s relatives is in her class. The table filled with life, Fuyumi joining in. Shouko still wasn’t fully convinced this wasn’t a dream she was having. A normal family dinner. Normal sibling talk. Normal.

Briefly, she excuses herself to the restroom with Natsuo’s teasing call of ‘call us if you get lost!’ prompting a secret smile as she exits their line of sight. Now, washing her hands and staring into the mirror, Shouko is alone with her thoughts. Did they ever feel jealous? Asks one. Jealous of me?

Because although her childhood was hell, the burning hell that sometimes led her to bite at her own wrists to try and express her own helpless rage in the only way she was ever taught, she was at least acknowledged. Natsuo got it worst of all, obviously- the mere concept that one of his own children could be Quirkless seemed to drive Endeavor to fury. But Fuyumi had been ignored unless she was somehow important to Shouko’s development. Her Quirk was powerful, but their father had very little interest in ice alone. She was the mother after her own left, forced to learn to cook and clean and tend to wounds. Of course there were maids and other employees, but their numbers dwindled as Shouko got older- Shouko figures it was probably to keep loose lips from spilling the truth about this hell house. Had they ever looked at Shouko, showered in attention and given first priority in any situation, sent to the best private schools and given the best tutors, raised to have the career just about everyone dreamed of?

It was possible. Shouko knew she was often jealous of them, in any case. She’d been a bit jealous of Touya when she was extremely small, considering all the attention he got from their father. Now she knows what a foolish thing that was to envy. This was a curse, and he just got out in time. She’s not so lucky.

… Did her siblings miss him? Do they know where he went? Shouko was far too young and hardly saw him- she was less attached. But he would have been Natsuo’s older brother, someone to look up to and pester out of love ( like the daydreams you have about what you and Fuyumi could have had if you weren’t cursed ). And Fuyumi… Well, he was her twin. Shouko can’t imagine how badly Touya vanishing must have hurt her. Does she think about him sometimes…?

She realized that she’d been staring blankly into the mirror with the water running for a bit too long. Turning off the water and drying her hands, Shouko swiftly returned to the dining room. Negative thoughts could be pushed aside for now- this was a rare good day, and she wasn’t about to let thoughts about her doomed legacy ruin it. Taking her seat, she managed to smile gently back at Fuyumi. “Welcome back, Shoko-lat.”

“You guys still use that nickname?” Natsuo beamed.

“When it’s just the two of us, sometimes.” Shouko nodded. Though it wasn’t really something punishment-worthy, she had no idea how Endeavor might react to the cutesy nickname. What if he took it as a sign Fuyumi was interfering too much with his prized creation? Best to just not use it and avoid unnecessary conflict.

Natsuo laughed between slurps of his soba. “I’m sure whoever came up with it was devilishly handsome and brilliant, eh, Shouko-lat?”

They’ve exchanged more words within the span of an hour than they have in eight years, Shouko realizes numbly, and a part of her heart that managed to escape her ice twinges with sadness at the realization that they won’t get to be a normal family like this for a very long time. It could have been different, couldn’t it? Things like this could have been their version of normal had they not all pulled
the short stick when it came to their birth family. Imagine if they didn’t all have to memorize each
floorboard that creaked in the house and instead lived a life where getting scolded didn’t mean the
too-grown-up big sister treating burns and covering bruises. That was a reality that could have been
theirs, once.

… Well, she could focus on ‘what ifs’ some other time. Fuyumi’s genuinely happy smile, Natsuo’s
presence, Shouko’s free night without training—these were rare moments, as were most of Shouko’s
voyages into the normal world she was denied. She was going to hold onto these precious memories
as tightly as she could.

(Because you know who you could become if you ever forget the light, don’t you?)

Chapter End Notes

(Fun fact: As far as I know we don't know Rei's maiden name, so I gave her one
myself! Hikawa is spelt 氷川, and means 'ice river'! The more you know.)

I can't believe Todo has had her disaster lesbian awakening, even if she doesn't realize it
yet. Listen: if you're a person attracted to girls, you legally cannot look me in the eyes
and tell me you wouldn't be down on one knee if you saw this very polite toddler reveal
herself to have an earth-shattering Quirk and biceps worth dying for. It cannot be done.

Anyways, thank you so much for reading! I'd love if you dropped me a comment or
kudos (or just want to cry with me about the Todosibs!!!!!!), and I almost always reply!
Thank you so much for reading, and I'll see you soon!
mother i don't feel good

Chapter Notes

Ohhhh my god how the hell did this get so long. I swear to god, I didn't think this one was gonna end up as 18 pages on Docs, but sometimes you just get super into the groove and then the next thing you know you've been writing for 5 straight hours without a break.

But anyways! I gotta provide the heads up here that this chapter contains some pretty common triggers/stuff that you may just not be comfy reading without a warning. To avoid spoiling it, I'm going to put the warnings in the end notes, so if you suspect a fic of this nature may contain something you're uncomfortable with, please check that out!

Final note for now: Momo and Midnight both appear in this chapter, and I wanted to note that this fic actually uses two redesigns! It felt a little weird writing a fic about sexism and girls relating to femininity and then keeping Momo's boobs hanging out, and Midnight's canon costume is just... ugly as hell haha. For Momo's, I am using the design by Zensoko (http://zensoko.tumblr.com/post/177550337778/decided-to-jump-on-the-momo-redesign), and the Midnight design by Padawanton (http://padawanton.tumblr.com/post/177175968756/i-was-too-far-gone-when-i-realized-that-i-had). Please go check out the artists! And yes, I made sure to get their permission haha.

Anyways! Onto the fic!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The peace brought on by their dinner was temporary, even as Shouko's heart ached for it to last longer. The next day, Natsuo was gone- he had to be, Endeavor returning while he was there would have been a disaster- and the house was Shouko's alone, Fuyumi having left early for work with an apology note on the kitchen table and the encouragement that she have some toast for breakfast. Shouko leaves without food- she doesn't feel particularly hungry right now.

The next day is… Normal school, mostly. Things she’s done her entire life. Math and science never interested her (and English has a funny way of escaping her grasp constantly), but she can handle all of it fine enough. What is new is when All Might enters the room with a bang loud enough that Shouko subconsciously tenses, her mechanical pencil creaking as it’s coated in frost from how hard her hand is clenching it. All Might is no threat, she reminds herself, but it takes a minute for her ears to stop ringing. She doesn’t like the sound of doors slamming. There are plenty of noises Shouko hates, really. Nails on chalkboards. People chewing out loud.

(Garage doors opening.)

They’re given their hero costumes, Shouko smiling slightly in the dressing room when she realizes it’s been built just as she requested. Though she was honestly more comfortable in something subtle and loose, that was also what her father’s design team had recommended when talks about a potential costume arose last year. Though he’d been… displeased with her choice, he couldn’t stop Shouko from submitting her request for a skintight bodysuit in pure white (inspired slightly by a conversation they’d had where her father grumbled over the stupidity of Mt. Lady’s pale-coloured...
bodysuit), the left side of her body encased in an ice-like armour. The heater is on her back, looped around both shoulders and under her chest, and she can feel the idle warmth as she slips it on, ensuring one half is tucked under her ice armour suitably. It only heats, never cools- she won’t ever need it to cool.

“Your costume is very nice, Todoroki.” A voice from beside her speaks, and Yaoyorozu is smiling at her. Her own costume is fitting for her Quirk- a bodysuit sits slightly lower around her hips than an average bathing suit, a yellow belt of unopened pockets sitting around her waist. The costume goes up to her neck, a long closed zipper running from there to below where her belly button presumably is. A white cape graces her shoulders, and Shouko briefly wonders if she had a professional team aiding her in the design- the Yaoyorozu family certainly had the money for it.

“Thank you. So is yours.” Shouko can compliment a good design when she sees it. The rest of the girls are mulling about excitedly, complimenting each other’s costumes as they finish getting them on. Shouko’s eyes drift to Deku’s green, skin-tight suit as the girl pulls her wild green ponytail through a hole in the back of her head covering. Hm. The whole thing looks a little tacky and hastily made, frankly. Skin-tight seems to be the norm among female heroes, herself included, so she’s not surprised that a quick glance leaves earphone girl and the floating pair of gloves as the only outliers. Shouko doesn’t have much time to focus on that, though, as everyone else is piling out of the changeroom, and she’s not about to be left behind.

Just about everyone else is outside, Shouko instantly noticing engine boy (Iida, apparently- That’s how Fuyumi and Natsuo had referred to his older brother after she brought him up last night) and his Ingenium-like costume. So he’d be carrying on that particular legacy, hm? Just another thing to differentiate her family from most other heroic households. There’s a twinge of disappointment, of maybe someone would have understood before Shouko quickly squashes it, turning to All Might.

Battle trials? Sounded decent enough. Shouko finds herself paired up with a Mezo Shouji, who nods as they search the crowd for each other (it isn’t difficult to find him- his appearance isn’t one you easily forget). They won’t be going for a while, and the other two they’ll be paired up against- Mashirao Ojiro and Tooru Hagakure- don’t seem like any sort of significant threat. As the first groups are sent off to their posts- Deku is shaking in her sneakers, it seems, and the stare Bakugou gives her is downright feral. Shouko has a bad feeling about this.

“We should formulate a plan of action.” A voice interrupts her thoughts, and she turns to find Shouji towering over her. Shouko’s a bit tall for her age and ethnicity, five foot six last time she measured, and she still finds this guy huge. Those were Mutant Quirks for you, she supposed.

“Perhaps.” Shouko takes a moment to cast an icy glare at the grape boy whose eyes are locked firmly on her rear. The boy blanches and skitters back- good. She knows she can give a mean scowl when she wants to, but she settles her expression into her normal one of neutral distaste as she turns back to Shouji. “Can you explain your Quirk?”

“My Quirk is called Dupli-Arms.” Shouji starts, raising his six interconnected limbs up. “I can recreate my own body parts on the ends, and they have enhanced abilities when compared to the original.” To demonstrate, he creates a mouth on the end of one of his limbs, which then begins talking for him. “I can manifest many different parts at once, as well.”

It’s creepy to watch, but it’s nonetheless going to be useful for what Shouko is already planning. “I see.” Her eyes flick briefly to the screens around the room as the teams start off, Deku and gravity girl climbing in through a side window. “Can you determine where people are by their footsteps? If you make an ear, that is.”

“Generally, yes.” Shouji nods.
“Good. Do that when the match starts, and I’ll handle the rest.” At her response, Shouji cocks an eyebrow.

"Are you sure? What’s your Quirk?"

Shouko figured she couldn’t really afford to lie about her Quirk, but she could stretch the truth in regards to what it was capable of. “My Quirk is Half-Hot Half-Cold. I can generate large amounts of ice. I’ll freeze the building and keep them in place while I get the bomb.”

She could almost feel Shouji’s apprehension at both the name and the described ability, but he seems content to leave it be for now, turning to the screens as Shouko does. It looks like Bakugou has found Deku, and Shouko finds herself cringing at the cruelty of the situation. There’s no reason for him to brutalize her like that, and she feels an unpleasant memory crawl up her spine and tingle at the back of her neck. Electric boy- Kaminari?- makes a comment about Bakugou not holding back at all against a girl, and she’d roll her eyes at the dated commentary if she could pull her eyes away from the screen. An enormous explosion covers the camera in smoke, Bakugou ignoring All Might’s warning, and Shouko releases a breath she didn’t realize she was holding in when Deku stumbles to her feet, parts of her costume torn and skin reddened in familiar burn patterns. For an awful second, it genuinely didn’t look like she was coming back from that.

Shouko finds herself echoing the same opinion as multiple of her classmates- why isn’t she using her power? Deku is being beat into the ground, picked up and thrown like a ragdoll, and it’s almost infuriating. Did she just forget what she did to the baseball the other day? The pink girl in the eye straining costume makes a noise between a gasp and a whimper as Deku braces for an impact, and-

The entire upper floor shatters with the combined force of an explosion and a punch, rubble flying wildly and disrupting multiple camera angles. Iida and gravity are blown back, though the girl takes the opportunity to quickly grab a pillar and launch a flurry of debris at the boy. Shouko’s barely paying attention when gravity jumps onto the bomb- like the rest of the class, her eyes are fixated on Deku’s broken body, arm bent back so far and burned so deeply that she feels her stomach twist. She collapses in a pile of rubble, legs equally twisted, and Bakugou can only stare, slack-jawed, at the girl who broke herself just to set up a convoluted plan. Even so, she wins. She won like that.

Even so, that kind of attack… Shouko thinks she knows why she was so interested in this girl now. She’s not sure her current theory is correct, but…

If it is, things are going to get complicated.

The rest of the matches and their results are no shock to her (though Shouko is quietly pleased to note that nobody else had to be carried out on a stretcher). Her own match with Shouji is over in a heartbeat, Shouko barely acknowledging the frozen Hagakure and Ojiro as she went to claim the bomb. It also turns out that the girl is not named Deku, but Izumi Midoriya. That makes more sense. Shouko learns this through the concerned whispers of Uraraka- gravity girl, apparently- and Iida, which she finds herself ignoring Team G and Team C’s battle (and she’s not exactly torn up about that, given how the grape fool’s constant leering whenever Yaoyorozu opens her zipper to expose her stomach leaves Shouko with a bad taste in her mouth) in order to eavesdrop. Midoriya’s Quirk is called Super Power, and it apparently has a bad habit of injuring her whenever she uses it. That… seems like an inconvenient limitation. Shouko knows the pain that comes with Quirk overuse (frostbite is not an experience she is eager to go through again), but decimation on that level is really bad. She wonders how long Midoriya will last in the hero course like that, and then takes a moment to puzzle over why the thought leaves a bad taste in her mouth.

As the exercise wraps up and Shouko finds herself in the changeroom, she ponders over the results.
Who was her biggest competition here? It had been drilled into her mind that every other student was a rival, someone she’d have to overcome eventually to become number one. Honestly, the biggest threats from what she’d seen as of yet were Yaoyorozu, Bakugou and Tokoyami in descending order. Yaoyorozu had easily the most versatile Quirk in the classroom, and she’d even come ahead of Shouko in the assessment test the day before. She was the one to watch out for the most. Bakugou’s power level was completely insane, but his entitled attitude was clearly holding him back. If Shouko was lucky, he’d eventually get himself expelled and she could tick him off the list. Tokoyami was more of a dark horse (dark bird?), but she’d seen his careful steps and planned out maneuvers during his combat trial. Not watching him would be a mistake.

She was caught up in her thoughts as she changed, ignorant to the world around her. Stupid mistake. Shouko didn’t even realize someone was trying to get her attention until her bare back was prodded—right where her spine still ached from a vicious kick during last week’s training with her father. Reflexively, Shouko spun around, grabbing the offender’s wrist and wrenching it upwards. It was a simple move, one that had been beat into her when she failed to perform it correctly, so it was instinct to perform. Until she heard the pained yowl and remembered that this was the changeroom, not the training room, she was fully prepared to follow through with the traditional knee to the sternum. Shouko blinked once, and the attacker vanished, replaced by a squirming girl with horns and pink skin. This was… Ashido? Ashido. Shouko promptly releases her, and the girl makes a sound between a wheeze and a laugh as she rubs her wrists. “Jeez, Todoroki! You sure don’t mess around!”

“Sorry.” Shouko takes a little too long to respond, something she hopes escapes the attention of the rest of the changeroom, who are staring in bewilderment at the scene.

“It’s okay!” Straightening up as she stretches her arms out, Ashido beams at her, black eyes lighting up as she leans in. She got over that fast... “Anyways, I was trying to ask you something, but you were totally spaced out!”

Shouko knows she has a tendency to do that, and doesn’t see it as apology-worthy when she’s already said she’s sorry once (albeit for something else). “What was it?”

“Who do you think the cutest guy is?” Ashido leans in further, prompting Shouko to take a step back. “Our classic Japanese beauty must have an opinion!”

Blinking, Shouko wonders if she somehow misheard all of that. The sound of something getting swatted in front of her brings her back from the inside of her head, which is currently playing the Wii Channel theme and swirling with question marks, and to the present, where Ashido is pouting after earphone girl smacked her with an earlobe. “At least let the girl get dressed, Ashido.”

“Aww, boo!” Ashido pouts, big and overdramatic. “You’re no fun, Jirou.”

Jirou, if that turns out to be her name, rolls her eyes. “I’m reasonable. We don’t even know the guys yet.”

“But we know their faces!”

“If we were just judging attractiveness based off faces, Bakugou might win. But he’s way too cruel to ever really be cute, ribbit.”

“Woah! Tsu doesn’t hold anything back!!”

Shouko has lost interest in the conversation. In fact, she didn’t have any interest to start with. Everyone was going to be in for a rude awakening if they thought something as trivial as romance
could happen in the cutthroat world of heroism. Why even bother? She’s seen how relationships blend with heroics. They go together like gasoline and a lighter, water and a grease fire, screaming teapots and the face of a terrified little girl howling *mama stop, mama please, mama why?*

… Shouko wants to stop thinking about this. It’s not their fault they don’t know. They’ll learn one way or another, and it’s not her responsibility to teach them. She ignores Yaoyorozu’s concerned glance at how tight her expression has gone as she changes and leaves the dressing room first.

Midoriya doesn’t return to classes that day. Shouko leaves at the last bell without waiting for anyone else- why would she? There’s training at home, and she can’t afford to be late.

The next few days are more of the same, sans one of their classmates almost killing another, and Shouko has no problem keeping up with both the physical and academic portions, even with burns and bruises distracting her. She wished her fool of a father could acknowledge that perhaps he could tone down his training now that she was at UA- she’s running laps and improving her Quirk each day at school, so there’s no need for more at home. At the very least, Shouko wishes he’d learn to tone down that damn flame to prevent little burns- she’s changing around other people now, and bandages and cover up can only hide the truth for so long. She almost doesn’t air that opinion until the cruel voice that seems to follow her around just to jab at any exposed weak points whispers *you’re a true Todoroki woman, weak and cowed into silence, hm?*, and the next thing she knows she’s snapping at her father about it and Fuyumi is left to help her cover up another black eye. Whatever.

The only remotely exciting thing to happen is Thursday. They elect a class president, and Shouko votes for Yaoyorozu with little hesitation. She herself has zero desire for the role, and so far, the other girl is the only one who hasn’t demonstrated either complete incompetence or extreme irresponsibility. She gets vice president, and Midoriya winds up class president- not shocking, considering that these things were always based on popularity. The small girl already has a close knit-circle of friends, and there’s no doubt most of the class feels sympathetic for her after the training incident with Bakugou. What is surprising is the way Midoriya gives up the position to Iida after a very confusing lunch hour- it’s a strange opportunity to squander, but if she wants to decrease her chances of making it big, that’s not Shouko’s problem.

Friday comes, and there’s apparently going to be a special exercise today- rescue training at the USJ. Shouko’s never gotten that down past the basics- her father isn’t a rescue hero primarily, his Quirk is too oriented towards combat (*fire only brings pain*), so she’s looking forwards to learning how her ice might be useful when it comes time to save others.

So naturally, everything goes to hell in about five seconds.

In a confusing cloud of panic, Shouko learns several things: one, Aizawa is apparently an underground pro called Eraserhead. Two, these villains intend to kill them. And three, Bakugou and Kirishima are complete morons. She ruminates in irritation on the last bit as she’s pulled into a warp gate and landing flat on her back in the landslide zone of the USJ.

The villains are nothing, honestly- Shouko barely even feels a hint of adrenaline as carefully practiced ice floods over the ruined ground, stabilizing it and trapping each of the hired thugs up to their chins. Shifting gracefully to the side as she senses movement behind her, Shouko grabs a spear mid-attack, ice shifting down the weapon and holding the struggling villain in place. He looks genuinely terrified, but Shouko feels no sympathy as she leans in to glare at him. “You’re encased fully in ice. I’d give it ten minutes until frostbite starts to kick in. From there, your cells will die slowly. It starts in your hands and feet before it creeps up your entire body, killing all sensation beyond repair. Unless you’re interested in becoming a quadruple amputee, you’ll be answering my
questions.”

If she wasn’t so focused on the battle, Shouko might have been disturbed by the way she spoke—too much like her father and his cruel manner of handling villains. But she’s too busy to draw attention to the troubling parallel, and her glare only darkens as the villain whimpers in fear. “Well? Time’s ticking.”

Shouko almost wanted to laugh as she learned of the villains’ plans, knocking them out before allowing a slight amount of warmth to sneak past her palm, kick-starting the process of thawing them out. Kill All Might? Seriously? What a bunch of prideful idiots. It was All Might. And, given that the hero in question had just burst in seconds ago (sans his signature smile), it looked like things were going to be resolved quickly. Even so, when that monster appeared…

Well, Shouko couldn’t explain what triggered her to freeze herself a bridge of ice, rushing to the plaza. Call it heroic instinct, but something felt wrong here, and as she watched the battle between the monster and All Might, she knew her assumptions were correct. He was pinned down between the warp gate villain, and if she didn’t act now-!

Shouko swings her arm out, firing out her ice in a controlled sheet that encases half the monster like a blanket. It makes a horrifying screech at the impact, and it gives All Might just enough time to free himself from its’ grasp. Sighing in relief, Shouko stands guard by the warp gate villain, who has been pinned down by Bakugou. Regarding the misty void with furious eyes, her gaze is quickly drawn to All Might, and her eyes widen.

She’s never seen him hit something so many times, with so much force. Shouko feels her mouth hang open in amazement as the Symbol of Peace himself takes down a foe that she’d seen destroy her teacher only minutes earlier, sending it flying with a victorious smash as the creature goes straight through the USJ’s ceiling. A childish flurry of glee overcomes her even as her face stays blank. She’d seen All Might help in person! She’d even helped! Somewhere in a cold heart, a little girl with bicoloured hair in high pigtails squeals in happiness. Even so, it’s not done yet. There’s so much smoke, something isn’t right with All Might, and the hand villain charges, and-

Midoriya screams, full power filling her body as she flies forwards, arms extended in a punch. Even from this angle, Shouko can see the girl’s legs flopping unnaturally, no doubt horribly broken. That villain with the disintegration powers— if she runs into him…!

The pang of fear in Shouko’s heart, however, is interrupted by gunshots, and the hand villain goes down as Midoriya skids out on the ground. Iida’s voice booms across the USJ, and as Present Mic’s scream is heard, Shouko realizes the teachers have arrived. All Might is fine, Midoriya is fine, she’s fine.

The following events are all a blur—Shouko and her classmates (sans one, a certain green haired girl having been loaded into an ambulance) gathering outside, surrounded by police and paramedics. Shouko’s fine, not a scratch on her, and spends the bus ride back to school in pointed silence. Fuyumi texted her earlier, saying she saw the news and was on the way to pick her up from school. Her sister brings back the realization that oh, right, she has a house and a family (if it could be called that) to return to after her entire class found themselves the victims of attempted murder. She has mundane things to worry about, even as everyone else seems to find their worlds turned upside down. Will her father hold back on the training tonight knowing how today went?

Later that evening, Shouko learns he will not.
There is another incident the day school starts back up, and even though it’s not nearly on the level of a large scale villain attack against a group of first year students, it manages to shake Shouko to an uncomfortable point.

It was the middle of heroics history, Midnight going over something about an addition to hero law in the eighties. Shouko honestly wasn’t paying attention- she knows most of this already, having grown up with a pro who grumbled endlessly over paperwork and incident reports, and something else had her attention. Namely, her stomach hurts.

She’d been trying to grit her teeth and bear it for the most part (she knows she’s good at handling pain), but this was just unpleasant. It was like something is gnawing at her from the inside out, heating her up to a point where even her attempts to regulate her heat with her ice weren’t helping. Was it something she ate? Breakfast was rice, miso, and smoked salmon, so it wasn’t out of the ordinary for her at all. It could just be a random ailment, and Shouko sighed internally as she imagined her father forcing her to train through it because *heroes don’t have sick days, Shouko*. Whatever.

In fact, she didn’t take any sort of action until she felt an uncomfortably cold feeling on her legs. Looking down, Shouko’s eyes widened as she realized that not only was there a red stain on the front of her skirt, but she was sitting in a small pool of blood that made a disgusting squelching noise as she shifted in surprise. What the hell? Was… Was she injured somehow? They hadn’t had heroic fundamentals yet, it couldn’t have been from that. Shouko’s brain wracked itself for answers- could training last night have resulted in internal bleeding of some kind? She found that unlikely, as last night was comparatively easy. She’d only had a bruise on her arm to cover up, nothing that could cause a slow flow of blood the day afterwards. Running through a few other scenarios, Shouko came to the conclusion that she had no clue what was going on, but it couldn’t be good.

She raised her hand, Midnight looking at her quizzically. "Hm? Is something the matter, Todoroki?"

Shouko must have looked mildly distressed- she could feel her brow furrow, lips pursed tightly. "May I go to Recovery Girl? I believe I’ve been injured.”

“Injured?” Midnight asked, looking concerned. Eyes are on her now, the peculiarity of her statement drawing looks. She could hear Yaoyorozu gasp from her left. “Where are you hurt, honey?”

“I don’t know. My stomach was bothering me, and when I looked down there was blood on my- what are you doing?” Shouko cut herself off as Yaoyorozu stumbled to her feet, eyes wide with frantic concern as she yanked her own jacket off to throw it over Shouko’s lap.

“Todoroki, it stained.” She whisper-yelled, looking worried. Shouko’s face remained the same, but internally, her tension was rising. Was it bad?

“… Yes? I am aware.” Shouko heard Satou stumble over words to her right, and as she turned her head, he was very pointedly turned away from her. To her front, Tokoyami (who had turned around to see what the fuss was about) quickly swivels back around. Dark Shadow makes an embarrassed sounding chirp.

Yaoyorozu looked confused, and there was a gasp of recognition from Midoriya as she, too, clambered to her feet, rushing over. “Ah, Todoroki! Don’t worry, I have a stain remover in my bag, we can just-”

“Why does everyone seem to know what’s going on except me?” Shouko cuts Midoriya off, irritation sneaking into her tone. She doesn’t like being left out of things when they’re pertinent to her. “Miss Midnight, there’s blood between my legs and on my chair. I can’t determine the cause.”
There was a multitude of awkward squeaks and sympathetic ‘oof’ sounds throughout the room. Midnight looked thrown off guard, to say the least. “… Todoroki, it’s okay. I’m going to come with you to Recovery Girl, aright?”

That made sense, at least. Shouko still didn’t understand why half the males of the class were either blushing or staring at literally anything else. She heard Mineta make a faux-gagging sound to her side. “Ew, gross.”

“Are you ten fucking years old, grape shit?” An unexpected ally comes in the form of Bakugou, who turns around and stares Mineta down with a glare that could melt icebergs. “If you’re gonna be a dumbass over a period and still expect the girls to even glance at your shitty little face, you’re even stupider than I thought.”

Mineta makes a meeping noise, staying quiet. Shouko breaks the brief silence. “… Period? What do you mean?”

Once again, silence falls. Yaoyorozu and Midoriya both look bewildered at her, and the other girls who had started to stand look equally as surprised. Midnight looks confused for a moment before shaking it off, heading towards Shouko. “It’s alright, honey. Let’s go to Recovery Girl.”

“I- Please, allow me to come as well!” Yaoyorozu barks out, blushing as she realizes how loud she was. “I just… She’s my classmate too, and I just-”

“Me too!” Midoriya abruptly raises a hand.

“Miss Midnight, let me come! I gotta atone for scaring her in the changeroom the other day!”

“She needs some aid through this, ribbit.”

“I mean, it isn’t like we’ll be learning without a teacher, so… I’m coming!”

“Um, I don’t- you know what? Screw it. I’m coming along.”

“I have extra Midol! I’m coming toooooo!”

Before Shouko knows it, the entire female population of Class 1-A has gotten to their feet, insistent on following Shouko to the nurse. Midnight calls out for a somewhat flustered looking Iida to keep the peace as she comes along. She still has no clue what the hell is going on as she’s ushered down the hallway. The first person to question her is the invisible girl (Hagakure, she thinks?), who turns to her with a predictably unreadable expression as they travel in a pack down the first stairwell. “Todoroki, is this your first time getting your period? Fifteen’s super late.”

“Hagakure!” Yaoyorozu scolds as she finishes tying her own jacket around Shouko’s waist, something she’d been working on doing since they left the classroom. “That’s impolite!”

“It’s fine, Yaoyorozu.” Shouko hates herself for the sudden unsure tone that creeps into her voice- she hates sounding vulnerable. “I still don’t know what you all mean by ‘period’.”

The looks on everyone’s faces are nothing short of gobsmacked. Though she rarely feels embarrassed, Shouko feels something adjacent to that at their stares. Midnight hums sadly, placing a hand on her shoulder. The touch is gentle, almost maternal, and Shouko resists the urge to lean closer. “Menstruation, darling. Do you know what that is?”

“No.” Whatever she’s missing is clearly important if the concerned expressions being sent her way are anything to go by.
Midnight rubs her shoulder gently, and Shouko allows herself to inch slightly closer to the teacher, close enough to faintly feel body heat. “That’s alright, hon. Recovery Girl can go over it with you. This is normal.”

Normal? She’s bleeding! Shouko masks her confusion with a nod, and instead focuses on Jirou and her slightly awkward cough. “I’m not- I mean, uh- what about your mom? She didn’t bring it up to you?”

“My mother is out of the picture.” It’s not exactly private knowledge that Endeavor’s spouse mysteriously stopped being present for all public events, so Shouko doesn’t feel nervous revealing that. What does make her nervous is talk about mothers while she’s so close to Midnight- her useless brain is chirping at her like a bird, making associations between the gentle hand on her shoulder and a touch she’s missed for the better half of a decade, and it’s taking all of Shouko’s energy to shut it up.

“Oh.” Jirou’s cheeks were pink already, but her blush deepens further at the response. “Sorry.”

“It’s fine.” Shouko says, because it is (it isn’t). By this point, they’re standing outside of Recovery Girl’s office. Midnight leaves to go talk to the other woman and explain the situation, and that leaves Shouko and the rest of the girls waiting just outside.

A voice catches her attention, and Shouko’s gaze turns to Midoriya. The girl is wearing a nervous smile as she speaks, and a fluttering feeling shoots through Shouko’s chest. She bets it’s because of how ill she’s feeling already. “You, ah- Don’t feel embarrassed, okay? This happens sometimes.”

“Yeah, don’t worry!” Uraraka’s cheerful tone feels a bit forced with how much enthusiasm her voice is carrying, but the base is still quite genuine. “When I got my first period, I was in class too. I didn’t even realize until I got up to answer a question on the board!”

“Oooh, that’s rough.” Ashido winces sympathetically. “I got mine wearing white shorts. It was super bad! I’m sure we all have stories about ours.”

“I don’t.” Tsuyu speaks placidly as always, and Shouko can’t help but find her neutral expression and croaking voice a bit comforting right now, even if she doesn’t know what exactly they’re talking about. Is this blood normal?... “I’m transgender, but I try to carry painkillers or pads just in case someone else does, ribbit.”

Shouko actually knows what that means this time- it’s a well known fact that the current number three hero, Hawks, has been open about being a trans man since his debut. He’s funded multiple charities for transgender youth, something she finds reassuring in the way that it at least proved to her that not every high ranked hero was hiding a beastly interior. Shouko has met him, and likes him well enough, even if her father seems irritated by him. Jirou makes a surprised noise beside her.

“Wait, you’re also… I-I thought I was the only trans girl in the class!” Her voice is a mixture of surprise and relief.

“So it’s two of us now, ribbit. How nice.”

“Like Hawks!” Ashido smiles brightly. “Well, not exactly, but y’know!”

Uraraka beams. “It’s so nice of you to come anyways! Girls supporting girls!”

Stories of identities and badly timed events are interrupted as the door opens, Midnight walking out with Recovery Girl. The old woman smiles understandingly at Shouko before nodding to the other girls. “Well, let’s get this all sorted out, shall we? You girls can go back to class.”
“Wait, we can’t leave her! She’s probably really confused!” Ashido says something accurate for a change, though Shouko’s not sure why them sticking around would help any.

Recovery Girl sighs, waving a hand. “Then I can explain everything to her. Don’t you have a class to be in? How about you ladies return when I’m all done here? Provided Miss Midnight gives you her permission, of course.” The older woman casts a gaze up to the pro, who nods with a smile.

With some final grumbling and offers (“Hey, hey, Todoroki, do you need Midol?” “Recovery Girl probably stocks that, y’know…”), Shouko is ushered into the nurse’s office, the older woman inviting her to sit on the bed. Seeing the way the girl hesitates, Recovery Girl chuckles, patting the bed. “It’s lined in paper, sweetheart. Don’t you worry about a stain.”

A stain of any type on a couch at home would have been disastrous, and even with this reassurance, it takes Shouko a moment to sit down, shifting Yaoyorozu’s jacket to cover her front and to avoid sitting on it. There’s a few moments of near-silence, Recovery Girl humming slightly as she digs through a drawer before emerging with a notepad and a warm smile. “Now, deary. Can you tell me what you know about menstruation?”

About thirty minutes later, Shouko leaves the nurse’s office embarrassed and enraged. Not at Recovery Girl, of course- the old woman was as sweet as could be, there was no reason to be upset with her. No, she’s angry at… Well, her situation in general, but mostly at her father.

Recovery Girl had gone over a lot with her- teaching her what a period was, why it happened, how to deal. It was entirely new for Shouko, a girl who’s closest female contact was often too nervous to meddle with their father’s precious creation in any way. At one point, the conversation had veered into other aspects of her health- apparently, Hagakure’s earlier comment about fifteen being late for your cycle to start was very much true. Cue taking her height, weight, inquiring about her exercise and eating habits. Recovery Girl had made a humming noise as she delivered her results. “Well, Todoroki, I’m going to tentatively state that you’ve haven’t been eating enough for most of your youth, and that added to your exercise routine has delayed your period well past the average age. If this keeps up, you’re at risk to developing what we call the female athlete triad, and that’s going to affect your health negatively for the rest of your life. While it’s good for a hero to be firmly in shape, not taking breaks and exercising moderation can be very bad for you.” The doctor had tapped the girl’s thigh, taught with thin muscle.

Shouko had known her eating patterns weren’t the best- her father strictly regulated what she ate, and denying her food was not at all uncommon when she underperformed. Over time, she’d gotten good at hiding stolen snacks around the house- some crackers tucked in rolled up socks, a pocket stitched into her futon that often hid granola bars, and so on-, but feeling full was something she often found herself being denied. Recovery Girl had continued on, scribbling something on a piece of paper before handing it to the student. “Here’s my recommended treatment, dearie. The supplements aren’t expensive, and can be added to your food. Make sure you tell your father you shouldn’t exercise at home for longer than forty minutes a day, not until you’ve put on at least twenty pounds in fat. You’ll be training at school anyways. It’s important we allow your body to catch up- your fertility could be damaged if you keep going. Please don’t hesitate to ask me if you have any questions about women’s health- I know it must be hard with just your father.”

Oh man, didn’t Shouko ever know that. Apparently most girls were taught about this in the third grade- the third grade! Shouko’s school didn’t have a sex ed program- both her elementary and middle schools had been private and high price affairs, places where parents didn’t want to encourage ‘delinquent behaviour’ by teaching the students about basic human bodily functions. Her own body had always been a tool for the man who created her, she knew this, but it was still the
body of a human! Why was she never told about this? Her thoughts swirled in her rage, trying to find her answers. Did her father just… forget? Did it slip his mind that his perfect creation was also the bearer of two X chromosomes, would eventually reach maturity and have her first period in the middle of class? Shouko’s mind shot back to her life not long after her Quirk manifested— the hair being cut. Only being permitted a skirt when it was a school uniform. The makeup, the makeup, the burns and Fuyumi’s black eye all in the name of some powders and creams—

Had he wanted a son all along?

She didn’t know, but the mere prospect was enough for deep rage to simmer in her stomach. It was not the first time Shouko wanted to explode at her father, consequences be damned, and it would not be the last time. Recovery Girl had offered to call the other girls back as they’d initially wanted to do, but Shouko had declined. She was feeling a shame she’d never known she was supposed to before today, the embarrassment of having basically shouted into an air horn that her period had started to her entire class now itching under her skin. Shouko didn’t even want to go back, but it wasn’t like she had a choice (like everything else in your owned life, little puppet).

When she marched into the classroom, a new skirt and an aching stomach soothed with painkillers, there was an uncomfortable silence. Shouko nodded absentmindedly as Midnight asked her if she was feeling better, walking over and dropping the freshly washed blazer in her arms on Yaoyorozu’s desk before sitting down (her chair was clean, she noted as she pitied whoever wiped the blood off), returning to her notes and doing her best to sink into the cold as she always did, blocking off feelings and hiding away from the poorly disguised stares in a cloak of ice.

Shouko was waiting in the front room when her father got home, sitting next to the kotatsu and dressed in comfortable sweatpants and a tank top she’d gotten as a hand-me-down from Fuyumi. Speaking of the eldest Todoroki daughter, she had texted Shouko to say she’d be working later than usual, so the younger girl was fully prepared to confront Endeavor alone about this. Her rage had not cooled despite her best efforts, ideas of how she’d go about this swirling and rendering any hope of taking coherent notes for the rest of the day moot. Now, though, she had a pretty good idea. Even if the sound of the garage door made her hands instinctively tighten, Shouko held steady as the man walked through the door. “I was in Recovery Girl’s office today.”

Endeavor paused as he slipped off his shoes, probably having changed at the office before coming home—god knows all the attention he’d draw in full regalia. “… And why are you telling me?”

“I’m not allowed to exercise out of school for longer than forty minutes a day until I gain at least twenty pounds.” Shouko fixed him with a stare. “In fat, not in muscle.”

Her father raises an eyebrow, irritation clear on his face. “And just why the hell would you need to do that?”

Shouko grits her teeth, meeting his bright blue eyes. “I learned what a period is today, and how strange it is to start yours at fifteen. I learned it because I got my first one in the middle of class and humiliated myself in front of everyone by not knowing why the hell there was blood on my skirt,” Taking advantage of her father’s flabbergasted expression, the one he always wore when their sad excuses for conversations inched towards femininity, Shouko continued, raising her voice and channeling the anger and embarrassment from earlier. “Recovery Girl said I have to put on twenty pounds, or I might be sabotaging my own process. Shouldn’t you have known this when you decided on my regimen?”

“Don’t you dare take that tone of voice with me, Shouko!” Endeavour snaps back, recovering from the shock of recalling his child was female quicker than Shouko might have liked. “You really think
you’re going to rise to the top spot if you take breaks where the male heroes around you don’t?
You’re already fighting at a disadvantage as is!”

Even if this is dangerous, even if she knows how it’s going to end, Shouko bares her teeth and
allows more rage to seep into her voice. Expressing anger has never done anything but gotten her
beaten, but she is so tired of holding everything in and learning to bandage her burns, scars, the raw
bite marks digging into her forearms as she expresses her fury in the only way she was ever shown.
Getting to her feet, she stands five feet away from her father, her nostrils flaring. “What
disadvantage?! Is it because you think women are weaker? You’ve already driven any hope of being
a normal girl out of me and you think continuing to destroy my health will do anything but lead me
to retiring in my twenties?!”

She hates him, hates him, and the rising heat in the front room may not be from Endeavor alone. A
part of Shouko is screaming to stop, she intended to make him uncomfortable, not to do this, but she
can’t stop her rage from billowing out. She is a Todoroki, a legacy built on tears and fury and
destroying anything in your way. She should have known it would end in violence- she is bound to
feelings of lividness, a cursed child who was too stupid to see past her own disposition. Endeavor
moves much quicker than Shouko ever could, and there’s a slap across her face, strong enough to
send her skidding backwards in a sick recreation of a certain argument over hairstyles when she was
due. Fuck, he’s pissed. She’s sent flying on top of the kotatsu, the electric heater making a creaking
noise as it breaks under her weight, wood splintering while her body crashes through it onto the
floor. A sharp pain runs up her back, and she shrieks. Endeavor grabs Shouko by the collar, eyes
blazing in every sense of the word. “You should have been a son!” The man roars, shaking her.
Shouko tastes blood; she thinks she bit her tongue. “Your Quirk should have been Touya’s,
Natsu’s! Instead it went to an ungrateful brat who can’t understand what I’ve sacrificed to try and
level the playing field for her! You think you can afford a day off?! You think you’re deserving of
special treatment, that villains care that you’re a woman?! Then you’ve thought wrong!”

“Fuck you!” Shouko screams like a trapped animal, ice she summons being melted instantly by the
sheer force of her father’s Hellfire. The rage overshadows her fear, the girl baring her bloodied teeth.
“You think I can control how my body functions?! I didn’t ask for any of this! I didn’t ask to be a
woman! I didn’t ask to have this Quirk! I don’t twist and turn in the ways you want- I’m tired of
being your fucking legacy because you weren’t good enough! I’m your daughter, and I’m the best
you’re ever going to have!”

There is a silence, a moment of calm before the storm, as two hateful sets of eyes meet. Shouko is
braced for impact, almost craving the validation of a broken nose or handprints around her neck-
she’s hit a nerve, and she wants nothing more than for her father to prove that she’s lost the battle but
won the war. Instead, Endeavor does something strange- he drops her. Shouko tumbles back onto
the wreck of what was once the kotatsu, staring up at him in confusion as he stands silently. Why
isn’t he hitting her? “What are you…?”

Her father looks pensive as he looks down at her, but there’s no sorrow or anger. Instead… He looks
like he’s just understood something. “... Hm. So you want to be treated like a woman, do you? If
you’re going to turn your back on the hand I offered that would have pulled you out of that fate, then
so be it.” Even though he doesn’t sound angry, there’s a threat in his voice. Shouko doesn’t know
what she did, but she knows she fucked up, unable to do anything but stare up at Endeavor in
confusion as he leaves the room with a parting word: “Go see the healer. No training tonight. Don’t
say I didn’t warn you, Shouko Todoroki.”

Shouko… has no clue what the hell just happened. He’d never reacted like that before, and she’s not
sure that it’s any better than being left with an eye swollen shut. She didn’t mean to get that
aggressive, nor for it to go this far. She’s an idiot for thinking she was anything but blood and rage.
For a moment, all she can think is ‘poor kotatsu’ as she lies in the ruins of the heated table. Shouko’s anger runs wild, it runs deep, and she should have known better than to pick a fight when she’s too full of bitterness and brutality to bring it back down. Now her father is planning something, and not knowing what that man is going to do never leaves Shouko feeling anything but paranoid.

Cringing as she got to her aching feet, Shouko spat blood from her tongue onto the wreckage of the kotatsu before slowly limping to their healer’s private quarters. She wouldn’t go there unless her father instructed, the tight-faced woman being paid per use of her Quirk, meaning they’d quickly run up wild bills if she went there for every bruise and scrape that she could have otherwise taken care of herself. But since it was his order…

Something made Shouko very anxious about disobeying him right now.

The rest of the night had been… Well, technically it had been peaceful. Fuyumi had panicked when she’d gotten home and fretted over Shouko, but the younger girl dutifully did not reveal the reason the kotatsu had met an untimely end. After that, she’d done her homework and gone to bed early, the extra hours not consumed by her exercise routine too eerily empty to do anything but sleep. There wasn’t anything in the morning either- with the lack of an enforced morning run, Shouko hesitantly did stretches in her room before breakfast in an attempt to fill her hours. It wasn’t like she had hobbies- wasn’t allowed them. What was she supposed to do now?

School was school, with the exception of a couple of the girls asking her if she was feeling okay after yesterday’s incident. Shouko told them she was fine, and offered nothing else when prodded for information. The only notable incident of the day was an encounter with a horde outside their classroom, other courses trying to scope out the competition after 1-A’s unfortunate incident at the USJ. It was of no concern to her- they weren’t going to be any sort of issue for Shouko, especially not the strangely deadpan boy with purple hair and eyebags of the same colour. Bakugou, as he was prone to do, made everything worse. Whatever. Eating her lunch alone (the pocket money Natsuo had slipped into her hand as he left that cozy evening going towards buying an extra treat to try and put on weight- a nashi pear tart, which proved to be a shockingly tasty yet calorie-laden dish), Shouko distracted herself from the uneasy feeling by scrolling absentmindedly through her phone, letting her thoughts melt into nothing as she read the news concerning an impressive rescue mission in Kagoshima headed by the Wild Wild Pussycats.

There was no such thing as peace in Shouko’s life, and that fact left her on edge all day. She was waiting for some sort of disaster to strike and throw her entire world on its head- a paranoia that, at least for today, turned out to be justified. When she came home, Fuyumi was in the kitchen, leaning back to greet Shouko as the girl passed. “Oh, Shouko! How was your day?”

“Fine.” Her response is simple, because she genuinely doesn’t know how else she can explain the bizarre tenseness of this Tuesday.

Fuyumi nods, used to Shouko’s one-word responses by now. “That’s good. Ah, dad wanted me to tell you that he left something for you in your room? He dropped by about an hour ago before heading back to work.”

Something in Shouko’s gut twists. That… definitely feels like it’s going to be the instigator that shatters her fragile peace. Thanking Fuyumi before hurrying up the stairs, feet finding the quiet floorboards more out of instinct than actual fear (her father isn’t home, anyways). Sliding open her shoji door, Shouko’s heartbeat picks up in fear as she sees a letter sitting on her futon. Approaching and unfolding what turns out to be a printed out email, the bicoloured girl’s eyes widen like dinner plates as she reads the letter. No. She reads it again, praying that maybe this time, the words will rearrange themselves into another option. No. Just try it again. No. Again. No. Again.
There is a change that time, but only one word, which becomes a blurred mess as one of her tears drips onto the paper. Holding the paper that may as well be the proclamation of her death sentence, Shouko reads it one last and desperate time:

*Mister Enji Todoroki,*

*Thank you for submitting your daughter’s profile for review and matchmaking. Your generous donation has ensured we have the funds to prioritize Miss Shouko’s omiai ceremony over other company clients. Your request sheet was dutifully attended to, and we are pleased to report that we have found a match suitable for your daughter’s needs. Our suggested match is Mister Hideomi Ondo, another hopeful who responded enthusiastically when shown Miss Shouko’s profile. Attached is Mister Ondo’s profile. Please review it with your daughter and respond with your interest level in an omiai. Although Miss Shouko has yet to reach marriageable age, should both parties find themselves interested in pursuing that path, we are happy to facilitate the engagement and wait until Miss Shouko’s sixteenth birthday for the wedding. Thank you again for choosing our company, and we eagerly await your reply.*

*Sincerely,*

*Kyosei Matchmaking Service*

An omiai. A meeting between a man and a woman, facilitated with the intention of the two of them discussing marriage. Shouko thinks she’s going to throw up. Trembling hands look at the attached sheet detailing Ondo’s profile, and she genuinely does have to swallow back vomit- he’s twenty seven, oh god, oh god, his Quirk is Temperature Resistance and she understands now, Shouko knows exactly what her father meant, she *understands what it is to be a Todoroki woman* -

Shouko drops the sheet, pressing her hands over her mouth and screaming, the noise muffled and raw as her panicking mind attempts to process everything. Her father is punishing her by forcing her into a Quirk Marriage. A child with Half Hot Half Cold and a resistance to temperature weaknesses, burns and frostbite? They’d be unstoppable! She could always decline, try to push back, but Shouko knows how much money her father would be willing to spend to get his way. According to Natsuo on the rare occasions she spoke to him after her training started, it was how he managed to get their mother to agree- threw money at the family until she was all but his. This is going to happen. If she doesn’t bend back, become her father’s perfect golden girl, push herself past safety and health and sanity to become the top hero-

Oh god, she’s becoming her mother.

That’s all it takes. Shouko breaks down in tears, body curling up next to the futon as she tries to muffle the noises of sobs into her knees. *Maybe, her anguished and bitter mind supplies, maybe you’re like her already. Can you really say you aren’t crazy?* Shouko can’t answer and that’s what terrifies her to her core, a heart of ice shattering.

*What the fuck is she going to do?*
CONTENT WARNING FOR:

- Menstruation
- Mentions of unhealthy eating/forced starvation
- Child abuse
- Forced marriage
- Exploitation of a minor (nothing graphic, it's the mention that a twenty-seven-year-old is interested in marrying a fifteen-year-old)

[scooby doo voice] ruh roh rouko-chan. also: shout out to all the other poor bastards who got their first periods in class. we're all in this together

Anyways! That was a massive chapter, I'm happy you made it through! What's Todo gonna do about the matchmaker, especially with the sports festival in two weeks...?! (Also: you can pry my trans headcanons from my cold dead hands. We stan trans Jirou + Tsuyu + Hawks in this house)

I want to thank you so much for reading, your support seriously means the world to me. I love comments like nothing else, so if you could drop one, I'd be eternally thankful! Thanks again, and see you soon!
your bite is worse than your bark

Chapter Notes

Ughhhhh I have been staring at this damn document for too long and trying to will it to be good with no success, please free me from it. I'm not super pleased with this chapter, but I was so done with it, so now I'll just drop it on you guys and bolt. Gotta love writing. It's basically just another 'Kale wants to write the Todosibs doing nice Todosib things' chapter because I'm weak and the idea for one scene had me frantically trying to bring it into existence at warp speed, so now there's a whole lot of character interaction and not much plot stuff. Whoops.

Anyways! BIG CONTENT WARNINGS, please check the end notes if you have triggers you believe could appear in a work like this one! Some notes now:

- I literally cannot believe my guess that Natsuo would work in the medical field got confirmed the other day djsdkskj. Guess I'm canon-compliant now?
- I always felt a little disappointed that we didn't get to see canon Todoroki express any sort of negative emotions towards his mom- obviously he knows it's Endeavor's fault for driving her to that point, but he was a little kid who was betrayed by his own mother! And you're telling me there wasn't even a little anger in his heart for her? Naw son, not in this home.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

To say Shouko had thrown herself back into her training would be an understatement.

She would run in the morning until she was almost vomiting, her sessions with the punching bag now stretching until she could hardly hold a pencil the next day from the deep ache in her knuckles, and she’d practiced with her Quirk after school until a teacher actually had to come in and tell her to go home. Her father was no longer helping her, seemingly insistent on this bizarre form of punishment, so she did it all by herself. She needed to prove herself, had to save herself from the worst type of fate, and the Sports Festival would be her opportunity to show her father it wouldn’t be worth it to force her into a marriage. There was, though, one thing Shouko knew was holding her back but was unable to bring herself to do- use her fire.

It was illogical not to, she knew that. If Endeavor saw her use her flames, he’d surely reconsider, wouldn’t he? And there was so much on the line- god knows her father would make her drop out of the Hero course, if not out of school entirely, if it meant he’d get what he wanted. But… Shouko remembered being in middle school, curled up in her futon and biting her lip to avoid crying as she rolled over onto yet another raw burn. She remembered swearing to herself that she would not become him, that she’d win using only her mother’s power.

The only fate worse than turning into her mother would be to turn into her father. She cannot use his Quirk.

Shouko has a… strange relationship with her feelings towards her mother. She loves her, she really does, in the way only the youngest child really can adore their mother. Rei Todoroki was a victim, put through hell all because of her Quirk and the egotistical drive of a man with more money than morals. How could Shouko not mourn for both the loss of their relationship and for her mother’s
stolen life? She was a martyr, someone Shouko tried to emulate in appearance in order to remind her father of his failure as a husband, remain a ghost of the happy marriage he could have had if he wasn’t obsessed with power. But on the other hand… Her mother’s betrayal left Shouko scarred, vision in her left eye still noticeably cloudy despite the surgeries. She couldn’t take it any longer, and lashed out at a vulnerable and terrified child. Shouko had watched her take beatings without protest, and mixed with her sympathy was a bitter resentment. Fight back, mama, fight back! Get us out of here, use your ice, mama please, you need to fight!

But she never had. Her mother had abandoned whoever she was before marriage, and Shouko’s love was matched by her desire to resemble her mother in aesthetics alone. She would love the woman forever, but Shouko couldn’t be her.

(Could it be you fear her still?)

Her rigorous training is interrupted only once one week before the Sports Festival- the date of her first omiai. Fuyumi knew what was going on, and if the bruise Shouko saw sneaking out of her older sister’s sleeve was any indication, she’d tried to talk her father out of it. Regardless, as Fuyumi tries to offer her a supportive goodbye as Shouko and her father stepped into the chauffeured car, all the bicoloured girl can think is that she really wished her older sister wouldn’t smile like she was holding back tears (which she probably was, frankly).

It’s a silent ride over to the omiai company’s main headquarters, a business running inside a charmingly Japanese-style home that reminds Shouko a bit of her own in both fashion and the way it carries an air of dread for her. She’s brought into a backroom by an older woman with some kind of fox Quirk judging by the animal head and the tail, and Shouko finds it oddly fitting- like a kitsune, all done up in her kimono. Attendants greet them at the door, fussing over Shouko as they dress her in a furisode, all reds and whites and floral patterns that are far too bright and sunny for what feels like her funeral procession. Shouko wants to laugh when the makeup is bought out- what a change in tone it was from the last time someone had put makeup on her. There’s no little errors or smudges like what happened with Fuyumi, and that makes it feel all too fake somehow. The face that stares back at her as the stylist moves onto her hair isn’t Shoukos, even if they share the same scar and haunted look in their mismatched eyes. The real Shouko has a monolid, a freckle or old acne scar here and there, and her lips are cracked and thin. The imposter in the mirror has applied clear tape to achieve a double eyelid, her skin is without a single flaw, and her lips are red and plump. Close to the real girl in some aspects, but as her hair is pinned with a delicate red kanzashi, Shouko realizes she doesn’t recognize her at all. A stranger.

She’s presented to her father, who walks her down to where she’ll meet the man who may very well become her husband. The man hasn’t said anything about removing her from the hero course yet- Shouko knows the more efficient option is for him to wrangle her back into submission and continue training her rather than setting her up with someone and waiting for her to eventually pop out a heir with the right Quirk. Even so, the mere possibility that she’s going to have to go through with this is…! Shouko forces the fear back, clenching her jaw and staring at Endeavor with ice in her eyes. “I’ll mess it up on purpose. I’ll act rudely and be loud and obnoxious.”

Her father’s gaze is cold as he examines his golden child-turned-bargaining chip. “I don’t think you want to learn what your third option is if you cannot either prove yourself capable of becoming my successor, or if you cannot bear one that will function as such. If you think this man is interested in you because of your actions rather than what you can give him, you don’t understand how romance functions in the world you were made for.”

Shouko’s stomach turns. He could be referring to so many things- her Quirk, her wealth, her body- and none of them are good. She’d known on some level that a twenty seven year old pursuing a
child of fifteen wouldn’t truly care about a relationship as much as he would what he could get out of her. Not that Shouko ever expected herself to be in any relationship (as her father said, romance wasn’t for people in her world) much less a happy one, but the terrifying prospect of being married off might be somewhat more tolerable if the man cared about something past her father’s bank account or some perceived youthful innocence. She says nothing more, and neither does her father.

Part of the reason this matchmaking company was chosen (aside from their willingness to brush aside one party being underage for a “donation”) was that their traditional building allowed for them to host the omiai itself. An attendant was waiting outside a door, bowing before ushering Shouko inside. The girl shot one last look of anger at her father, wondering for a brief moment whether any of this could be real or if it was just a drawn out punishment in the name of humiliating her. If it was the latter, it was working.

As she was ushered inside, the first thing Shouko notices is the interior design- the room is traditionally Japanese like the rest of the building, an aesthetic she would have normally appreciated had it not been under these circumstances. Tatami floors connect to fusama walls, and a shoji-papered door is open to allow the mild air of spring inside. A garden is visible on the exterior, a snaking path leading through flowers and trees. It was exactly the type of room Shouko would expect a miai to take place in. What draws her attention with a drop of her stomach, though, is the person seated at the chabudai in the center of the room.

Hideomi Ondo is just as his image showed: average height, blue hair in a clean and professional cut, and a slightly shimmering appearance on his visible flesh- the iridescent second skin that serves as his Temperature Resistance Quirk. He’s dressed in a kimono less formal than Shouko’s, red with a deep blue haori. Shouko is quietly thankful he didn’t go for the more traditional route and wear black and white with hakama- she’s not sure she could handle looking at him dressed up like it was a wedding. He looks up at her and smiles, a completely ordinary and well meaning expression that still churns Shouko’s stomach. “Miss Todoroki, it’s a pleasure to meet you.”

He sounds like an adult, and Shouko feels like she’s a little girl playing dress-up in her mother’s clothes again as she bows stiffly. “A pleasure to meet you as well.”

The attendant reminds them that they have twenty minutes booked before making her exit, leaving Shouko to kneel on the other side of the chabudai. It’s a moment before she notices the teapot in the center, belatedly remembering that it’s traditional for the woman to pour the tea as she hurries to pour two cups with a swiftness that indicates she’s not very good at delicate movements. She has to shift awkwardly to avoid the long sleeves of the furisode from getting in the way.

Ondo smiles as he accepts his cup, sipping from it and seemingly pleased with the taste. “Thank you. Is this your first omiai?”

“She is.” Shouko confirms, setting the teapot back down and seemingly wishing she had some kind of time Quirk- anything that would let her zoom through twenty minutes as fast as she could. Ondo seems to have expected that answer, nodding.

“Given your age, that makes sense. Even so, you’re very mature for fifteen.” His reply forces Shouko to focus hard so as not to grit her teeth. The snarky part of her wants to shoot back with thanks, it was the trauma, and is barely held in. Ondo continues as much as she wants him to just shut up. “You’re in the UA hero course, aren’t you? That’s very exciting. Was it your class that was involved in that awful incident with those villains?”

She shrugs, taking a sip of her tea. “That was us.”

“I’m glad you’re fine. It would have been nothing short of a tragedy to lose a beauty like you before
the world saw her.” Shouko’s hands tense around her cup, and Ondo laughs gently. “My apologies, I know I’m being direct. I was just fascinated by you the moment I was shown your profile.”

“Mister Ondo, that’s-”

“Just Hideomi is fine.” Ondo’s reply thankfully cuts off the snappish response Shouko was about to give. It allows her to take a deep breath in and remember the etiquette briefing she’d been told about as her makeup was being done.

“Hideomi, then. That’s very flattering.” She lies. Shouko’s never been all that polite, even if her generally formal manner of speech hides it if you only talk to her briefly, so lying to keep the peace like this makes her teeth grind.

Ondo (and yes, she’ll only refer to him as such in his head, he doesn’t get first name privileges in the privacy of her mind) smiles in response, putting down his teacup. “Maybe it’s flattering to you, but to me? It’s the truth. You’re very charming, Shouko.”

Okay, he said she could use his first name, but when the hell did she say he could use her first name? Ignoring the breach of etiquette, Shouko just nods. “Thank you.”

Her teeth are grinding, muscles tense, and she almost jumps when she feels a sudden hand on her knee underneath the chabudai, a gentle touch that makes Shouko want to throw up. “Really, you are. It’s unusual to get married so young, isn’t it?”

“It’s… It’s traditional in the Todoroki lineage.” That’s not a complete lie. Her father was married at twenty, the twins being born at twenty one, and her mother was just eighteen for both events. That said, Shouko has no idea what Touya is doing, Fuyumi is single, and Natsuo is nineteen with a girlfriend of his own choice. She’s the only one being groomed to marry this young, and the thought plus the hand rubbing her knee through her furisode makes her want to puke.

His hand is still on her knee, sliding upwards inch by inch with the minute, and Shouko wants nothing more than to encase him in ice. Her father’s threat rings heavy in her ears, though, and all she can do is clench her jaw harder and avoid Ondo’s eyes as he speaks. “It makes sense for a traditional family like yours. What was your Quirk again?”

“Half Hot Half Cold.” Replies Shouko, who is taking a sip of her tea to avoid spitting out anything that would induce Endeavor’s rage should it get back to him.

“Oh, that’s right! Your father is the number two hero, isn’t he?” Ondo smiles as if he didn’t already know such a thing, as if he wasn’t rubbing Shouko’s thigh through the thick furisode. The density of the material doesn’t prevent her stomach from twisting as she confirms it with a nod. “That’s pretty amazing, Shouko. No wonder you’re aiming for heroism. My Quirk isn’t much use for combat, so it was never a path for me.”

“Half Hot Half Cold.” Replies Shouko, who is taking a sip of her tea to avoid spitting out anything that would induce Endeavor’s rage should it get back to him.

“Oh, that’s right! Your father is the number two hero, isn’t he?” Ondo smiles as if he didn’t already know such a thing, as if he wasn’t rubbing Shouko’s thigh through the thick furisode. The density of the material doesn’t prevent her stomach from twisting as she confirms it with a nod. “That’s pretty amazing, Shouko. No wonder you’re aiming for heroism. My Quirk isn’t much use for combat, so it was never a path for me.”

Shouko takes a longer sip than is necessary, counting backwards in her head to keep herself calm. “I was told that your father owns a support item company. Do you work there?”

“I do! Klimat Support Company.” Ondo confirms. The rubbing does not stop, but it has at least remained localized to her lower thigh. Any higher and Shouko doesn’t think she could resist the urge to smack it off. “I work high up in their human resources department- book clients appointments with the designers, handle questions, all that stuff. We’re major enough that I’m just too busy to try and find a good wife in a more modern way, haha. My father suggested this route, so here I am.”

Shouko guesses that being busy isn’t the reason the rich, decent looking Ondo isn’t married yet- he’s
clearly an experienced creep, able to keep chatting with her even as he’s feeling her up. No woman who wasn’t being held at metaphorical gunpoint would last more than a date. “I see.”

“Regardless, I’m glad I got you before someone else did.” Ondo chuckles to himself as if they were two friends sharing a joke. “A pretty girl like you would get snapped up in a heartbeat.”

*And somehow you think you’re not the one snapping me up?* Shouko thinks, biting her tongue viciously to avoid saying her thoughts. Is this what it was like for her mother, dealing with Endeavor? Constantly holding her true thoughts to her chest, nodding to placate someone they couldn’t stand? Her gut twists as she realize this was the world faced by other women, a life marred by terms like *glad I got you* and hands that snuck up their legs. Shouko was a sheltered child, raised not by her gender but by her Quirk, and she’s starting to realize that it might be better to be controlled by someone aiming to make you his successor rather than controlled by someone aiming to make you his. How many other people have sat where Shouko is sitting, had their hearts break as they were forced by fate and finances and family to give themselves away to a stranger? Who’s broken dream is she kneeling on? *Who’s broken dream is she kneeling on?*

“Haha, the nerves are adorable.” The hand moves from her thigh to where her hands are clasped in her lap, and Shouko makes an embarrassing yelping noise as the contact brings her back from her panicked train of thought. Ondo is smiling, and she would like nothing more than to wipe it off his stupid face with a fist. “You probably don’t have any experience in romance, do you?”

There’s a certain lasciviousness to his tone of voice, and that plus the way his hand has yet to leave Shouko’s as they remain folded directly on her lap makes her heart stop. “... I have no experience.” She savours the sound of ‘no’, even if it’s not the way she wants to say it.

Over the years, Shouko has gotten good at reading facial cues- it was a survival tactic growing up. Could she push her father’s buttons now, or did that little twitch of the eyebrow mean she’d be crawling to the healer with a broken leg? Was now a good time to tell him she accidentally broke her cell phone, or would she be getting stitches instead of bruises? And now as Shouko watches Ondo’s smile grow ever so slightly, she knew it clear as day: he had made a decision on her, and it was one that would lead her down the path of Rei Todoroki. “I see, I see. So beautiful and yet you’ve never had a boyfriend? It’s not surprising that the number two hero would raise such a proper young lady.”

Shouko *really* thinks she’s going to either hit him, scream, or hit him *while* screaming, so she thanks whatever deity has taken pity on her as there’s a gentle knock on the door. Ondo’s hand retreats, the subtle predatory glaze in his smile replaced by a charming businesslike grin as the attendant slides open the door. “Miss Todoroki, Mister Ondo? Twenty minutes have concluded.”

“Ah, time flies when you’re enjoying yourself!” Ondo gets to his feet, moving around the table to offer Shouko a hand up. In the name of appearances, she accepts, even if the satisfaction of smacking it away would be earth-shattering. “It was a pleasure to meet you, Shouko. I look forward to our next meeting.”

“... You as well, Hideomi.” Biting her tongue and tolerating the hand that holds her own for a little too long, Shouko can feel the tension leave her body as they’re led in different directions down the hallway. She almost wants to hug the attendant, but that would be weird for more than one reason.

Unfortunately, all released tension returns as they round a corner and are met with Endeavor in the waiting room, the man seated in a chair that seems too small for his massive form. Shouko allows herself to zone out, a common technique she utilizes whenever the stress becomes nigh unbearable, and enjoys the peace of the fuzz in her head and the lightness of her body. It was called dissociation, she thinks from the time she mentioned it in middle school and was given a confused stare and a mandatory counsellor trip, and it’s Shouko’s comforting friend up until she’s forced to snap out of it
by a hand on her shoulder guiding her to the changeroom.

Her hair is let down, the makeup washed off, and Shouko marvels at how much work was spent on her appearance for just twenty minutes in a tea room. Slowly, the real Shouko returns as the parts that made up that peculiar imposter are plucked away, and she’s back in the white blouse and pleated red skirt Fuyumi had leant her (apparently her usual outfit selections of sweatpants and a tank top weren’t appropriate to wear, which is just confusing considering she had to change anyways). Her father is waiting for her as she’s lead to the chauffered car, looking at her expectantly. “Well?”

“He’s a pervert.” Shouko blurts out as she feels the rumble of the engine, pent-up anger in her chest threatening to burst through the seatbelt. “He felt me up and got all excited when he figured out I’ve never had a boyfriend. You’re not serious about this. It’s a punishment.”

“Is that what you think?” Endeavor rolls his eyes from the front seat. Both members of the Todoroki clan know how much their driver is paid not to ask questions and to keep his mouth shut, know there will be no consequences no matter what is discussed in his presence. “If you really do believe this is an elaborate punishment, you’re even more foolish than I previously believed. Hideomi Ondo comes from a wealthy family who run a famous support company, and his Quirk mixed with yours would create a child worthy of being my successor.”

“A chi- are you serious?!” Shouko slaps the side of the door, her generally emotionless face awash with wide-eyed disbelief. “All Might will have retired long before I’m old enough to have a baby-even longer before any child I have would be old enough to take up heroism!” This was why Shouko still believed it was a scare tactic, the fifteen or so years it would take to raise a child to the age where they could enter a hero school. He was bluffing, right?

Fixing her with a glare, Endeavor scowls at his youngest daughter. “You had your little incident just last week. I could have a suitable heir by next September if you’re married in January.”

“What do…” Shouko trails off, processing that. And though she will hate herself for the display of weakness later that night when she is alone and biting her wrists in rage, for now all she can do is let her jaw drop in horror. “No. No. I’m not- until I’m eighteen at least, I-”

“Your sixteenth birthday is in January. That’s the marriage age for a woman. Why do you think you’ll be exempt from motherhood?” The car is slowing to a stop outside the Todoroki estate, and Shouko hysterically wonders how much the driver is going to have to drink tonight to forget this. “I did a good thing for you, training you as my successor and trying to keep you from this life. But because of your ungrateful insolence, you’ll create my heir instead.”

“Dad-!” Shouko whisper-shouts, and she can’t remember the last time she referred to the old man as anything but ‘father’ or his hero name, and it speaks volumes as to how desperate this situation is. The car is off, parked, and Shouko launches herself forwards to grab at her father’s arm in the front seat in a final display of humiliating desperation. “Dad, no, you’re lying, you’re not really-”

Crunch. The arm grab wasn’t her wisest move in hindsight. With a fiery glare, Endeavor sends his elbow back into Shouko’s nose, the girl flying backwards and hitting her head off the bulletproof glass of the window. “Do not think grabbing at me like a child having a tantrum will change a single thing. If you prove yourself worthy of being seen as my heir again, I will call the arrangement off. Until then, this is your fate. I’m being generous by offering this choice after the stunts you’ve pulled since starting high school. Do not make me regret it.”

Opening his car door, the man exits with a heated (literally) slam. Shouko takes a moment to partake in some hyperventilation in the backseat of the car, trying not to choke on the blood running down her nose as she finally throws her own door open and runs out, not even bothering to close it. When
she bursts through the front doors, Fuyumi is waiting anxiously in the front room beside the newly-purchased replacement kotatsu, and her face blanches as she sees Shouko running in, eyes wide like a feral animal and blood dripping down the front of her face. “Shouko, your nose-!”

The younger girl cuts her off, looking at the blur that is her older sister. Shouko’s vision always gets worse as she panics, the cloudiness of her damaged left eye almost feeling like it’s spreading. She feels Fuyumi hold her to her chest, hears her start to hurriedly rush through the mindfulness techniques she usually used whenever things like this happened, but Shouko can’t really process it. Her hands are clenched at her sides, shaking, and her nose burns even as Fuyumi activates her Quirk slightly to cool Shouko’s body down. She doesn’t do that unless the injury is bad, some hysterical part of Shouko notes, her body was suited for fire but can only use ice in a reversal of her twin brother’s condition, good god how bad does her nose look? She’s thankful for the pain in a way, thankful for the way it draws her focus away from blurred vision and the terrifying mental image of herself with a swollen stomach. *(Where will your child’s burn be? Will they scream or will they cry first? What kind of colour will your room be in the psych ward?)*

Shouko doesn’t fight as she’s guided down the hall and out the side door towards the healer’s quarters, a mess of shaking breath and horror and a vicious battle to try and ice over her raw heart.

It doesn’t work.

Now that she’s seen firsthand what fate she’s plummeting towards, Shouko trains even harder. She starts neglecting school work- her English marks won’t matter if she’s forced to drop out of school, after all- and tossing homework aside to spend the time excessively exercising. Recovery Girl’s warning rings once in her mind before she silences it. Perhaps damaged fertility would be a blessing at this point. At least that way, if the worst case scenario came along, she wouldn’t be able to be used as an incubator. Shouko obsessively watches every past Sports Festival, watching each event and doing her best to train her body for each one. She has no idea what will happen this year- it’s part of the appeal of the Festival, not knowing what you’ll be witnessing until the day itself- and the stakes are too high to take a chance by ignoring certain events. Though he hasn’t said it out loud, it’s unspoken that Endeavor wants nothing short of first place from her in order to withdraw his marriage threat.

All that said, she’s human and she has a limit. Three days before the Sports Festival, she passes out coming home from an extended jog that was preceded by two hours of strength training and three hours of Quirk usage after school. Fuyumi, in the newly-learned teenage slang Shouko is inadvertently picking up by nature of sitting within earshot of Hanta Sero, flips her shit. So now her sister’s pleading for her to take a break for the rest of the day has landed the bicoloured girl in her bedroom, Fuyumi’s carefully prepared dinner of champon and shogayaki sitting half-eaten beside her futon. So much has happened lately that Shouko can’t even determine what she’s *supposed* to be feeling right now. She’s not good at emotions at the best of times, and this is objectively the worst of times. In the middle of considering whether or not she could get away with doing some push ups in here, her phone buzzes with a text.

**Natsuo**: yo yo lil sis!

**Natsuo**: nee-san told me you weren’t doin so hot

**Natsuo**: i wanted to check in and see if that’s improved at all

**Natsuo**: *improved*
Natsuo: god damn i have fat fingers

Natsuo… This was unexpected. Most things involving the middle Todoroki child were unexpected, honestly. He was never part of Shouko’s life- not by choice (she thinks) but by necessity. If Fuyumi hovering too close to her for too long would spur Endeavor’s rage, god knows the anger that would erupt if a Quirkless sibling risked influencing his precious creation. Their dinner a few weeks ago helped in humanizing the ghost that was Natsuo, so this doesn’t feel as unnatural as it would otherwise, but it’s still hard for Shouko to process. It takes her a minute to formulate her reply, tired mind not sure what to say.

Shouko: I’m as well as I could be in the situation.

Natsuo: thats good to hear!!!!

Natsuo: preppin for the sports fes i assume? me n my uni buddies are watching it together and my moneys on u

Choosing to settle into bed despite it only being eight PM, Shouko pulls the blanket up to her chest as she settles into the futon, phone held above her face. Hopefully she wouldn’t drop it- her nose was still gradually healing from the omiai incident, and the last thing she needed was an injury via cellphone.

Shouko: I am. Father isn’t training me right now, so I’m doing it myself.

Natsuo: hell yeah kid get that bread

Natsuo: also this is less fun but like

Natsuo: i just wanna let u know that i don’t know the whole story abt u and endeavor rn, but nee-san told me enough and im sorry that ur going through this. its illegal and if the resident flaming trashbag didn’t have enough money and influence to silence it id be sprinting to the cops

Natsuo: but please know worst comes to worst, i have a sleeping bag and some spare floorspace in my dorm room

Natsuo: you can come if he tries to make you live with someone else. you and nee-san both

If that isn’t the most tempting thing she’s heard in months. Shouko notes that his last comment indicates Natsuo most likely knows about the marriage threat- Fuyumi probably told him, and Shouko doesn’t blame her. The older girl likely needed someone to vent to after the omiai incident.

Shouko: I’ll remember that.
Natsuo: good. I know we didn’t see each other much as kids but im still your brother

Natsuo: *brother

Natsuo: fucking fat fingers again! im trying to be sentimental and theyre barging in like they own the place

Natsuo: but yes i care about u and jsyk i know dads social media passwords and if you want me to log into his twitter and block best jeanist just to start drama i will

That actually makes her smile, and Shouko ponders actually telling him to do it.

Shouko: It might be funnier if you blocked someone like Hawks or Mirko. They would call him out on it.

Shouko: But either way, no thank you for now.

Natsuo: aw damn

Natsuo: for real tho, anytime. in regards to both blocking the pussycats or whoever and coming to stay with me

Putting her phone down for now, Shouko tries to settle down for sleep. She’s bone tired, has been for the past two weeks, but her mind is so full of… well, everything. At least this time, the ‘everythings’ are good. Natsuo’s kindness, Fuyumi’s tenderness, and why? She’d been a specter in her sibling’s lives, the golden child that was so far above both of them. So why do they even care about her? How can they be so kind when she herself turned out as this shadow of a girl? A part of Shouko suggests that it was because they were spared from the violence and she wants to smack that part of herself because of how untrue it is. As if they weren’t both constantly and subtly on edge to avoid getting in their father’s way and evoking his anger. As if the bruises they bore when they failed to do so were fake. As if Shouko doesn’t remember four months ago, hearing a sobbing Fuyumi frantically trying to talk Natsuo down from something involving bleach over the phone, hearing the I already lost one brother please please Natsuo please I can’t lose two because that’s completely normal behavior from functional adults who were never neglected and made to feel like they were nothing!

… The everythings stopped being good. Shouko’s entire body clenches as she hears the garage door open, and her eyes flitters to the window then to her closet where her emergency bag was hidden (stocked with granola bars, bottles of water, some clothes, and twenty thousand yen in cash). There’s a moment of contemplation before she picks up her phone again.

Shouko: Can anytime be right now?

Natsuo’s dorm is small but thankfully private. It looks how she suspected a university boy’s room to look- posters of sports stars and musicians on the walls, papers and a closed laptop strewn about on a
small desk, and a mess of clothes on the floor (though it looks like he politely shoved them all to one side of the room after Shouko announced her intended visit). The pizza he’d ordered despite her insistence that she’d had champon to eat already, it’s fine, no no Fuyumi is just exaggerating when she says I’ve only had a couple bites arrived minutes before Shouko did, and she does have to admit it’s pretty tasty right now. Though there’s no kitchen in his dorm room, there’s a mini fridge and a little foldable table set up in anticipation for her arrival, and she’s seated across from Natsuo now as the two eat.

“Seriously, I’m glad you came.” Natsuo says over munches of pepperoni that he picks off then eats. It’s one of many strange habits she has witnessed either last dinner or tonight, like how he carefully separates different foods so that they don’t touch and will eat all of one food at once then move onto its neighbour, never alternating bites. “Nine PM pizza for no reason is, like, the classic university experience.”

“It’s good. I haven’t had pizza in a long time.” Probably around four years, but Shouko doesn’t count that closely.

Natsuo grins, still holding his slice and talking as he gets up to check that the door is locked. He’s done it about five times not counting now, and Shouko’s only been here twenty minutes, but whatever. She doesn’t mind. “See? I’m the coolest sibling. I feed you pizza.”

“Onee-san feeds me zaru soba.”

“Touche.” Her brother sits back down, reaching for another slice, but his eyes are on Shouko. “So did anything in particular make you have to come here? Or was it just kind of a ‘fuck it, let’s go’ moment?”

“The latter.” Shouko shrugs. “I heard father coming home and just kind of stuffed my school uniform in my escape bag and jumped out the window.”

Natsuo laughs over his food. “Goddamn, you’re metal. But oh man, the escape bags. I still have mine even though I don’t need it anymore. It’s comforting.”

It was Fuyumi’s idea, implemented when Shouko was still a first year in middle school. She’d insisted it would be fine, it was just a precaution in case of a villain attack and absolutely nothing else, but maybe they should put some food and money in a little secret bag so that they could grab it and go if they needed to. Shouko’s was currently sitting on the floor by the door, the girl having grabbed it and then shimmied out her window and onto the ground. It wasn’t that high of a drop, plus she’d tested the jump once before just in case of a situation exactly like this. One train ride and a phone call to let Fuyumi know what was going on (and though her sister fretted over Shouko’s choice, she didn’t argue when she informed the older girl she was staying with Natsuo), and now she was in her brother’s dorm room. Shouko chooses to parrot Fuyumi’s words from years ago. “Well, if there’s a villain attack or something, you can use it.”

“Sure can. Villain attacks are something else.” Natsuo rolls his eyes, sarcasm evident in his tone and half-smile, as he gets up to check the lock again.

“I think it’s locked, Onii-san.” Shouko supplies. Her brother nods as he fiddles with the lock, grinning sheepishly.

“I know, I know. I just like double-checking with this kinda stuff.” Finding it unsurprisingly locked, Natsuo turns back around with a smile. “Pizza was good, but you know what goes best with it?” Seeing Shouko’s cocked head, a silent indicator of her thoughts, Natsuo smiled wider and clapped his hands. “Have you ever played Mario Kart?”
Natsuo groaned overdramatically as he rolled out the sleeping bag. “Are you sure you haven’t secretly been playing Mario Kart in your sleep or something? You kicked my ass!”

A small smile graces Shouko’s lips as she crawls into bed. She’d argued with him when she realized his text didn’t mean she’d be sleeping on the floor- he fully intended to give her the bed. Shouko wasn’t about to force poor Natsuo into a sleeping bag by imposing on him so suddenly, but his reminder that she needed the best sleep possible for the Sports Festival in a couple days finally meant she caved and agreed to take it. “Maybe you’re just terrible.”

It was easy to talk to Natsuo. He was so casual and carefree, though Shouko remembered a more sullen boy when he lived at home. Being free from Endeavor’s clutches completely must have done wonders for him. Though... Shouko still remembers that phone call she wasn’t supposed to hear, pressed up against the wall outside the kitchen to listen to Fuyumi plead with him to not do whatever it is he was planning, and wonders how much of this is an act for her sake. Hopefully not very much, and she decides to interpret his stuck out tongue and display of false anger as the jokes of a happy boy. “I’m banning you from picking Rainbow Road ever again, you sadist.”

“I’m only ever going to pick Rainbow Road next time.” The concept of there being a next time warms Shouko’s heart in the best possible way. She wants to do this again, have fun and talk to her brother and watch his strange little habits decrease as he adjusts to her presence. Natsuo hasn’t stopped checking the lock on the door or window, but it’s decreased a lot since they started the game- in fact, while he’d turned the console on three times in a row, he turned it off normally at the end. Shouko’s not sure why, but she thinks that’s good.

Natsuo rolls his eyes, unzipping the bag and starting to get in. “Boo. And I let you borrow my shirt and everything!”

It’s true- Shouko realized that she didn’t actually have pajamas in her escape bag when she walked over to the public bathrooms down the hall to change. In turn, Natsuo lent her one of his old t-shirts. It was a bright orange and had a strange symbol on the front, black and shaped sort of like a ‘P’ with a feathered tail. When she’d asked, her brother had simply told her it was some foreign sports team he liked. It was way too big for her, Natsuo’s naturally stockier body trained by American football and jogging meaning that his top hung off her like a dress. Shouko loved it. The shorts were actually his girlfriends, grey and made of comfy terrycloth, and were vital to Shouko’s playful retort. “But your girlfriend gave me these shorts. I wonder how she mysteriously forgot her pants in your bedroom.”

Natsuo’s cheeks go red before he laughs loudly, throwing a pillow at Shouko. “Hey, don’t you go insinuating gross stuff! Little shit.” It’s the first time she’s heard that term used lovingly, and it makes Shouko’s face heat up like Natsuo’s, though it’s out of a nearly embarrassing joy on her part. There’s a pause from the boy before he speaks. “... Huh. I didn’t know your blush did that.”

“Did what?” Shouko touches her face, not knowing what he’s talking about.

“It’s uneven. Like, your left cheek gets a lot redder than your right one.” He tilts his head, examining it. Shouko has never heard or witnessed this, but she also almost never blushes. Shifting so she can see into the mirror on the other side of Natsuo’s room, she’s surprised to see that it’s true. Where her left side is rosy red, spreading from her cheek to one side of her nose, the right is more subdued, looking more like she was just cold.

“I… I’ve never noticed that before.” It’s bizarre to say the least, and there’s a pause before the metaphorical light bulb moment. “Oh, my Quirk. It must have to do with my heat distribution through the two sides.”
“Oooh, that explains why Nee-san never blushes even when she’s super flustered! Quirk biology!”
Natsuo smacks a fist into his closed palm. “We’re geniuses! Let’s open a detective business!”

Shouko’s lips curl in a small smile. “Well, all we had to do was look at our biology. It’s an aspect of our family.” There’s a beat, and Shouko quickly realizes her mistake. “I mean-”

Natsuo raises a hand to silence her, looking more amused than anything. “Save it, save it. You don’t gotta apologize- I’m pretty weak to hot weather anyways, so it’s mostly true.”

Quirklessness is uncommon enough that it’s easy to forget that there’s nearly one billion six hundred people on the planet who don’t have any sort of power. It’s rare in East Asia, Shouko remembers from the rigorous studying for the entrance exam- it’s because the first Quirk user was from China. Quirks spread out from that region, and her nation was just a small sea apart. Japan’s real Quirkless population is closer to 9% than 20%. Shouko does not know why she remembers these things, but then recalls the frantic way she’d studied to ensure she’d pass the exceptionally challenging UA recommendations written exam, and suddenly understands why the facts are so deeply burned into her brain. Natsuo never talked to her enough to really discuss his Quirklessness, so she was worried he’d take offence by her forgetfulness.

The boy didn’t seem to care though, chuckling as he settled into his sleeping bag. “People always treat it like some kind of rare disease or disability. I’m Quirkless, not sick.”

There was a pause, Shouko trying to figure out how to phrase this in a way that wouldn’t insult the brother who had given her kindness she did not deserve. She only knew one Quirkless person, a boy in middle school, and she only knew of his status due to the immense bullying he underwent. She never knew his name, just knew that he was Quirkless and had a haunted look in his eyes. He transferred out in second year, and Shouko never saw him again. Was this how life went for Natsuo? “... Were people cruel to you growing up?”

“Yup.” His laugh carries both the sadness of someone who has faced immense cruelty and the peace of someone who has escaped it to find their place in the world. Shouko doesn’t know if it’s because of the bullying or their father. “Just normal kid bullying, but with an actual motive. Flowers on my desk, getting the crap kicked out of me in the bathroom, so on and so forth. It ended up slowing down a lot when I joined the football team in middle school- turns out bullies don’t want to try insulting you to your face when the Quirkless kids’ got a furious football team behind him. But it was bad for a while.”

“I didn’t know.” Shouko admits. She’s the furthest thing from Quirkless, cursed by fire and blessed by ice, and she was never afforded the mental stamina to worry about others when she had her own hell at home to deal with.

Natsuo shrugs. “I mean, the old bastard kept us away from each other. Makes enough sense that you didn’t know.” It’s the first time their years of isolation have been brought up all night, and Shouko knows it would be awkward if he didn’t immediately follow up with “Even so, you’re still my sister, y’know? Nee-san and I want you to be happy.”

At this point, Shouko’s not certain that’s an emotion she can process for longer than a happy hour or so before the guarded emptiness returns to fill her mind with static and thoughts that spiral. Even so, it’s a nice statement, and she nods. “Thank you.” As an afterthought, the girl adds. “I want you to be happy too.”

“Now that I’m out? I think I’m pretty happy.” Natsuo grins. “And it only happened ‘cause Endeavor was all pissy over his kid not having powers. Being Quirkless might have been the best thing that happened to me.”
Shouko cocks her head. “You don’t want a Quirk?”

“As a kid, I did.” Says her brother. “I just wanted to be like everyone else, have some cool ice or fire to show off, y’know? But now it’s the reason I never have to see our garbage old man again. I’m happy with who I am now. Not to mention after the thing with Nii-san… Well, a Quirk that hurts your body is never good. I was kinda grateful I didn’t get something like that.”

“What was he like?” Shouko asks before she can stop herself. “Onii-san. Touya, I mean. I… Never saw much of him.”

Natsuo’s smile turns a bit softer and subdued. He reminds her of Fuyumi like this. “He was nice. Rough around the edges, maybe, but he was a really cool older brother. I bet he’s out there travelling freely, y’know? Backpacking and stuff. Hell, he probably doesn’t live in Japan anymore. He had a huge soft spot for you, even if you don’t remember it. Hopefully one day we can all meet up.”

“That would be nice.” The four of them, hanging out somewhere and chatting like normal siblings over coffee or something… What a strange fantasy. Shouko’s pondering was interrupted as she heard Natsuo yawn loudly.

“Wah, it’s only eleven and I’m ready to sleep! I used to be up til two most nights last year.” Natsuo stretches his arms, the audible crack in his shoulder making Shouko wince. “I have an eight AM class tomorrow, so if you want I’ll wake you up by six thirty or whatever? So you can get ready for school and hop on the train.”

“Sure.” This night will end, and Shouko will go back to her self-imposed routine, her heart frozen over once again. But as Natsuo gets up to turn off the lights (on and off three times, what’s with the threes?), the bicoloured girl is able to remind herself that she’s sleeping somewhere safe, just a few feet away from someone who cares for her even if she doesn’t understand why. It’s peculiar, but Shouko decides it’s a mystery she can leave unsolved as she closes her eyes and drifts off.

Chapter End Notes

CONTENT WARNINGS FOR:

- Exploitation of a minor
- Forced marriage
- Non-consensual touching of a minor (NOT in a sexual area, but it's done in a sexually charged way)
- Child abuse
- Talks of forced pregnancy
- Implied past suicide attempt/suicidal ideation
- Implied OCD as a result of former child abuse and neglect

Even though it's light on canon plot progression, this chapter got dark... But I hope certified Good Big Sibs Fuyumi and Natsuo make up for it a little haha. In regards to Natsuo: it isn't uncommon for victims of abuse or neglect to develop OCD, which he has pretty bad as a result. Shouko and Fuyumi have their own things going on, but I hope to dig into that later. I had childhood OCD (not from any form of abuse I should note!) and understand a lot of the patterns, and I hope I portrayed it well in an adult.

I wanted to ask you guys something: namely, should I have small segments from the
POV of characters who are not Shouko? They probably wouldn't be too big, and they'd be from plot-important people like Izumi, one of the Todosibs, Aizawa (and hoo boy does he become important later), etc etc. I'm debating whether or not other people's perceptions of Shouko might be nice to read from time to time? Lemme know what you think in the comments! And as always: thanks so much for reading, and I'll see you soon!
One of the very few benefits of her father no longer training Shouko was that all she got when she saw him at home the evening after her abrupt sleepover at Natsuo’s was a pointed glare before he went back to whatever it was he was working on. You’d think she could also add ‘less sore and tired’ to that list of good things, but her own self-imposed routine ensured that this was not the case. Shouko knew the stakes of the Sports Festival were too high to slack off, that she needed to prove herself here to keep even the smallest semblance of freedom in her life. And as the day of the event proper starts off, she is ready, feeling the ice flow beneath her skin as she prepares herself for the fight ahead.

The train ride is high-tension, multiple other students (mostly Gen Ed, though she sees a Hero Course boy who looks too old to be in her grade, wearing an intense expression and cropped dark hair) also making the commute full of nerves and determination. Shouko is content to just look out the window on the trip, serenity only broken when she gets a text:

**Natsuo**: good luck shouko-lat!!!!! me n The Squad are rooting for u! launi even used her quirk on her hair for spiritual support. let the hair energy flow through uuuuuuuu

Attached is a selfie of Natsuo grinning broadly as he and multiple other posing students sit around a TV in someone’s dorm. To his right sits his girlfriend (Launi Nurekami, if she remembers that name correctly), a pretty dark skinned girl with kinky curls puffed out around her chin. She’s flashing a peace sign, hair coloured half-red, half-white. Shouko smiles despite herself, and even if she’s not able to afford to think about much but the competition, she does manage to provide a selfie of herself in return. It’s just a straight shot of her with a small smile, but she hopes it at least makes Natsuo happy.

**Shouko**: She wore it better.

**Natsuo**: launi said you take selfies from the angle of a middle aged mom and also that shed die for you
Shouko’s moment of happiness is interrupted by a scoff and a humourless chuckle to her left. Turning her head, Shouko engages in a glaring match with the boy sitting beside her for a minute before he rolls his eyes, muttering something about the Hero Course and priorities as he turns away. Wasn’t that the purple haired kid who had challenged her class some time ago? Whatever. She’d be surprised if he made it past the first round. Turning back to the window, Shouko zoned out for the rest of the ride.

The stadium is just as magnificent as it looks on TV, but the changerooms and class waiting rooms are a bit plain. Even so, the buzz of energy can be felt through the entirety of Class 1-A as they partake in their own little rituals to prepare themselves for the trials ahead. Shouko has no doubt that they all have their spots on the coveted podium - but she knows she’ll be the one taking first this time around. She has to. These lucky fools, living in a world where they had a choice. She’d show them.

Speaking of, there was one person in particular Shouko needed to talk to. She’d thought of the power she’d seen during training, at the USJ, and she knows exactly what’s happening here. This is the person she needs to beat to prove herself. Eyes scanning around the room, her gaze settles on the bundle of nerves talking to Uraraka and Iida. Striding over, Shouko calls out a few feet from the target. “Midoriya?”

“H-Huh?” The girl seems surprised, turning around with a swish of her long ponytail. The yellow ribbon holding it up had two loops that reminded Shouko of a certain hero’s hairstyle, and she almost wants to laugh at how obvious her theory is. “Yes, Todoroki?”

“If we’re looking at this objectively, I’m stronger than you.” She folds her arms over her chest, ignoring the way the room has quieted down to listen to this strange exchange. Midoriya looks confused, face seeming almost apologetic for some reason. “Um… I guess so…”

“And even so, All Might’s interested in you, isn’t he?” Seeing the girl’s eyes widen, Shouko cuts her off. “It’s obvious, so don’t lie.”

The smaller girl gulps, and Shouko uses her height advantage - almost seven inches taller - to loom over Midoriya. “N-No, I don’t think he’s particularly paying attention to me…”

“Keep that act up if you want. I’m just letting you know that I’m going to beat you.” Not caring about how impolite it is, Shouko stares Midoriya dead in the eyes before turning on her heels and starting to stride off.

However, she’s barely made it a few steps before a tiny, determined voice speaks up. “Todoroki… I don’t know what compelled you to do all that just now, because of course you’re stronger than me right now. You’re one of the most capable people in this class, if not the most capable. I’m so far behind you.”

“H-Hey, no need to put yourself down like that, Midoriya!” Kirishima pushes out his chair, getting in between the two, but Midoriya boldly steps aside to keep eye contact with the bicoloured girl.

“No, Kirishima. It’s okay. I need to let her know that I’m going to beat you.” Not caring about how impolite it is, Shouko stares Midoriya dead in the eyes before turning on her heels and starting to stride off.

Midoriya inhales deeply, fists clenching. For some reason, Shouko remembers a line from one of the books they had to study in literature last week: though she be but little, she is fierce. “I’m coming up faster than you’re anticipating. And I’m going to give this everything I have!”

That all but confirms Shouko’s theory: this girl and All Might… Well, that surge of determination from such an unassuming person has all but confirmed it. Todoroki simply raises a brow. “We’ll see.” She can hear Bakugou make an angry noise to her side, but before the boy can start anything,
there’s a knock on the door and a muffled call that Class 1-A needs to get moving towards the gates. No more time for her declarations of war- the battle is starting.

An obstacle course? Good. Shouko practiced specifically for that one, and as everyone takes their positions, she knows what her opening move needs to be. In practiced form, she’s sweeping through the bottleneck and weaving between running students with the grace of someone who has grown up learning how to dodge in the blink of an eye. As soon as she’s near to the front of the pack, she inhales, allowing the familiar ice to fill her senses before whisking an arm back, freezing the ground up to everyone’s ankles. The cries of confusion and anger confirm that Shouko got them, and the girl takes an easy lead. Present Mic yells something about her, but she’s tuning him out. His voice is grating.

The robots are no trouble, nor is passing the gorge. Shouko imagines the look on her father’s face as she makes it to first with solely her ice, proving to him that she can be number one with half her Quirk and showing him that she’s worth holding on to. Her thoughts of victory are interrupted, however, by a screech of anger behind her. A quick look over her shoulder confirms her thoughts- Bakugou is catching up, propelling himself via his explosions. Grimacing, Shouko sped up, allowing ice to flood just in front of her as she skated forwards. She could beat him, she was sure of it, but-

That minefield up ahead seemed mildly problematic.

Shouko started weaving through the field- the mines were slightly visible just as Present Mic’s last yodelling announcement had said they’d be. It would just be a matter of making sure she didn’t step on one. It was clever, Shouko mused- those in the front were now at a disadvantage. Must make for good TV, seeing all the shake ups that would result from this. But as long as she watched her step-

Goddammit, Bakugou was loud. Swivelling her head, Shouko was barely able to dodge a viciously grinning Bakugou as he allowed his explosions to propel himself forwards. As he got directly next to her, he shot the girl a nasty smile. “Your declaration of war was to the wrong goddamn person, Icyhot!”

Icyhot…? Gritting her teeth, Shouko barely leapt out of the way of a close range explosion, the heat singing her arm. She was lucky to avoid landing on a mine, but a quick retrace of her steps lead Shouko to grab Bakugou’s arm, icing it over. He melted it quickly, and she went back again with a palm strike that turned into a normal slap as the furious boy dodged back and retaliated with an explosion to the stomach. Everything was moving fast, ice countered by flame, but Shouko was used to this- violence was something that ran through her veins, but it looked as if it ran through Bakugou’s too if his attacks were anything to go by. She had no time to wonder what his home life might have consisted of as she flicked her gaze to the ground in front of her to Bakugou and back to the ground, watching for mines while dodging attacks and landing hits of her own. Just as she was coating her fist in ice with the intention of delivering an uppercut, an explosion nearly sent both of the combatants stumbling to the ground. In fact, they’d both have fallen directly onto a mine had they not grabbed each other at the last minute, pulling and shoving to stay stabilized in the most bizarre case of accidental teamwork to date. Both heads swivelled back to see the cause of such a powerful explosion, and… Was that Midoriya?

Shouko found herself agreeing with Mic on this one. What just happened?!

The girl went soaring by on what looked like a piece of scrap metal, surpassing them both, and Bakugou screeched in anger as he blasted himself upwards to try and catch her. Suddenly realizing she’d been left in third, Shouko slammed a foot down and sent forth an ice path to run over. She’d hesitated to do so beforehand, knowing how it would help the people behind her, but there was no time to worry about that now. She had to focus on the two in front of her.
Running alongside Bakugou’s flying blasts, she had no more intention to fight him for now, and it seemed like a shared opinion. Shouko moved as quickly as her legs would take her, going for the sprint as Midoriya tumbled down. She adjusted her ice path to ensure the girl wouldn’t land on it and not set off a bomb as she fell. Down went the scrap metal, and there was a sudden tickle. Shouko blinked in shock as, for that brief moment in time, Midoriya’s long ponytail brushed against her nose. The girl was falling headfirst in between her and Bakugou. One thought crossed Shouko’s mind, and then there was a pain on her shoulder and a blinding light.

Shouko and Bakugou’s yelps harmonized in a way that might have been comical had she not just been blasted by at least four bombs. When her head stopped spinning and the smoke cleared, all she could see was Midoriya in the distance, a tiny body getting smaller as she rushed even closer to the exit. Darting forwards, Shouko’s legs moved in a dead sprint. She had to win, had to! Aizawa’s voice rang over the announcements, and for some reason, one phrase hit Shouko’s heart: each of them is driven by some desire to succeed. Oh, Eraserhead. It’s not a desire anymore. It’s a need. Shouko did what she wished she had done years ago.

She ran.

She pumped her arms back as a frenzy of emotion overtook her, running like her life depended on it (and in a way, it did). She was shorter than Bakugou, form leaner, and it gave her the speed advantage, passing him by. Midoriya was only thirty or so feet away, the girl stockier with muscle than Shouko- she could catch up. Twenty five, twenty, worthless legs, FASTER!, fifteen, ten-!

Midoriya ripped through the gate five seconds before Shouko.

She had lost to her.

Catching her breath as she almost stumbled through the gate, Shouko’s thoughts were in a frenzy. It was okay, she could catch up (could she though?), this was horrible, but her father would accept it as long as she won first overall, right…?

God, she hoped so. Watching Midoriya tear up as the cameras focused on her, clearly overjoyed with her own victory, Shouko clenched her fists. Of course. That girl was from the world where crying was acceptable, where comforting friends like Uraraka and Iida would join her side, where she was doing all of this because of her own free will. Nobody puppeteered Izumi Midoriya, and Shouko thought she might hate the other girl for it. And without even using her Quirk? What kind of reckless confidence did this fool have? She had no right. And yet… She thought back to the moment when Midoriya’s long hair hit her face, one thought that escaped before the explosions that nearly brought her to her knees. In that moment, Shouko had smelt plenty of fresh dirt, the foul burning sugar of nitroglycerin, and the ever familiar salt of sweat. But for a moment? There had been peach scented shampoo, soft and mild.

… It had smelt good.

Shouko turned her back to Midoriya, walking away and silencing her head with the comforting static.

At least in the context of the Festival itself, second place was better than first in the long run. It didn’t mean it would be good when Shouko encountered her father, but it was good when everyone was rushing to her side and begging to be on her team. She had the pick of the litter, and so far everything was going perfectly. The cavalry battle involved teamwork, yes, but so far her team had done an excellent job of listening to her orders. With a minute left, they had the ten million points, leaving Team Midoriya in the literal and figurative dust thanks to Iida’s Recipro Burst. That said, they were
current immobilized as a result. But even as Team Midoriya turned on their heels and rushed them, Shouko was confident they’d keep it. Uraraka would get her team disqualified if she tried to float any of Shouko’s team members, the support girl didn’t seem to have any combat-suited Quirk, Midoriya herself would shatter herself if she tried using that oh-so-familiar Quirk, and Tokoyami was easy to repel via Kaminari. And yet, as they approached in a dead rush, Shouko’s eyes widened: Midoriya’s arm was lighting up in green, swinging back. What the hell was that idiot doing?!

It must have been a last, desperate choice for her. Shouko scolded herself for not seeing it coming. That would shatter her ice easy, and she was way too close, and Iida was yelling and she could feel Kaminari stumble and Yaoyorozu gasped and-

Shouko’s left side lit up, a huge gust of wind blowing the flames away even as they coated her arm protectively. In the moment of shocked stillness, Midoriya yanked away a headband, velcro scratching her neck as it was torn off. When her teammates’ yelling yanked her back to reality, Shouko scrambled to check around her neck. Had they- no, they hadn’t grabbed the ten million. Breathing a sound of relief, Shouko cranked her head around to see that Team Midoriya was figuring it out at the same time, Midoriya’s panicked shout for them to rush Team Todoroki obvious. Shouko grit her teeth, a flurry of emotions hitting her like a truck, but still focused on the fight. “Yaoyorozu, more insulation! Kaminari, get ready to discharge!”

The twinkling sound of Creation started up, the hair on Shouko’s arms rose with static electricity as Kaminari charged up, oh for fuck’s sake when did Bakugou get here and there’s so much going on at once that her head is spinning and the noise is- oh, okay. The match is over. Bakugou hits the ground inelegantly. Shouko takes a minute to catch her breath as her team chatters excitedly, adrenaline slowly draining out as they realize they’d gotten first place. Thank goodness. Shouko ignores the world around her, eyes searching the crowd for her father. He’s not hard to find, but he’s also too far away to see clearly (and Shouko’s eyesight doesn’t help that). His expression just isn’t readable, but Shouko has a bad feeling about it anyways.

Tearing her eyes off him, Shouko instead walks over to Midoriya, the girl drying her tears as Midnight announces a break. “Midoriya.” Wet eyes flick to her, confused and slightly intimidated. “We need to talk.”

Oh man oh man oh man, what’s Izumi supposed to do?! Todoroki had all but dragged her down this unused entrance instead of going to lunch, and the two of them have been standing here, the bicoloured girl just… staring. Izumi really hopes she doesn’t look as nervous as she feels, but realizes with a gulp that she definitely looks like she’s going to pass out.

Todoroki was… Confusing? She was always so distant from everyone else, like there was some unspoken barrier between them. All her reactions were a little strange, randomly tensing up over movements or grabbing people who snuck up on her. And how did she not know what a period was until it happened? It was like Todoroki lived on another planet her whole life, an alien to human culture (would Ashido find that funny or insulting?). Not to mention that completely uncalled for challenge! She was just such a wild card in her reactions. And yet, Izumi often felt the uncomfortable gaze of eyes on her back, different from the waves of bad energy that she got when she knew Mineta was ogling her. A few glances confirmed that it was always Todoroki with her gaze fixed on her. It made Izumi really, really nervous- well, a lot of things did, but this especially! It wasn’t just that a super pretty girl kept looking at her- well, that was a little bit of it. It felt like her stare was searching for something, itching to take her apart and find whatever she was looking for. And considering Izumi had All Might’s Quirk? Someone searching for secrets was veeeeeery anxiety inducing.

Hoping that it wasn’t anything serious, Izumi willed her voice not to shake. “Um… You wanted to
The other girl fixed her with a stare, crossing her arms as she leant against the wall. Izumi flinched, bracing herself for some bombshell like ‘I figured out your Quirk’ or ‘you’re involved in a top secret conspiracy’ or ‘I’m actually an alien who can read minds and that alien thing back there insulted me so much that I’m going to eat you’, only to be met with something entirely different but no less troublesome.

“... Are you All Might’s secret love child or something?”

What.

Even if the girl had denied the blood relation to All Might, her wording implied there was something there. Shouko narrowed her eyes, taking in the tiny girl before her. Well, no- tiny wasn’t right. She’d been thinking of the other girl as small, but defined muscle and curvature spoke to a pint-sized powerhouse. So why is Izumi Midoriya such a nervous crybaby? For a moment, Shouko’s mind flicks to the worst case scenario- is it possible that the current number one pro is just as sinister as the current number two?- but is quickly dismissed if only because Shouko doesn’t think she could trust in the system she’s aiming to join for even a second if All Might turned out like Endeavor. No, best to find more evidence before breaking your own heart. What’s one way to find out someone’s history?

Tell them your story first.

So Shouko tells.

She tells of a man obsessed with power, a wife sold like a dog, a pair of twins pulled apart two different times, a Quirkless brother becoming a phantom (and she twitches there- very strange), of a little girl blessed and cursed, of bruises and stitches and a boiling tea kettle. Midoriya looks horrified, hands going to cover her mouth as the story goes on. Shouko vaguely wonders if she should feel ashamed to admit this- she never really has - but she also knows she has a habit of spilling everything after accidentally letting a drop out, and this has rarely made her feel awkward before. Maybe she’s not supposed to feel embarrassed, or maybe she is and she’s simply horrendously emotionally stunted. Either way, she feels fine (and something about Midoriya makes her want to keep talking) so Shouko continues into possibly the riskiest prospect. “After I started my period, I got into a fight with Endeavor. It culminated in him telling me that if I wanted to be treated like a woman so badly, that could be arranged. The next day, I found papers announcing that an omiai had been arranged for me with an older man who has a Temperature Resistance Quirk.”

Midoriya gasps , eyes looking suspiciously damp. “Todoroki, you need to tell a teacher! That’s against the law!”

“So are Quirk Marriages, discriminating against the Quirkless, and beating your children. But look at how well those laws have functioned when someone has money and power.” Shouko narrows her eyes. “The only way to ensure my father to call off the arrangement is to prove I can be a suitable successor rather than an incubator for one. You made me use my fire, but it won’t happen again. I’ll win with my ice to prove I’m strong enough without him, but that it would also be a waste to marry me off in my prime.”

“But- that’s-”

“I’ve said all I need to say.” Shouko speaks coolly as she interrupts Midoriya’s stuttered plea, pushing off the wall she was leaning back against and turning to leave. “It’s only right to let you know why
I’m declaring war against you. Like it or not, I know you’re connected to All Might. Many people are aware of that, and I have a duty to fulfill. I’ll beat you to prove myself.”

Shouko has stepped out of the hall and into the sunlight, strolling towards the cafeteria when Midoriya abruptly calls out. “Wait!” Pausing, Shouko turns her head slightly to see Midoriya standing there, fists clenched. “Todoroki… We’ve had such different lives. To be honest, I still feel like I’m not worthy of being here. But so many people have supported me and given me this chance. I can’t let them down … Shouko Todoroki, I’m going to show you my best no matter what! I’m going to win!”

There it is again on that girl- a fire that doesn’t burn her up, a stark determination even as her fists shake. Shouko thinks of that quote again, resolves to try and find the source. “We’ll see. Don’t you dare lose until I get the chance to fight you.”

With that, the conversation is over, and Shouko walks off in the direction of the cafeteria. For whatever reason, Midoriya heads the other way. Whatever. If she wants to be late to eat, that’s on her.

“Todoroki!” There’s a call for her as soon as she opens the cafeteria door, sounding both relieved and panicky. It’s Yaoyorozu, rushing forwards with an orange bundle in her arms. “Thank goodness you’re here! There’s been a schedule change from Aizawa, we need to get changed into these for the recreational activities. Where’s Midoriya?”

“Last time I saw her, she was wandering back into the stadium.” Shouko says as a bunch of orange and green is shoved into her hands.

“What?! She’ll miss lunch! Ugh, we really need to get the whole class to exchange numbers. Thank you, Todoroki!” And with that, Yaoyorozu is off, seemingly hunting for the green haired girl. Shouko takes a minute to examine what’s been handed to her, eyebrows shooting up- seriously? Why was this mandated? Whatever- she’d really rather not get in trouble for something as stupid as this, so Shouko vows to head off to the changeroom as soon as she’s done eating.

(Though eating doesn’t prevent her from googling a certain quote, a strange and burning confusion that arises whenever her eyes fall on Midoriya’s head during class reviving as she rereads it and finds the context.)

Looking back at it, Aizawa wouldn’t make a weird, creepy change like mandatory cheerleader costumes. But hindsight is always 20/20 and does very little to help you and your eight other gobsmacked classmates as you all realize you’ve been tricked on national TV. Shouko feels far too exposed in the costume, pompoms shifting to cover her stomach awkwardly as she feels a rush of eyes on her for an unwanted reason.

“Kaminari! Mineta! Was this you?!” Jirou snaps at the two offering thumbs ups. Shouko hears Yaoyorozu make a miserable noise as she crouches into a ball. “It’s not funny!” And with that, Yaoyorozu is off, seemingly hunting for the green haired girl. Shouko takes a minute to examine what’s been handed to her, eyebrows shooting up- seriously? Why was this mandated? Whatever- she’d really rather not get in trouble for something as stupid as this, so Shouko vows to head off to the changeroom as soon as she’s done eating.

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“Jirou! Sorry, we couldn’t resist joking around with you guys a little.” Kaminari, for his part, seems more playful and sheepish than the leering Mineta.

“Uraraka speaks surprisingly sternly. “Do we look like we’re having fun?”

The playfulness is decreasing, leaving the electric boy seemingly unsure of himself. Shouko’s got a bit of a theory about Kaminari just judging by his general behaviour, but now’s not really the time to
give him some sympathy (like she’s good at that even when they certainly do deserve it). Mineta, on the other hand, waves them off with a smug smile. Shouko decides that she hates him a little. “Oh ladies, don’t you know it’ll raise the replays of the Festival? It’s all for a good cause in the end!”

“So I guess it’d be okay to fool you guys out in skimpy cheer costumes too, right?” Ashido snaps, tone mocking as she continues. “Plenty of people like that- it’s for a good cause! Ugh, I thought these were cute uniforms, and knowing you’re the reason they’re here ruins them.”

Hagakure seems to be trying to make the best of the situation, waving her pompoms around, and it sounds like she’s smiling (even if the pep in her voice is a bit forced). “It’s okay, guys! Let’s find the silver lining- what if we go cheer on some of the General Studies kids while they do their recreational events? It’ll improve our classes’ reputation.”

Shouko is tired of both this conversation and the way that multiple boys from the sports field aren’t even trying to hide their gazes. It’s somehow less irritating than the random girls from the field who are glaring at the eight of them- who pissed in their cereal? She sighs, rolling her eyes. “I’m going to get changed.”

“Eh, not a huge loss.” Mineta shrugs. “Todoroki’s got a nice face even with the scar, but she’s a total washing board otherwise.”

“Don’t talk about her that way!” Much to her shock, it’s Midoriya who stands up for her, stepping out in front and scowling. “We’ll tell Aizawa!”

“Get a life, grape freak.” Jirou rolls her eyes, turning and walking off with a miserable looking Yaoyorozu. She tilts her head back. “Todoroki, we’re getting changed. You wanna come?”

Nodding, Shouko follows suit. Being put in a sexy costume on national television for no reason whatsoever was just pissing her off before the third event. She hears Kaminari try and stutter off something like an apology, but that’s cut off by Asui telling him that ‘you’ll probably make it worse if you speak to them now, ribbit’, and boy is she right. Shouko stalks off, unsure if the fact that perverts found her body to be unappealing was good or bad.

She thinks of Hideomi. She thinks that it’s good.

Some of the girls had followed Hagakure’s lead by staying behind and cheering for the other classes, which seemed to fluster them more than encourage them. Midoriya and Asui had almost seemed like they wanted to go back, but the triple threat of Hagakure, Ashido and Uraraka lead to those two electing to stay and cheer. Shouko tuned it all out, newly changed into her gym uniform and standing with Jirou and Yaoyorozu against one of the walls.

“Was I too harsh on Kaminari?” Jirou sighs, toying idly with one of her earphone jacks. “I was pretty pissed off, but…”

Yaoyorozu put a hand on her shoulder, smiling gently. “I don’t think you were in the wrong at all. I know you’re better acquainted with him than the rest of us are, so maybe he’ll realize he was out of line because the first protest came from you.”

“Hopefully… It’s not like I dislike him or anything- he’s at least got a nice personality outside of all that nonsense, unlike the grape. I hope he’s not mad or anything.” Jirou rubbed the toe of her shoe into the grass. “Thanks, Yaomomo.”

Shouko blinked. “Who’s Yaomomo?”
“That’s- ah!” Jirou turned beat red, tensing up. “Oh, it was just a little nickname I thought up for Yaoyorozu.” Her eyes flickered nervously to the dark haired girl. “Um, i-if you don’t like it-”

“Not at all! I love it!” Yaoyorozu clapped her hands together, eyes sparkling. She must have been a bit of a sheltered rich girl, too. “‘Yaomomo’... It’s terribly cute! Thank you!”

Jirou looked relieved beyond belief, exhaling deeply. “Phew. Thought I’d overstepped a boundary there. Uh, you can call me Kyoka. Both of you.”

Oh, right. Shouko still had to partake in this conversation. “Please call me Shouko, then.”

“Yaomomo, Kyoka, and Shouko.” Yaoyorozu (should Shouko start mentally referring to her as Momo? Maybe) looked pleased as punch by this development. “I’ll remember that!”

Kyoka smiled and opened her mouth to say something else just as Midnight called everyone back to the field. Exchanging smiles (in Kyoka and Momo’s case) or nods (in Shouko’s case), the three girls made their way to where the Eighteen Plus Only Hero was currently hyping up the crowd before placements were announced. However, before she could pull up the results, there was a hand raised at the front.

Ojiro was dropping out, it seemed. Something about ‘not getting here on his own merits’. Wasn’t he on Team Shinsou? Shouko didn’t even know who that was. A Class 1-B kid or something? While she looks for this mysterious cryptid in the ground, a Class 1-B she’s never spoken to before drops out as well. Whatever. If they want to waste their chances, that’s fine by her. Some other Class 1-B kids are brought up, and as the results finally come onscreen, it looks like Shouko isn’t paired against either of them, so she’s unbothered. Reading lazily, she examines the names for the first round.

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ROUND ONE

_Inasa Yoarashi VS Hitoshi Shinsou_

_Mina Ashido VS Hanta Sero_

_Shouko Todoroki VS Mei Hatsume_

_Izumi Midoriya VS Yuuga Aoyama_

_Katsuki Bakugou VS Denki Kaminari_

_Ochako Uraraka VS Ibara Shiozaki_

_Eijirou Kirishima VS Momo Yaoyorozu_

_Fumikage Tokoyami VS Tenya Iida_

Mei Hatsume is an unknown- most likely 1-B or possibly either the Support or General Studies students who made it through. Regardless, Shouko is confident in being able to defeat her. There’s something she’s far more interested in right now, and it’s that provided Midoriya defeats Aoyama (and she has no doubt in her mind that she will), they’ll be able to face off. Her own strength, her value, it can be proven should she take down the girl who bested her so cleverly in the first round. Shouko’s eyes fixate on the back of Midoriya’s neck, the other student still in that cheerleader costume, and her gaze narrows. All Might’s special one, little Hermia…
She has to go down, and go down hard.

Natsuo Hikawa is concerned.

They’re all crowded in Rio’s room, and it’s slightly too humid- Natsuo knows the girl needs it because of how her lower body is entirely tentacles, but seriously, could they have held the viewing party in someone else’s room? He feels Launi rest her head on his shoulder as the commercial break starts, some of his tension draining out as his girlfriend’s kinky hair tickles his chin. Junya and Hiroyuki are chatting excitedly by the TV, beers in hand- it turns out the two other boys he’d met at the Quirkless support group on campus always searched for an excuse to day-drink. Sosuke is rambling excitedly to Rio about the purple haired kid that made it onto the third round- it’s his little cousin and they actually have the exact same Quirk, how exciting is that?! Natsuo wonders if his Human Anatomy classmate is worried for his relative too, though he suspects it’s not in the same way he worries for Shouko right now.

Speaking of worrying for Shouko, Natsuo’s phone lights up with a text. Pulling it out of his pocket, he opens the messaging app.

Fuyumi: Did you see the second round too?

Natsuo: yup. fire

Fuyumi: Do you think that’ll be better or worse for her…? With dad and all.

Natsuo: idk. depends on whether or not she uses it in the fighting portion

Fuyumi: Do you know much about her competitor? Sorry, I’m watching with my class and have to keep looking away to keep them in line.

Natsuo: room full of 3rd graders VS room full of tipsy college kids: annoyance battle START

Natsuo: but fr though: im pretty sure shes the pink haired support kid?

Fuyumi: So we don’t know her Quirk or if it’s dire enough for Shouko to use her fire… Her next competitor may be that green haired girl who swiped at her though. That may affect things.

Natsuo: i dont even know if its good or bad for her to use it ugh. every part of it is worrying!!!!

Fuyumi: Welcome to being a big sibling :P

Fuyumi: In any case, I may have to freeze those two boys who pulled that stunt with the cheerleading costumes.

Natsuo: i dont have a quirk but what i do have? fists. come get some weirdos

Natsuo: PROTECTIVE BIG SIBLING MODE ACTIVATE

Fuyumi: Haha! We’ll fight them together.

Fuyumi: Anyways, I need to get back to the kids. Let’s just hope it turns out okay.
Natsuo sighed, dropping the phone to his lap and rubbing his forehead. Launi shifted, tilting her head up to look her boyfriend in the eyes. Her hair was still red and white, the girl having promised to keep it on like a good luck charm for the youngest Todoroki. “You okay?”

“‘M good. Just a little stressed over Shouko.” Natsuo replied, Launi nodding sympathetically. While he hadn’t told her much about his sister’s situation, she knew enough about his to extrapolate that Shouko probably went through a similarly awful situation.

“She’s one tough cookie. I’m sure it’ll turn out alright in the end.” After getting a smile and quick kiss out of her boyfriend, Launi sat back up straight, pointing towards the TV. “Ah, everyone! It’s starting again!”

And so Natsuo shifted to a more comfortable position, anxiously glued to the screen as the first pair took to the stage, Sosuke roaring with glee that it’s his cousin, that’s Hitoshi! Don’t we look alike?! Only to get promptly roasted by everyone who reminded the excitable student that his head was literally just a cat head, albeit a purple one. He couldn’t look more different from the tired boy on screen. Natsuo couldn’t help but wonder if, when Shouko became a woman rather than a girl, she’d look like Fuyumi.

He hoped so. He knew the pain of sharing their father’s shape.

Chapter End Notes

CONTENT WARNINGS

- Canonical sexual harassment

Much lighter fare this time around haha. That said, I do have some general notes to make!

- Launi means colour in Hausa (I decided to make her half Nigerian), and the ‘Kami’ in her last name means hair! She won’t be super important, I just wanted to add an additional cute girl haha.
- The cheerleader scene in BNHA canon is, as the kids say, fucking weird and gross. Kaminari is my favourite male character in the series, but like... Come on, dude. Actually, I read an AMAZING meta on Kaminari from a blogger I really respect, so if you want to know the angle I’m taking electric friend, read up!: https://quirkyi.tumblr.com/post/178837184966/some-thoughts-on-kaminari-under-the-cut-tldr
- MATCH UP CHANGE WHOOOOO! Really, I just wanted to write some cool new fights, haha.

Please leave a review if you enjoyed! Thanks for reading, and I hope to see you soon!
can you stand the person you've become?

Chapter Notes

Remember when these lyric titles were songs about abuse? SIKE they're all from Bastille songs now because I've been going through a phase.

Anyways, thank you guys so much for all the kind comments! I've said this before, but they make all the tedious parts of writing worth it a hundred times over. This one is shorter than usual just because I didn't want to try and cram Todoroki VS Midoriya in at the end- it didn't feel right and it undercut a lot of the emotional weight of the chapter. So here's the short version!

This chapter contains some potentially upsetting content, so please check the warnings in the end notes! Now, onto the story!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The two competitors approach the ring- one a tired looking boy named Hitoshi Shinsou, supposedly from General Studies. The other, a way too enthusiastic giant from 1-B named Inasa Yoarashi. Oh, weren’t they both on the train this morning? She remembered having that staredown with the Shinsou boy.

Shouko’s line of thought is interrupted as Momo gasps in surprise from her side. “Oh, Yoarashi! He was one of the other recommended students! I heard he came first overall.” At her proclamation, Shouko bristles. So there was already someone stronger than her here...? She hadn’t even considered the two other recommended students that resided in 1-B. Before she can think about that, though, a grating laugh rattles her eardrums like the world’s shittiest maracas.

“Ohohoho! So the high and mighty Class 1-A didn’t even think that there’d be a real powerhouse in the other class?” A blonde boy pops his head over the barrier between both classes’ seating sections, looking slightly deranged. Who the hell was this asshole? “The strongest recommended student is ours, not yours! What a shame for poor little Yaoyorozu and Todoroki!”

“We’re both rich and taller than average. We’re neither of those things. Also, I don’t know you.” Shouko deadpans, because it’s true.

Before the blonde can respond, there’s a giant hand chopping at his neck from behind, and he slides out of view with a keening noise. A much friendlier face pops over the barrier, looking apologetic. “Sorry about him. We try to keep Monoma in control, but he gets away from us sometimes.”

“That is quite alright, Miss Kendou!” Iida is on his feet, arms chopping around wildly enough that Tokoyami has to duck to avoid getting smacked in the beak. “From one class representative to another, I declare that all is well again thanks to your mediating!”

Kendou chuckles a little, though she’s distracted by something to her side that’s out of view for Class 1-A. Tilting her head down to the obscured individual, Kendou looks pensive. “Hm? What’s up, Shouda?”

“I-I wasn’t able to find Yoarashi before the match!” The voice sounds frantic, and Shouko
recognizes it thanks to the earlier dropout— that’s Nirengeki Shouda, the boy from Team Shinsou who had stepped down. “I needed to warn him about that creepy guy’s Quirk!”

Kirishima’s loud and enthusiastic voice prevents Shouko from being able to hear the rest of Class 1-B’s conversation. “Oh, it’s starting! It’s starting!” All gazes focus towards where Midnight is swinging her flog, announcing the official start. Winds start to pick up around Yoarashi, the boy’s fiery enthusiasm almost palpable in the air as dust devils begin forming. Midnight holds down her hair to keep it in place. Shinsou looks up, says something far too distant to be audible, and—

Yoarashi freezes up, his Quirk deactivating. Shinsou points past Yoarashi, saying something else, and the entire arena watches in shocked silence as the Hero Course student turns and begins to walk away from his competitor, a sad keening noise in the Shouda boy’s voice echoing out as Yoarashi walks out of bounds. A flabbergasted looking Midnight calls the match in Shinsou’s favour, and things erupt.

The audience is beyond confused, but roaring with cheers for whatever the hell just happened anyways. Class 1-A is chattering excitedly, wondering what exactly just occured down there as Yoarashi seems to snap back to reality, looking around in shock. Class 1-B, meanwhile, is total chaos. There’s shouting, frantic unanswered questions, and a boy’s voice yelling at someone named Komori to let her know that hey, hey, you’re growing mushrooms on me! Yeah, they’re taking it a lot harder, and Shouko doesn’t blame them— it’s their classmate, after all. And who the hell is this General fucking Studies kid who just took out the highest ranked recommended student in a matter of seconds?! Ojiro groans behind her, face buried in his hands. “Ugh, of course. That guy’s Quirk…”

“Wait, you know his Quirk?” Midoriya manages to look up from where her nose is buried in her Quirk Analysis notebook.

Ojiro nods grimly, pursing his lips. “When you respond to whatever he’s saying, he can take control of you. That’s how he got us to join.”

A mind control Quirk… Isn’t it more suited to a villain? Oh well. Shouko’s not here to question motivations. Hers aren’t exactly the purest, either.

The battle between Ashido and Sero is favoured towards the pink girl, but the other student puts up a valiant fight regardless. He’s producing tape just slightly slower than she can melt it, and Ashido eventually wins out, escaping his grasp and managing to use raw physical strength to knock the boy down and pin him. Sero yields as she pins his arms down and holds an acid coated fist over his head, and the two get up together, smiling and laughing. They’re clearly friends, the match ending with no hard feelings. That will be a nice, easy one for the replay channels— enemies on the battlefield, comrades right after! Shouko has learned how the Festival functions and what reporters like to show off based on her obsessive viewings of it while training.

Midoriya and Aoyama is… well, Shouko only gets to see about half of it, considering she’s in the anteroom in preparation for her own match. Midoriya mostly just dodged the entire time, trying to get in close enough for a strike, and that’s when Shouko had to leave the stands to go get ready. Judging by the shuddering wind pressure that shakes her prep room table slightly, however, she’d used her Quirk. Even without seeing the match, Shouko knows Midoriya has won.

She’s ushered out into the hallway, and she feels a sense of adrenaline run through her body as she steps into the sunlight to the roar of an adoring crowd. She’s introduced as “The youngest daughter of our own Flame Hero Endeavor, it’s the burning cold Shouko Todoroki of Class 1-A!”, and Shouko’s jaw clenches. That’s all she is to these people, isn’t it? Just an extension of him. The other girl, Hatsume, is eager to go, hopping around from foot to foot and waving at the crowd. Is she
aiming for some PR stunt? It would make sense with the way she was showboating with her inventions during the cavalry battle. Shouko gets into a fighting stance, allowing a moment of tranquility to overcome her, ice rushing through her veins and cooling any remaining nerves. As soon as Midnight swings her whip, Shouko releases the pent up power of her cryokinesis in a wave of ice.

For her part, Hatsume does decently. Most of her items are useful in dodging Shouko’s initial barrages, darting out of the way of ice. Of course, the bicoloured girl is agile enough to dodge things like fired nets or flashbangs, but she’s silently impressed that Hatsume created all of this—anyone who hadn’t been raised to fight would likely have been caught. She’s clearly in it to promote her support items, and Shouko allows her to finish her final sentence describing the capabilities of her jetpack before finally ending it via a burst of ice that encases the other girl up to her shoulders. Midnight calls the match, and Hatsume is grinning even while she shivers under the icy barrage as Shouko approaches to melt her out. “Oooh, good moves, Freezerburn! I could tell you were holding back a little to let me present my beautiful babies, so I owe you one.”

“Don’t worry about it.” Shouko isn’t sure someone with the slightly unhinged air that Hatsume carries is someone she wants a favour from. Also, what’s with the nicknames from people today? “... A word of advice for you as a Support student from someone who grew up around a pro.”

“Hm?” Hatsume cocks her head, seeming interested.

“Stay away from Klimat Support Company. Even if they’re prestigious, their higher management... are not to be trusted around girls our age.” That’s probably not true for all the executives, but frankly, they have a pervert who likely only got his position via nepotism on staff. Shouko doesn’t feel bad preventing them from snatching up such a bright young talent.

Hatsume nods, grinning. “Oooh, industry secrets from an insider!? I owe you double the favours now! I’ll keep it in mind, Freezerburn! Now could you hurry up the melting a little? Some of my babies aren’t exactly weatherproofed yet.” Shouko rolls her eyes, allowing more heat to seep through her skin.

After the match, Shouko had been given a quick check for any injuries by one of Recovery Girl’s assistant nurses and then sent on her way. She’s just in time to catch the end of Bakugou versus Kaminari—by which she means she’s there for twenty out of the thirty seconds it took to conclude. She’d had a degree of hope for the electric boy, seeing the way he could competently take orders when he was on her team earlier, but it seems like he’d quickly blown his power in one shot, Bakugou propelling himself off the electrified earth with explosions and quickly landing one directly against Kaminari’s defenseless face. The drooling boy had been knocked out cold instantly, ending it rather anticlimactically. Hopefully he was too out of it to understand the way the audience was shouting that it was a nice try in a sad attempt at comfort.

Now, Uraraka versus Shiozaki was much more of a wild card. Shouko knew Uraraka’s Quirk, and it seemed like Shiozaki could control those vines that made up her hair. She had a rough idea of what might happen as the two girls lined up on stage, but Midoriya’s muttering a couple rows down confirmed what she herself was thinking: “Hm, so Shiozaki’s Quirk is good for distance and capture primarily, and Uraraka can only do close range combat. That said, if Shiozaki’s vines count as part of her body, it’s basically Uraraka’s match. But even if she floats her, that leaves—”

“Dammit, Deku! I can hear you from all the way over here!” Bakugou shouts in anger, corralled back in by Kirishima, who wrangles him into his chair. “Shut up already!”

For some reason, watching Midoriya’s whole body clench in fear before she hid her face in her notebook (two of her fingers were bandaged—her Quirk from round one, presumably)... It was really
irking Shouko more than it needed to after she saw the other girl’s determined face and strong voice back in the hallway earlier. Why did this one boy manage to make her shrink into herself? Turning her head towards Bakugou, a few seats away, Shouko glares before she can think. “It’s strange to hear you telling someone to shut up.”

There’s a chorus of ‘oooooooh’ throughout the class (mostly from Sero and Ashido, honestly) and Bakugou suddenly looks like he’s about to blow a fuse. “The fuck did you say to me, Icyhot!!”

“Guys, jeez!” Hagakure waves her arms (probably?). “The match is starting!”

For now, all debate ceases as the class turns to watch Uraraka battle it out with the 1-B girl. Determination on her face visible even from here, the girl rushes forwards. Shiozaki clasps her hands, vines shooting out. One goes for Uraraka’s ankle, but the Zero Gravity user had tapped both her running shoes just before rushing her opponent, jumping with de-gravified shoes and avoiding the first attack.

“Is she going in for the body?” Ashido questions, a finger pressed against her chin. “If she can avoid her vines, that seems like it’ll work, but Shiozaki is pretty fast.”

“No, that’s not it at all.” Midoriya murmurs, leaning forwards as Uraraka released her Zero Gravity on her shoes. “It seems like Shiozaki has better control of those shorter vines around her forehead in close range. That would be bad for Uraraka. But look at what she’s doing with her shirt!”

As she bolted, Uraraka was unzipping her UA sports jacket at the same time. “A strip show from a babe!” Shouted Mineta before Asui smacked him with her tongue. Thank god.

“Uraraka wears a tank top under her sports jacket, ribbit. Don’t be gross.” It was true- Uraraka yanked off the jacket, revealing a tank top underneath. Maybe five yards from Shiozaki, the girl let out a battle cry and tossed the jacket.

It was an easily predictable move, Shiozaki catching it with a vine and tossing it out of bounds. However, it looked like Uraraka had another plan. Midoriya was out of her seat, having rushed to the front of the box seats to lean against the railing in awe. “I see- she’s doing it! She’s going through with the plan she told me?”

“What plan?” Asked Shouji from behind the excitable green haired girl. Midoriya turned with a blinding smile of excitement, and Shouko found herself shifting about in her seat.

“The jacket ruse!”

It was true- throwing the jacket had been a mild distraction for Shiozaki. She’d easily be able to stop Uraraka from getting in close like that. But instead of continuing to run, Uraraka threw herself to the right, leaping on a vine that was resting idly on the ground while its owner focused on the thrown clothing. Shooting out her arms, Uraraka smacked the vine, and Shiozaki yelped as she found herself freed from the pull of gravity. So they did work as an extension of her body. The girl tried to get a grasp on Uraraka, but the brunette was already throwing her back, vine in her hands used like a rope to hurl her opponent towards the white line. Uraraka grimaced as she avoided a vine by floating herself backwards, ending up near the very spot where she’d started just as a helpless Shiozaki flew out of bounds.

“Shiozaki is out of bounds!” Midnight called, swinging her whip as Uraraka released both herself and the Class 1-B student, looking even greener than her opponent’s hair. “Uraraka wins!”

Whoops and cheers erupt from 1-A as Uraraka offers a thumbs up and shaky smile to the crowd,
even as she looks like her lunch might resurface. Shouko offered a couple claps up- Uraraka had
been nothing but pleasant to her, so it felt somewhat necessary. Midoriya, predictably, was tearing up
as she cheered for her friend alongside Iida. Shouko’s eyes lingered on the back of the girl’s head-
they’d be fighting next round, wouldn’t they? She had two fingers wrapped in bandages (most likely
from when she’d apparently panicked and blown Aoyama clean out of the ring), so she was already
at a disadvantage. All Might’s golden girl… Shouko narrowed her eyes as Midoriya stiffened for
some reason. Kirishima and Momo were up next, weren’t they? Should she stay for her… friend?
Acquaintance? It’s true she and Shouko were on a first name basis now, but the bicoloured girl had
no real way to classify Momo and Kyoka beyond ‘also had no time for cheerleading’ comrades. In
any case, Shouko figured she should at least stay and watch. Sitting back, she turned her eyes to
Momo as the whistle was blown.

Yaoyorozu, against all odds, had lost.

It didn’t make sense, Izumi thought. She was objectively more powerful than Kirishima, even if she
wasn’t as physically strong. The girl was a genius, too! Why didn’t she just make a net to catch him
and then push him out of bounds? Or startle him with a flashbang and use the advantage to get him
out of the ring? She’d just… Frozen up, Kirishima easily pushing past her shield and forcing her past
the white line. It was a little disappointing- Yaoyorozu had so much potential for an amazing fight,
and she’d gone down so easily.

“Deku? Dekuuuuu? Hey, Deku!”

“I-H-Huh?!” Izumi is only snapped from her thoughts as she receives a gentle poke to her freckled
cheek. Startling a bit, she turns to see Uraraka regarding her curiously. Kirishima and Yaoyorozu’s
match had torn up a lot of the arena floor via Kirishima’s Hardening, so there was a small break
while Cementoss rebuilt it, giving the students time to chat among themselves. So with Iida in the
anteroom in anticipation for his match, that left the two girls of their friendship group to talk.

“You were totally zoned out there!” Uraraka exclaims, cocking her head. “Hey, if you’re nervous for
your next match…”

“N-No, it’s not that!” Izumi waves her hands around with a stilted chuckle. “I mean, I am nervous,
it’s Todoroki and she did challenge me and obviously her Quirk is super difficult to counter-“

She’s cut off by another cheek poke, making an embarrassing noise as Uraraka giggles. “You’re like
one of those rubber charms, squeaking when I poke you! But seriously, you were doing the rambling
again.”

Izumi’s cheeks flush, and she meeps in nervousness. “Was I? Er, sorry. I guess I just… learned
something earlier that upset me.”

Uraraka purses her lips. “Oh, Deku… Are you okay?”

“I’m fine, p-please don’t worry!” The last thing Izumi wants is to distract her friend from her next
match by making her too concerned. “It’s just- well… Uraraka, can I ask you something?”

“Always.” Uraraka shifts towards her a little, like they’re two friends sharing gossip- the thought is
almost upsetting to Izumi. She hopes Todoroki doesn’t think that’s what she’s doing all those rows
behind her in the stands (and yes, she knows the other girl is staring, she’s familiar with the feeling of
her eyes specifically on the back of her neck).

Trying to figure out how to phrase this, Izumi gives it her best shot and lowers her volume. “If… If
you learned someone respected and powerful was committing a super serious crime from one of the victims, but both of you know all the people he’s hurting don’t have enough influence to even scratch him… If telling the truth could seriously disrupt public safety… What would you do?”

For a moment, Uraraka looked shocked, but it quickly morphed into a mix of sympathy and concern. “That sounds… like a pretty big problem. How bad are they being hurt?”

Izumi thinks of a girl with an empty gaze, thinks of deep red scarring over aquamarine, thinks of the way her own heart clenched when she heard how casually Shouko had told her about an impending marriage she was being strong-armed into. Thinking of her in a wedding dress with a veil that didn’t disguise the dead-eyed stare she’d had when she mentioned her future… It makes Izumi’s stomach flip. “Pretty bad. Really bad, actually.”

“Then you need to tell someone, at least.” Uraraka decides after a moment of thinking. “Even if they can’t stop the bad person, maybe they can help the victims a little? It’s the heroic thing to do.”

There’s another pause before she sputters, waving her arms around in an Iida-like fashion and almost clocking Ojiro in front of them. “I-I-I mean that’s just my opinion! It’s silly of someone like me to preach heroism to someone like you, but-“

“Ah, don’t put yourself down!” Izumi quickly reddens, her own arms fluttering about in a matching fashion. They actually did hit Ojiro this time, who let out an exhausted sigh and changed seats, knowing better than to get between those two and a flustered conversation. “I think you’re really heroic, Uraraka! Thank you for the help, I just… Didn’t know what to do.”

“That’s probably true. It’s just a difficult situation.”

“I’m sure you’ll pick the right option!” Uraraka beamed, offering a supportive pat on the shoulder. “You’re you, after all!”

“A-Ah, I’m not all that smart!” Izumi’s cheeks reddened, hands flying up to cover her face. “I’m just gonna hide in here until the next match starts.”

“You better come out soon, then. They’re walking out!” Uraraka points as Izumi lowered her hands to see Iida and Tokoyami march onto the field to the sound of cheering. Her brunette friend joined in, cupping her hands around her mouth and shouting. “Goooooo Iida!”

Embarrassment forgotten as the desire to support her friend riled her up, Izumi grinned and yelled alongside Uraraka. “You can do it, Iida!” Leaning forwards, she subconsciously popped out her notebook, pen tapping against the page as she waited for Midnight to start the match. Even so, her mind was heavy with thoughts- Todoroki needed help that Izumi couldn’t give her, even though realizing that tore her up. Who could help? Could anyone help? She couldn’t possibly bring this up to All Might- the number one hero accusing the number two of being a serial abuser? Hero society would be in shambles, and they couldn’t afford that after all the recent news with the Hero Killer.

... Maybe there was one other person who could help her, though.
After Yaoyorozu’s loss, Shouko had gone for a walk. She wasn’t that interested in how Tokoyami versus Iida would play out, so she decided to leave at that point. Walking down the hallways, she briefly contemplated getting another one of those delicious nashi pear tarts from concessions until she remembered that she had a match to win and didn’t have any money on her anyways. Besides, sticking around in this area seemed like it wouldn’t settle the discomfort in her stomach- this weird guy with black hair and scarred up eyes kept staring at her from the corner. She was willing to bet he had even more under that flu mask. Glaring at him, she made her way to the restricted hallways. To access them, you’d either need to be a student-

“Shouko.”

… Or a pro. Shouko turned to scowl at Endeavor, his arms crossed as he stared down his youngest child. “What do you want?”

“You’re acting disgracefully.” The man spat out, taking a step towards her. “You would have taken first unquestionably in every event if you’d quit this childish rebellion and used your full power. Do you have any idea what the consequences for failure will be for you?”

“I know damn well what they are.” Shouko’s hand subconsciously moved to the thigh Ondo had been feeling up last week. “And I’m still going to win. I’ll just do it without you.”

“You’re weak without me,” He responded curtly. “That Bakugou boy will make a fool out of you if all you do is use your ice.”

Shouko’s lip curled in a sneer. “I wasn’t aware your real Quirk was telling the future. There’s no guarantee he’ll make it to the finals with me.”

“Do not get an attitude with me, Shouko.” Endeavor took another step forwards, and Shouko heard something over the intercoms about Tokoyami emerging victorious, but she was more focused on the way her muscles tensed, ready to fight or flee if she had to.

He wouldn’t hit her here, would he? No, it was unlikely. Her father was a horrible person, but Shouko could begrudgingly admit he was smart. That said, she had learned over time not to underestimate her father’s anger, and she needed to be careful. “Even if it’s him I fight, I’ll overwhelm him with no trouble. I’ve been training by myself- I’m still determined to win. I won’t be a brood bitch you can sell off to suit your imperious pipe dreams.”

That was a bit too far, and Shouko prepared to raise her arms in defense as her father’s eyes flashed. “Shouko Todoroki, how dare-”

“T-Todoroki!” A pitched voice called out, and father and daughter both turned to see a trembling Izumi Midoriya on the other side of the hallway. “I- um- Mister Aizawa sent me? To get you. He, uh, needs to talk to everyone going on to the second round. So… Here I am.”

There was a crushingly awkward moment of silence, Midoriya standing there like an anxious, trembling statue as Shouko and Endeavor just stared. Eventually, Shouko sighed, flipping her hair over her shoulder as she marched towards the anxious girl. “You heard her. Mister Aizawa needs us.”

“This isn’t over, Shouko.” Her father warns before turning his gaze to Midoriya. “And you. Don’t you dare shame this brat by holding back. You hear me?”

“… D-Don’t call her that.” Small and quiet, Midoriya’s voice still somehow radiated enough determination to fight the overwhelming heat of the hallway. And there she is again, little Hermia.
Endeavor raises a fiery brow. “Care to repeat that?”

The foolish girl raises her gaze to meet the Flame Hero’s, and her childish features harden as her voice raises. “I said -”

“Midoriya, we’re going. Come on.” Shouko was hit by a wave of panic as she realized the foolish choice Midoriya was about to make, grabbing the girl by the arm and dragging her around the corner despite the green haired girl’s hiss of pain. Once she’d all but yanked her a suitable distance away, Shouko turned to grab her by the shoulder, expression incredulous. “What the hell were you thinking?” Midoriya’s expression is guilt-ridden, but she doesn’t lose the determination in her tone. “He was being mean to you. I wanted him to stop.”

Shouko rolled her eyes, releasing Midoriya and pinching the bridge of her own nose in irritation. “...Whatever. What did Aizawa want?”

“Oh, um- he actually didn’t want anything.” The smaller girl looked sheepish as she rubbed the back of her neck. “I just came looking for you because I was worried when Endeavor wasn’t in the heroes section…”

“Ok, look. I’m putting the brakes on this before it starts.” Shouko scowled at Midoriya, who seemed to shrink into herself. “Maybe I should have known this before I told you why I have to beat you, but I’m not looking for some hero to whisk me away from him. I’ve handled him my whole life, and I still can. Don’t stick your nose where you don’t belong.”

“B-But he’s hurting you!” Midoriya exclaimed, shrinking further as Shouko’s angry stare grew deeper. “You said all that stuff before about the omiai, and I just… I want to help you before it gets really bad, or the man you’re supposed to get married to decides to… If he ever tries…”

Shouko realizes what she’s getting at. “Until he what? Rapes me?” Watching Midoriya blanche at the word, Shouko scoffs, crossing her arms. “Tell me- how do you think my siblings and I were conceived? Do you think my mother was truly willing to lie down with my father? Of course not. I have full reason to believe that my father is a marital rapist, and I have no doubt Ondo will be as well. But until we’re married, he’s too smart to try and pull something so drastic. That would violate the terms. And believe me- I will not allow myself to be married off. I’ll win this tournament.”

“H-How can you talk about it so casually…?!?” Midoriya is clenching her fists, looking up in bewilderment and sadness. “Todoroki, this isn’t how normal people live!”

“I’m not a normal person. The world I’m made for and the one you live in are very different.” Shouko glares one last time before turning on her heels, leaving the stuttering girl alone. “Don’t interfere in my life. There’s nothing that can be done to help me, so stop it before you make it worse than you already have. Go back to playing friends with Iida and Uraraka, and be thankful for what you have.”

“There’s a keening tone in Midoriya’s fading voice as Shouko walks away, and she ignores the way it stirs something in her chest. This didn’t clear her mind at all- and judging by the loudspeakers in the hallway, the fight between Ashido and Shinsou was about to begin. Both of them would need to head to their respective anterooms.

She ices her heart over one last time, letting emptiness overtake her like an old friend. She can’t afford to go into this match angry.
conversation with Todoroki… Well, it was nothing short of horrifying seeing how casually the girl treated her abusive life. Izumi swore she’d never forgive Endeavor for raising a child to believe she didn’t belong in a world of happiness, leaving the empty-eyed and delusional Shouko Todoroki instead of the fully alive girl she could have been in another life. And speaking of the Flame Hero, what on earth was she thinking talking back to him like that?! Izumi wanted to punch herself a million times for something so stupid, but her fingers were still a little bit busted. So maybe that wasn’t the smartest.

Mixed with the anger and regret was some guilt over what she had just done without Todoroki’s knowledge. Sighing, Izumi stared down at her jacket, unzipped a little further than she normal wore the sports uniform. Unzipping it far enough that her sports bra (All Might branded limited edition Silver age version, her favourite one worn for luck!) was slightly visible, along with the small rectangle tucked just into the top. Removing the object, Izumi pursed her lips as she touched the screen- it was her cell phone, and she had just shut off the recording application. She felt horrible about this breach of trust- was it really a breach if Todoroki clearly trusted her about as far as she could throw her?- but Uraraka had been right. Leaving this alone would be unheroic, and going in without evidence would only make things worse for the bicoloured girl. Izumi wasn’t sure this would be admissible in court, being recorded without consent and all that… But it may just convince one important person who she had already seen put everything on the line for his students to help her. Opening her notes, Izumi made a reminder to herself:

SHOW RECORDING TO MISTER AIZAWA AFTER FESTIVAL

Chapter End Notes

CONTENT WARNINGS

- Mentions of forced marriage
- Mentions of marital rape/birth by rape

CHAPTER SPOILERS START BELOW

Dun dun DUNNNNNN. Midoriya is doing the Responsible (tm) thing and reporting abuse to an authority figure! Now to see how Aizawa will handle it... Anyways, notes!

- I can't believe I introduced Inasa just to have him lose in like three seconds. Don't worry, he'll have his moment in the spotlight later! But for now, it's Real Shinsou Hours. You'll see why purple friend needs to succeed early on in good time.
- It's not an Uraraka sports festival match without her launching her jacket. the jacket ruse was a....... DISTACTION (and now you can legally kill me for this reference)

Thank you so much for reading, and I'd love to hear your thoughts in the comments below! I'll see you soon, and happy holidays!
you tried to take my wings, i just kept on flying

Chapter Notes

happy chrismis. its chrismin. merry crisis. merry chrysler

But for real, happy Christmas Eve, friends! I'm tipsy on peppermint vodka and watching It's A Wonderful Life with my family so you guys get an update. It's literally just the Todoroki + Midoriya fight aaaaand I'm not good at writing fight scenes! Oh fuck! I did my best.

Before we start: it should be noted that I'm a dub viewer, so most lines in the fight are based off those and not the ones present in the sub. So if anything feels different and you're a sub viewer, that's probably why!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Fuyumi Todoroki is on the edge of her seat- literally. There’s a non-zero chance she’s going to fall right off her rolling chair in front of all her third graders, and god knows how poorly that would go.

The Ashido girl, for all the strength she showed last match, loses within a minute of her fight against the Shinsou boy apparently related to one of Natsuo’s friends. It’s obvious to just about everyone watching how Shinsou’s Quirk is activated, so either nobody from her class warned Ashido about it, or the girl made a very foolish mistake and let him push her buttons. She hopes it’s the latter- she doesn’t want to think Shouko’s classmates are that heartless when it comes to one of their own. There’s a five minute break in between this fight and the next due to the acid burning holes in the cement ring, which leaves Fuyumi with some time to internally freak out over the next match.

There’s a tug on her slacks. “Miss Todoroki? Is your sister up next?” Fuyumi looks down to see little Hazuki, his gold eyes wide as he asks the question. His Quirk- Eyes Off- allowed him to force people to look away from him, and had been a significant issue at the start of the year when he would use it to get her to avoid him copying his neighbour’s paper. He’d gotten significantly better since then, though, and has so far turned out to be just a delight.

Another student approaches, Kochiya this time. There are bows where her hair would normally be, stuck down with tape- with a Quirk as body altering as Skeleton, the little girl has to make do with sticking them to the bone of her skull. Fuyumi remembers her high school history classes where she recalls that years ago, Mutant Quirks were called Monster Quirks until it was changed, Monster seeming far too cruel and dehumanizing. Kochiya is cheerful and bright, laughing and presenting her teacher with drawings nearly every day. Despite sunken dark eye sockets bearing impossible eyeballs and an ever present eerie smile, she is no monster. She’s class president Kochiya Bonkohara, and she’s currently nodding at Hazuki happily. “Yeah, it’s Miss Todoroki’s sister! She’s preeeeeetty.”

“I’ll be sure to tell her, Kochiya.” Fuyumi smiles and reaches down to pat Kochiya’s head, remarking internally about how smooth and cold it is. She can hardly panic internally when her students are involved- they need her there, present and able to lend a caring hand.

“I’m gonna be a hero too n’ be in the Sports Festival!” Barbara shouts from the back of her class. The Australian girl’s Japanese has been improving leaps and bounds since moving to Japan, and her
stingray tail is wagging about excitedly behind her. Fuyumi almost reminds her to keep it tucked under her chair before another voice joins.

“Me too, me too!” It’s Kaiko this time, and Fuyumi has to stand up before anyone says anything — with a Quirk volatile enough to be called Mass Destruction, the eldest Todoroki daughter knows the general reactions of the students when Kaiko mentions her heroic dreams.

“I’m sure you can all make it there.” She smiles out at her students, who grin happily at the praise, any thoughts of taunting Kaiko far from their minds. “Look, the break is ending — why don’t we watch and see what the students now are doing? You can learn from them when it’s your turn at the Festival.”

That quiets the class, and the ones standing up rush back to their seats and keep their eyes glued on the smartboard. Fuyumi sighs contentedly, leaning back in her seat. It was hard to keep her rascals organized sometimes, but they were quiet as mice during the matches. A little movement catches her eye from the far corner of the room, and she notices that it’s Nito, the boy’s eyes almost concealed behind shaggy red hair. He’s signing at her, and Fuyumi understands thanks to the Skype lessons Natsuo has been giving her on the topic of sign language — she’d asked him to tutor her when she learned the little deaf boy would be joining her class. Severe bullying at his previous school, apparently. It twisted Fuyumi’s gut to think how other children would have treated Nito — deaf and Quirkless. What an easy target. His message stirs her heart, reminding her of a certain white haired brother:

*Can I be a hero too, Miss Todoroki?*

In all honesty… Fuyumi didn’t know. It was a cutthroat business, and superpowers were hard to contend when you were a genetic relic from over a century ago. But she’d seen Natsuo’s spunky attitude, his fierce determination, and the willingness to always get back up when he was knocked down. If he had desired it, Fuyumi had no doubt the youngest Todoroki son could have become a hero. She smiles gently at her student as she signs back, clumsy and slow but still clear:

*You can, Nito.*

She sees his bright smile and remembers why she became a teacher in the first place. Smiling back at him, Fuyumi turns her chair around to watch her little sister as she walks into the arena.

Shouko feels nothing. This is what she tells herself as she approaches the arena. She feels nothing as Present Mic introduces her as “The ice queen with a burning spark, it’s Shouko Todoroki of Class 1-A!” She feels nothing as she watches Midoriya climb the steps in pace with her. And she absolutely feels nothing as her opponent looks into her eyes, conflict burning behind forest green.

“It will be worse for me if you hold back.” Shouko informs her, watches Midoriya flinch. “Don’t think going easy on me will make it better in the long run. My old man knows when someone isn’t giving it their all, so forget any sort of hero complex you have right now.”

“I-I wouldn’t hold back anyways, Todoroki.” Midoriya’s stutter takes away from the attempt to be intimidating that her words seem to imply. “I have something to prove to everyone… I’m not going down easily.”

“Whatever.” Rolling her eyes, Shouko lines up on her side of the arena as Midoriya lines up on hers. Even from the stands, she can feel Endeavor’s burning gaze. It’s something she’s intimately aware of, an itch she can’t scratch. He’s watching. Her future lies in this ring. Shouko *cannot lose* . As soon as Present Mic shouts out, her foot is slammed on the ground, a tower of ice whipping towards
Midoriya. If she could finish this one quickly-

“SMASH!”

Well, Shouko’s never been that lucky. Forming a small ice wall behind herself, she has to raise her hands to protect her face from the shards of ice that come flying as Midoriya fires off a shot. What was the name of her Quirk again? Super Power? Fitting. The audience shouts as blasts of cold air hit them and Present Mic is yelling something, but Shouko’s not focused on either of those things. She’s focused on Midoriya, holding her right wrist and panting as she stares Shouko down with an adrenaline fuelled tenseness in her eyes. Heterochromic eyes flick to the hand being cradled- one finger is bent back, bruising rapidly. So she was willing to injure herself to fight her, was she? Well, Shouko thought as she released another wall of ice, let’s see how long you can handle the pain.

Midoriya’s eyes were wide in shock for the split second before they were obscured by the ice, but there was nonetheless another scream just before Shouko’s ice split down the center. Bracing again, Shouko could feel the ice wall behind her start to crack. Frosting it over with one hand in an attempt to seal them up for now, she faced Midoriya once more, the girl biting her lip as she held up two more broken fingers.

“Six more fingers, Midoriya.” Shouko spoke cooly, watching the other girls’ eyes widen like dinner plates. Slamming down her foot, she released another wave, bracing it advance as Midoriya shattered it. An ice shard bounced off her blocking forearm, and she hissed as she felt it cut through her skin. Ignoring that for now, the bicoloured girl glared down her trembling opponent. “And now it’s five. You want an endurance match? Well, this ends now!”

Shouko stomped on the ground, firing a more precise wave of ice at Midoriya, sacrificing width for speed. Midoriya would no doubt be in a weaker position after this one, having to react quicker, so the second her ice broke into pieces, Shouko took off on a ramp of ice in the name of rushing for the green haired girl. She wasn’t as fast as she would be normally, she knew this- the ice was starting to affect her, muscles on her right side groaning in protest as she bolted up and over the ramp. Feeling the ice below her feet crack and the wind whip her hair around, Shouko took a leap of faith- and it was a good thing she did, a panicked Midoriya having snapped a bandaged finger to break it. The other girl looked up with a grimace, barely dodging as Shouko punched where her head had been seconds before, ice encasing her fist and embedding in the concrete of the arena.

The temperature in the arena had dropped several degrees, and Shouko was in her element. Winter winds in late May, the way her opponent’s breath was showing in Shouko’s subzero aura, the sensation of frost crackling up her arm as she stood back up- she was made for this. Her fire itched and ached to be used, but she forced down the feeling. Adrenaline pumping, Shouko spun on her feet, shooting out a wave of ice to encase Midoriya’s ankle as the girl leapt, creating another barrier behind herself just in case. This would be over soon.

Noooo thank you! Bad, bad, nah uh, non merci, antelope nope! Ochako was biting her fingernails in the stands, a nasty habit that only rose its head in periods of high stress. Deku had just broken her entire arm escaping Todoroki’s hold on her ankle, so she could be forgiven for feeling a little worried about her closest friend here! Todoroki had almost been pushed from the ring by that one attack, and Ochako and Iida had gasped in sync as the dust and frost cleared the air to reveal that Shouko Todoroki was merely slouched against her barrier on the other side of the ring, pushing aside large pieces of ice as she got to her feet.

“Todoroki is seriously crazy…!” Ashido gasped from behind her, the pink girl seemingly over having completely flubbed against Shinsou (which she refused to fully elaborate on, though Ochako swore she heard her mumbling about ‘making fun of my horns’). “She doesn’t have any weak
“Seriously, raccoon eyes?!” Bakugou snapped from a few rows back. “Look at her! Icyhot’s all frosted over on one side. Quirks are physical abilities- everyone’s got a limit. And she’s reaching hers.”

As much as Ochako loathed agreeing with Bakugou on… Well, anything, he was right this time around. Bits of frost coated Todoroki’s side, half of her mussed hair frozen at the tips. In fact, as Ochako’s gaze darted to the screens around the arena showing the fight up close for those in the nosebleeds to see, even the girl’s eyelashes were dotted with little pieces of snow. Slowly but surely, Todoroki’s Quirk was starting to freeze the girl alive.

Iida spoke from beside her, the boy’s brow furrowed. “She can use fire, can’t she? I don’t understand why she isn’t thawing herself out. Come to think of it, she never uses that aspect of her Quirk.”

Now, Ochako is the first to admit that she’s not the sharpest knife in the drawer, but she is not stupid. In fact, she’d argue that her social smarts outshone her academic smarts by a longshot. Deku had mentioned earlier that she’d learned someone was being hurt by a powerful person pretty badly, and Ochako knows from Yaoyorozu’s comment while handing her that cheerleading costume that Todoroki had apparently been talking to Deku just before the green haired girl appeared looking crestfallen. The bicoloured student’s father also happens to be the number two hero known for his abrasive attitude and sudden vanishing of his wife from all social events. Ochako makes it a point to avoid looking around in the changeroom (because it fills her gut with shame whenever she accidentally sees Jirou in her sports bra or Yaoyorozu with her costume mostly unzipped but she doesn’t like girls she doesn't like girls absolutely not absolutely not no no no), but the bruises and bandages Todoroki sports are obvious even when she mistakenly raises her eyes from the ground. And that’s not even getting into the scar on her face.

The person who needs help is Shouko Todoroki, and Ochako sighs sadly. “… I’m not sure, Iida. I guess she just doesn’t like to.”

Ochako finishes gnawing on her nails (now shortened to the point that they tingle in pain, she has to quit this) to dig into her pants pocket. Pulling out a cell phone with a predictably All Might themed case, she sighs, hitting the center button and opening to a lockscreen of Deku and herself posing in a purikura booth. They’d taken this photo last weekend on a mall outing together- neither one of them had been in a purikura booth before, Ochako being from the countryside and Deku admitting to not having any friends to take pictures with. Their skin was way paler than it was in real life and Ochako knows her eyes are not that big, but they’d spent more time adding glitter and flowers and drawn-on cat ears in the editor than focusing on how they’d looked. Between both girls’ peace signs sits the glittery text: ✺ OCHAKO + IZUMI ✺

Deku had made it her phone background, had she? Ochako couldn’t help but smile, though she’d frowned when she remembered why she was holding the phone in the first place. Deku had trusted her with this (please be so careful with it Uraraka, she had begged as she slipped it into the brunette’s hands before her match, there’s something really important on here and I don’t trust Kacchan not to explode my bag in the waiting room or something) and she had a good idea of what might be so important to her green haired friend. Sighing, she slipped it back into her pocket, looking back up to the match. Whether Deku liked it or not, she was a part of this too- she’d do whatever she had to to help.

Izumi is in so much pain .

Her fingers send what feels like electric shocks up her arm whenever she twitches, and she is
twitching a lot - it’s freezing in here, not even counting the numbness of the toes she’d just broken free from that wave of ice. Izumi thinks she’s too hyped up on adrenaline to feel much of her left arm, hanging loosely to the side, and she’s immensely grateful for that small mercy. That said, the more she ow thinks about it the more ow it hurts so ow she’s going to stop doing that and instead whips her head forwards to stare at Todoroki, somehow still not out of the ring.

The bicoloured girl pushes aside chunks of ice as she gets to her feet, not even stumbling. “That attack was a lot stronger than your previous ones, Midoriya. And it cost you a full arm, didn’t it? I wonder how much longer you’ll last.”

Izumi’s stomach jumps as Todoroki stands, and it’s for more than one reason. Combat-wise, Todoroki was a total monster: not only was her Quirk extremely strong, but she had awareness, reasoning and fast judgement capabilities on a level that some pros didn’t reach. But that’s not even the only grounds on which her heart finds itself pounding fast: as Todoroki stands up, frost coming out in a puff as she exhales slowly, she looks dead. Izumi had thought her eyes were dead before, but now she sees it- that was Todoroki at her most alive, challenging her. Now, smacked down and in the heat of battle, she looks like a zombie. There’s no light behind blue and grey, and Izumi wants nothing more than to skin Endeavor alive for what he’s done to this girl.

“What’s the matter?” She says and god Izumi almost jumps out of her skin. It’s like a dead body started to talk to her. ‘Too worn out after defending against my attacks?’

Don’t pity her! Izumi’s mind scolds. Did you forget what she said? Find a weak spot and fight her like anyone else! The green haired girl’s eyes dart over her opponent. The ice could seemingly go in any direction, though she had a small casting range before she could create huge shapes- maybe only three feet? Not enough, not nearly enough for Izumi to get in there before being hit by a glacier. Physically stronger than her, less bulk than Izumi but full of lean muscle and height, more agile-

The frost.

Todoroki was shivering.

“Thanks for drawing it out.” Todoroki speaks casually even as her body trembles. She tilts her head upwards, Izumi’s gaze following to see a glaring Endeavor watching from the heroes’ section. “Look at him. He’s furious I’m not using his power. Your hands are too destroyed for you to keep going, so let’s end this.”

Without even moving, Todoroki sends a blast of ice her way. In a way, the Half Hot Half Cold user is right- Izumi knows her arm is a mess, her finger still screeching in pain whenever her hand moves. It would be easy, wouldn’t it? Giving up, that is. Todoroki would get her victory, the pain would stop- why shouldn’t Izumi just let this happen?

… No.

No, this won’t be a victory for anyone. Todoroki would remain a prisoner to her arranged marriage, Endeavor wouldn’t be satisfied, and Izumi’s classmate would continue to live in hell. Beautiful eyes would remain dull and dead.

She’s the Deku who never gives up. Izumi Midoriya is not done yet.

Shouko thought Midoriya was reckless once. But that assumption was incorrect, she realizes as she gets back using her ice barrier as support.

This girl is borderline suicidal.
She’d released a blast so powerful from an already broken finger that it had very nearly knocked Shouko out of the ring. A drop of blood hits her cheek, and she realizes in numbed horror that it’s not hers. Midoriya’s right index is broken so badly that it’s bleeding. Shouko is speaking before she can think. “With your broken finger…? Why are you going this far?!”

Midoriya’s voice is small and monotone yet fierce, and Shouko thinks of that play again. “You’re trembling, Todoroki. There’s a limit to the cold your body can take, right?”

Shouko’s heart nearly stops. She’s… She’s right. Midoriya knows about her limit. The green haired girl continues even as Shouko feels her face contort into a snarl. “Normally you’d fix the problem by heating yourself up with your left side… But you’re not doing that now. You refuse to in front of him.”

“Midoriya-”

“Shut up!” The girl shouts, head flying up, and in her determined and furious expression, Izumi Midoriya has never looked more beautiful to Shouko. “Look at me, Todoroki! All of us are giving it our all- we’re all fighting for number one! Get off your high horse- you don’t get to win only giving it half of your power! You think you can beat me not giving it everything?! You haven’t put a single scratch on me yet! So come at me with all you’ve got!”

She’s right, she’s right, she’s right and Shouko hates it. Her heart begs to be free, and she ices it over. No, no, she can’t break. Not now. “Midoriya… What the hell are you trying to do here? You want my fire!? Now you’re just pissing me off!”

Shouko takes off, bolting towards Midoriya even as her exhausted muscles scream for heat. She was slower, and she knew Midoriya knew, that twitch in the girl’s eyes indicating how closely she was being watched. Even so, the way the green haired girl took off the second Shouko lifted her foot to leap-! The bicoloured girl heard something strange about eggs and microwaves just as she was punched directly in the stomach with the force of a semi-truck. It takes everything Shouko has to keep her lunch of kaisendon from resurfacing on national television as she slides backwards. She didn’t even have the energy to form an ice barrier- it was nothing short of a miracle that she didn’t slide out of the ring. Shouko heaved and coughed, leaping to her feet despite the scream of something deep within her gut and slamming her foot down to send off a wave of ice. It’s slow, too slow, and Midoriya is able to leap out of the way with ease. Why? Why was she doing all this? Shouko loathes to even think it, but if she’d wanted to, Midoriya could have won by now. So why the hell was she putting herself through all this pain? Shouko grits her teeth and runs in, trading punches with a grimacing Midoriya until the force of another finger being rebroken sends them both backwards, the bicoloured girl holding in a shriek of pain as she smashers into her ice wall- they’re getting clumsier, more jagged, and she knows she can’t keep going like this. Midoriya braces her thumb in her cheek to fire off one more hit, and Todoroki cries out with pain as she barely manages to bring up an ice wall to stop herself from flying out of the arena. Collapsing against it, it takes everything she has to struggle to her feet. Endeavor’s gaze is burning her up even as her body slowly freezes. “Why…?! Why are you putting yourself through this? Midoriya, why aren’t you just beating me already?!”

“Because I want to live up… To live up to people’s expectations!” Midoriya is wheezing, and her arms are flailing as she runs towards Todoroki, head still held high. She’s gritting her teeth, eyes filled with tears. “I want to show thanks to those who helped me get here… To save people with a smile on my face… I want to be a pro! I’ll do whatever it takes to be a hero! And to be a pro, to show everyone who believes in me that I can do it… I have to save you first, Todoroki!”

Shouko is a few months shy of four, nestled up to her mother on the couch and watching All Might
Midoriya punches her in the stomach, sending her flying backwards and nearly out of bound. Shouko almost throws up, swallowing it back as Midoriya screams out. “That’s why I’m giving it my all, just like you should be doing!”

“Ggh-!” Shouko scrambles to her feet, rushing to the middle of the arena— but she pauses when she notices that Midoriya isn’t moving, standing still in the center. Her long ponytail blows in the frigid wind, almost like a cape behind her.

“I know your story, but now how it’s affected you. I can put two and two together with the girl standing in front of me, but I can never truly comprehend what that man did to your mind. We’ve had such different lives.” Midoriya is wheezing, her legs shaking, but she stands with an aura of strength that almost makes Shouko want to drop to her knees. “If you want to reject your father, you can! There are so many ways you can do that! But you have no right to be here today if you aren’t going to use your full power!”

Shouko is still. She’s been on the border of dissociating this entire match, and the sudden memory of being held to her mother’s chest as her tears are dried yanks her away from the roaring crowd, from Midoriya, from her own pain. Mama, she cries, burns on her arms still fresh, I hate him! I don’t ever wanna be a person like him!

Frost is creeping up her body, covering her right side, and it barely pulls Shouko out of her blank state in time to register Midoriya’s voice. “That’s why…! Why I’m going to win this!” There’s a pain in her stomach, and Shouko can’t believe she can still hear Midoriya’s voice over the sound of her own cry of pain as she flies back from the punch. “I’ll surpass you!”

“Her brother and sister playing while she was pulled away. Touya never being mentioned again. Her mother putting on burn salve and teaching Fuyumi how to cover bruises. A crying mother. A daughter in the wrong place at the wrong time. A kettle. A house somehow becoming colder as it becomes hotter. A child crawling back to her room covered in vomit, nobody else there to help her. In these moments, Shouko learned to hate her father. She hated red—the colour of her hair, of her burn. She swore to herself she’d reject him no matter what the cost. She hated him, HATED HIM. Would she rather be sold off like a dog to be bred until she produced a proper heir? Would she rather run off to any possible fate like Touya? Would she rather jump off the school roof? If the option was to be like him in even the smallest way, the answer to all those questions was a resounding ‘yes’. Shouko gritted her teeth, left hand over her stomach. “I won’t… I won’t use my left side!”

“IT’S YOURS! YOUR QUIRK, NOT HIS!”

Several decades from this point of time, Shouko will recall the many ways of Midoriya (though she will be Izumi to her at such a point). The way her eyes lit up the moment she smelt fresh katsudon. The way she never really lost her rambling habit. The way one of her dimples was a little higher set than the other. But most of all, Shouko will remember the way her scream sounded like a song to her ears, the way her ponytail whipped around her head like a halo in the cold winds, and the way one sentence broke down a decade of hatred and suffering. It was like the world had stopped turning, everything deathly still except for the heaving chest and exhausted breath of the girl in front of her. It was Shouko and Midoriya, the rest of the world not present for the revelation of a lifetime.

Her left side erupts in flames.

Shouko Todoroki thinks she may be a little in love with Izumi Midoriya.
Fuyumi is crying, Kochiya and Hazuki running up to see if she’s okay. She’s more than okay, she’s *overjoyed*, the baby of the family did it, she put their father behind her and embraced who she was. Shouko is lit up in ice and flame, looking every bit as beautiful as their mother, and Fuyumi realizes her little sister is growing more and more into a woman every day.

Natsuo whoops in excitement, Launi shaking his arm and cheering just as loud. The room is awash with shouts of *Oh my God!* and *Is that fire?!* and *Natsuo, since when could your sister do that!?* He has never been so proud to be a big brother, watching his little sister wield the power he’d envied for years as a little boy (though he’d never dare tell her that). Shouko was taking her next steps, and Natsuo makes a silent promise to her that he will never be a shadow in her life again.

Rei Todoroki weeps in joy as she watches the event in the ward common room. Her beautiful baby girl.

A man watches from the stands. His scarred face is hidden behind a flu mask, a baseball cap granting his bright blue eyes and black hair some privacy as he watches Shouko erupt into the flames. Hmph. And wasn’t she dead set on denying Endeavor last time he heard anything from the Todoroki family? He speaks over the roar of the crowd, a voice heard only to himself.

“Tsk. And here I thought you were something special, sis.”

She’s beautiful, she’s beautiful, and Izumi finds herself smiling despite the pain. “Gorgeous, Todoroki…” The girl mumbles, and she knows she isn’t talking about the flame. The grin that has crept onto her opponent’s face, the wild expression of a caged animal tasting freedom for the first time- it’s the most beautiful thing Izumi has ever seen in her life. Hellfire be damned, Todoroki is heaven-sent, an angel flanked by wings of ice and fire that illuminate pale skin and mismatched hair. Her power is breathtaking, but more so is the girl who wields it. Izumi thinks of the shyness that overcame her when she realized she was being stared at, so different from the stares of middle school classmates, recognizes the flutter in her chest whenever that gaze fell on her for what it really was.

Izumi Midoriya thinks she may be a little in love with Shouko Todoroki.

Shouko is alive, power pouring through her skin with a scream of joy over finally being freed. Endeavor is shouting something from the sidelines, and Shouko finds that she doesn’t care. This is not his story, this is hers, and it’s her Quirk. Her power. She is not defined by him- Shouko will become her own person separate from her father, find who she wants to be. Before she knows what’s happening, there’s tears running down her face. Is it sadness for the years she’s wasted without her flame? Is it joy at the realization that she is free, that her cage has been opened and she can run in any direction she wants? That she can build a personality from the ashes she will leave behind on this battleground?

Shouko doesn’t know. But it’s okay. She looks at Midoriya, bruised and heavenly. “You’re crazy, you know that?”

Midoriya smiles shakily, hair whipping in the wind. “Maybe you have to have a crazy streak to be a hero.”

“You might be right.” Shouko activates her ice, and it’s like being released from a vice grip over her
entire body. Flames and ice form a cone, light flashing and exploding around her body, and this is
who she is, Half Hot Half Cold is Shouko’s and nobody else’s, her power to harness.

Midoriya is staring, eyes wide in wonder. Her bruised lips curl into an even more joyful smile.
“Beautiful…” Shouko knows she’s talking about the Quirk, but it doesn’t stop her heart from soaring
anyways.

“Midoriya, I see now… Thank you.” Shouko begins to move her arms, flame and ice dancing in
preparation for the entropic explosion about to be unleashed. Power rips through Midoriya’s form,
tearing the calves of her pants as she rockets into the air over Shouko’s ice, broken arm thrown back
as rainbow lines ripple through it, composing the attack of a lifetime. There’s concrete, pink gas,
green and white and red and iridescent beauty that Shouko prays she never forgets, and then an
impact that nearly throws her off her feet. Her head feels like it’s spinning, and she stumbles on her
feet, panting as she feels the heat and ice temper out around her to the expected warmth of a May
afternoon. Eyes adjusting to the world around her, Shouko notices two things: one, that her shirt is
half burned off, her hand flying up instinctively to cover the right side of her chest upon seeing that
her sports bra was almost completely torched. Two, that she’s standing in the ring only feet where
she was before the attack. Mismatched eyes dart around the arena, and that’s when she sees her.

Midoriya has collapsed, completely unconscious, against the far wall.

“Oh.
Oh.
Oh. Midnight runs over, removing her leather jacket and covering Shouko up with it while
whispering a congratulations. Shouko nods silently as she hears the crowd go wild. All those things
she’d thought about Midoriya just then… Were they true? Was it the flame, the adrenaline, the
pressure? Or did she really… Was she actually a- could she be- a les… Les… Nope, nuh uh,
impossible. Shouko couldn’t even think of the word right now. She’d had two major realizations in
the matter of minutes, and she could not bear a sexuality crisis right now alongside it.

As she leaves the ring and walks into the hallway, Endeavor is waiting, grinning in a pleased
manner. “Shouko, I’m thrilled to see you’ve realized your wrongdoings.”

“Move. I’m indecent.” Shouko attempts to get around him, but his imposing figure blocks her path.

“That woman lent you her jacket. You’re fine.” Not even bothering with Midnight’s name, Endeavor
continues. “You’ve gone past your childish rebellion! Now that you’ve accepted my power, we
can-”

“Just shut up.” Shouko takes the man’s shocked stillness as an opportunity to slip past him.

“Midoriya told me something important just now. This Quirk is mine- not a single part of it is yours.
And you know what? When I was using my flame… For once, I wasn’t thinking about you in the
 slightest.”

Walking away, Shouko speaks before he gets the chance. “This is my story, not yours. You had your
shot already. I’m looking forwards to becoming a hero separate from you.”

Shouko takes a deep breath before knocking on the infirmary door. She’d waited for Iida to clear out
(Uraraka was in the anteroom, minutes away from fighting Bakugou) in the name of not getting in
the way of her friends, but she needed to say this sooner rather than later. A nurse with large horns
like a ram opened the door. “Yes?”

“I’m here to see Midoriya.” Pausing, Shouko remembers she should clarify something. “Tell her it’s
Todoroki.”

Nodding, the young man trots away on cloven hooves before returning a couple minutes later. “You’re clear to see her. Just follow me.”

Staying closely behind the man, she thanks him as he holds open the door to Midoriya’s room for her. The other girl is shifting nervously in her bed, bandages on both arms and legs, and- Oh. Her hair.

Midoriya’s long ponytail is gone, no more yellow ribbon holding up hip length hair. Instead, her mussed hair is scorched around her chin, looking like a longer version of Ashido’s. Small green curls frame her face, and she chuckles nervously. “A-Ah, hi Todoroki! Um… Fire. Hair. Y’know.”

Oh no. Shouko burned her hair off. She feels a bit queasy as she recalls a threat her father made to her years ago. “I… I’m sorry, Midoriya.”

“No no, it’s okay!” The girl moves to wave her arms frantically before cringing, keeping the bandaged limbs close to her chest instead. “I was due for a haircut anyways. I’m gonna clean it up a little when I get home, please don’t feel bad! I kinda think it’s cute short.”

“Even so, I’m still sorry.” Shouko remembers how long it took to grow her hair to her ribs, and realizes how many years of growth she just carelessly destroyed from Midoriya’s long locks. That said, she didn’t come here to apologize over burnt hair. “I wanted to thank you for what you said out there. It… meant more to me than you’d think.”

Midoriya’s freckled cheeks pinken. “Oh! Um, it’s no problem at all, Todoroki! I’m just… Uh, sorry if I was annoying or anything! I just really thought you needed to hear it and I knew you wouldn’t listen if I didn’t prove it was your Quirk first and I didn’t know how I-”

“You ramble, don’t you?” Shouko sits down in a chair next to the side table, watching Midoriya squeak, and cuts in before she can respond. “And don’t apologize for that. You say a lot of good things when you’re mumbling.”

Oh man, that came out way more intimate than she’d anticipated. She wonders if she’s imagining Midoriya’s blush. “A-Ah, if you say so! It’s just… I don’t know. I guess you looked like you needed help, Todoroki.”

“Shouko.”

“Huh?”

“You helped me overcome a weakness and hurt yourself doing it. You didn’t have to, but you did.” Shouko allows her lips to curve into the slightest hint of a smile. “So please call me Shouko. It’s the least I can do.”

Midoriya looks surprised before she breaks into a tiny smile in return. “Oh! Then… Shouko. Please call me Izumi.”

“Izumi.” Shouko pretends like her heart doesn’t jump a bit hearing her first name from the other girl’s lips. Shifting a bit, she thinks over her next question. Is she being presumptuous by asking what she wants to? She’s not at all familiar with this process, not familiar with anything in relation to girls her own age. Was there a special code word? A secret handshake? A blood ritual? Anything was possi-”

“So… Friends?”
Or Izumi could ask it first. That worked too. Shouko paused for a moment in surprise before slowly nodding. “... Yeah. Friends.” Izumi smiled brightly, and Shouko felt the ice around her heart melt a bit. Maybe… Maybe she could let one person in. Just for now.

Yeah. That wouldn't be so bad.

Chapter End Notes

(Fun fact: All the kiddos in Fuyumi's class are actually OCs of mine from a future BNHA story I'm working on! Maybe one day in another work, we'll meet them again?)

Now time for them to be a useless lesbian and a useless bisexual respectively and be entirely unable to realize they're crushing on each other hard! Welcome to pining hell, everyone.

For real, thanks for sticking it out through my janky action scene writing. I know it's not great, but I hope I can improve as I write this fic! Thanks for clicking, and if it's still Christmas Eve when you read this, have a wonderful holiday! See you soon!
He takes and he takes and he takes

Chapter Notes

Hi again, all! Thank you so much for your kind words- I'm still iffy on my fight scenes, but seeing your reassuring comments really soothed me. I hope you're all enjoying your holiday!

So, we're back with content warnings- please check the end notes for those! Please enjoy!

QUICK EDIT: well shit, I forgot to mention that I started a Discord server for this fic! It's just me hanging out on my own like an idiot right now, but I would love to see you there! It'll likely be pretty small and cozy, so don't hesitate to hop in! I'd love to talk to you all! https://discord.gg/bXjzUg5

Shouko ended up wandering the halls for some time after her match, not in much of a mood to go back to the stands right away after her talk with Izumi. It was more a matter of just… reflecting over everything that had happened just now- the entire match and conversation afterwards were only fifteen minutes combined, but it was enough to prompt an irreversible change. That said, Shouko still had… hesitations. She was breaking a promise she'd kept up for years and years, a vow made when she was a beaten and bruised eleven year old. For her entire life, fire had been pain. Shouko believed Izumi, she did! It was just… a lot. Rome wasn’t built in a day. As she approached the end of the hallway, just a door between her and her classes’ box seating section, she paused, holding up her left hand and letting a little flame flicker in her palm. Pursing her lips tightly, Shouko made a fist to extinguish it. She’d get used to it in time.

Right?

Uraraka had lost.

Izumi hadn’t been able to leave the infirmary for the entirety of the match (she’d really screwed her arms up, Recovery Girl had seriously chewed her and All Might out), but there was a TV showing the event live inside. It was an absolutely heartbreaking loss, Izumi having shed a few tears for her friend when Ochako had finally collapsed unconscious on the arena floor. She’d tried so hard, fought so smart, but in the end… Well, Kacchan didn’t have to fight nearly as hard against Kaminari as she had against Shiozaki. He was better rested than her, increased reflexes, physically stronger. Uraraka had gotten close enough to victory that Izumi could see the discomfort in Kacchan’s eyes as he walked out of the ring even from the somewhat distant camera angle- she’d known the boy long enough to recognize the little things- but it hadn’t changed the fact that she had lost. She’d talked to Uraraka after the other girl woke up in the infirmary bed right next to Izumi, and… Well, she was glad she was released minutes later. Hearing her friend cry into her phone from the other side of the door was hard enough without having to see her.

Making her way back to the stands (Uraraka and Kacchan’s fight had torn up the arena to a frankly insane degree, meaning there was plenty of time between it and Kirishima versus Tokoyami for her to meander back), the first thing to greet her was Ashido’s shout. “Oh my god, your hair!”
“I told you it was burnt off!” Kaminari yelled triumphantly. “I saw them pick the ponytail off the ground when they were cleaning up! It looked like a snake with a bow on one end!”

Izumi turned beet-red as all attention was focused on both the hair she no longer had and what remained. “W-Wait, they threw out my hair?!”

“We’re not sure where it went. Provided you don’t dye it, you could donate it somewhere if they give it back to you, ribbit.” Asui—er, she means Tsu—offered up. “Also, everyone should be a little more sensitive. It’s upsetting for a girl to lose a lot of hair suddenly.”

“Um, it’s okay, Tsu!” Izumi quickly replied, seeing the unmoving Shouko flinch from the front row. “I actually was considering getting a short haircut anyways, so it’s not too bad! I’ll just need to tidy up the ends so they aren’t, er, scorched.”

Shouji raised one of his many hands from the back row. “I’ve always cut all three of my younger sisters’ hair. If you want, I could clean it up.”

Izumi raised a hand to shyly play with her bangs, feeling the ends crunch where the heat had blackened them. “I mean, if you don’t mind…” She was more than a little embarrassed at the prospect of being visible on TV again with her hair looking like she’d been on the wrong end of a flamethrower (which she kind of had been in a way).

Nodding, Shouji got up from his seat. “All I need is something to cut them with.”

Kirishima enthusiastically raised his hand, hardening it. “You can use my arm if you want!”

“No.” It was a little amazing how Izumi and Shouji spoke in perfect synchronization like that, but Kirishima’s proposal deserved nothing less. She’d thought about how she looked like she’d been caught by a flamethrower already—the last thing she needed was to have Kirishima use his Quirk and make her look like she’d also been in a terrible lawnmower accident. Chin length was short enough, thanks.

Yaoyorozu rolled her eyes from next to Shouji, holding out her forearm and creating a pair of stylist scissors and silently handing them off to the tall boy. Offering a nod in thanks, the Dupli-Arms user motioned for Izumi to sit down and got to work as soon as she was properly seated in the back row. He was surprisingly efficient, and within a few minutes, Izumi was staring into the compact mirror Hagakure offered up (why an invisible girl needed a mirror was beyond her) at her newly trimmed locks. They still sat around her chin, mussed as always, but it looked like more of an intentional choice rather than an unfortunate side effect of a battle. “Woah, this looks really good, Shouji! Thank you!”

“It’s not a problem.” Shouji nodded. “Looks like the next match is starting shortly. You might want to get back to your seat.”

“Yes, Midoriya!” Iida waved from their row, second from the front. “Join us in cheering on our classmates!”

Smiling, Izumi nodded at Shouji before heading down to Iida, sliding in next to him. “Hm, I should probably text my—” A few thoughts popped up, Izumi letting the gears grind and put it together before her eyes widened with a gasp. “Oh, crap!”

“Language!” Iida sounded scandalized.

“Yo, is that really a swear word?” Sero whispered to Koda beside him, who just shrugged.
“My cell phone!” Izumi’s heart had just about stopped when she’d realized she’d never gotten it back from Uraraka before the match. “It was in Uraraka’s pocket, and—”

“I have it.” The croaking voice behind her was like a melody to Izumi’s ears, given the context. Tsu extended a big hand to offer the phone to its’ owner. “Ochako gave it to me before her match.”

Izumi almost started tearing up as she grabbed it out of Tsu’s hand, holding it with all the care of a newborn. Crying over everything was sort of her brand, whether she wanted to or not. “I was so scared! Thank you so much, Tsu!”

“Never really pegged you as the phone-crazy type.” Said Kaminari from a few rows back.

Shrugging, Izumi went to play with her ponytail, blinking a few times before she remembered it wasn’t there anymore. Shaking that surprise off, she managed to actually respond. “I’m not usually like this. There’s just… something important on it.”

Without thinking about it, Izumi’s eyes flickered up to see that Shouko was staring right at her. There was an exchange of confused blinks before mismatched irises flickered to the chair next to Izumi, then to the green haired girl, then to the chair, and back to her again. This was… a request to sit beside her? Maybe? Shouko had some difficulty with asking for things normally or basic teenage conduct, something Izumi had found moderately endearing until she learned it was ignorance formed from a lifetime of isolation and abuse. Now it just twisted her heart to watch the girl clumsily navigate the social sphere where the rest of her classmates flourished (well, most of them. Mineta wasn’t making friends for clear reasons, and Kacchan… well, he was Kacchan). Offering a hopeful smile, Izumi waved at her. “Shouko, want to come sit with Iida and I?”

“… Sure.” Almost looking surprised that her message got through, Shouko stood up, scooting out of the front row to make her way to Izumi’s row.

“Since when were you two on a first name basis, ribbit?” Tsu asked, placing a large finger on her chin.

“Ah! Comrades by battle, are you?” Despite their vastly different appearances and approaches to life, Iida still reminded Izumi a lot of Kirishima in his enthusiasm and traditional opinion on combat. At least Iida never offered to cut her hair with his hands. Though he probably could, given how fast they moved sometimes. The freckled girl chuckled, rubbing the back of her head.

“Well, something like that. We chatted a little after the match.” Izumi smiled as Shouko as she entered their row, noting the faint scar on one arm- was that the cut from those ice shards? Recovery Girl’s healing was something else. Taking a seat next to her (and noticing the way Tsu and Iida left a seat beside her empty, no doubt to allow Uraraka to sit next to her closest friend when she got here), Shouko offered a shallow bow to everyone involved in the conversation. “Izumi, Asui, Iida.”

Tsu tilted her head. “Just call me Tsu.”

Shouko looked slightly taken aback before nodding. “Tsu, then. All of you can call me Shouko.”

This time, it was Iida’s turn to look surprised. “Are you sure? I’m fine if you all wish to refer to me as Tenya, but I don’t wish to impose on you so informally!”

Oh, Iida, ever respectful. Izumi took the chance to pipe in, leaning forwards in her seat slightly. “It’s okay, Tenya. And, um, everyone can call me Izumi!”

There was a hand on her shoulder from behind, Izumi almost jumping out of her skin as she turned rapidly to see a grinning Ashido behind her. “Call me Mina!”
“I don’t think you were included in this conversation, ribbit. But I’ll call you that if you want.”

Before Izumi could address the cheerfully oblivious Ashido (Mina?) behind her, there was someone familiar walking down the stairs. The group’s eyes turned to see… a frighteningly puffy-eyed Uraraka?! Tenya was the first to react, a panicked urgency in his voice. “U-Uraraka! Your eyes! You need to see Recovery Girl at once!”

Uraraka chuckled softly, rubbing at her puffed up eyes. “It’s fine, Iida. They’re, um, from something else.” Izumi said nothing, already intimately familiar with how raw eyes could look after a lot of crying. Moving to sit next to Izumi, it took Uraraka a moment to notice Shouko on the other side of her freckled friend. “Ah, Todoroki! Good match back there.”

“Thank you. And it’s just Shouko.” Shouko was also squinting suspiciously at Uraraka’s eyes. Was Izumi the only person in the stands who understood post-crying peepers? “You fought well, too.”

Uraraka smiled brightly. “Aw, thank you too! And in that case, just call me Ochako. That goes for all of you, really! I say we’re close enough for first names at this point.”

“We did almost die together. That tends to bring people closer, ribbit.”

“T-Tsu! Don’t put it like that!”

“But it’s what happened.”

Izumi smiled as she watched her two friends fire back and forth at each other, sparing a glance at Shouko. The mismatched girl was watching the conversation, the slightest hint of a smile on her lips. She was never the most expressive person even in happier moments like this one, but the smile had to be a good sign. Maybe Izumi was being too optimistic, but… it seemed like Shouko might be able to become just one of the girls eventually. Her heart soared at the idea of the Half Hot Half Cold user joining her and Ochako on cafe outings, coming to the mall with the rest of the girls, maybe even doing something like going out for dinner just with her-!

Shouko turned her head, and Izumi meeped as she quickly swiveled hers around to stare at the arena. Ok, so she was definitely attracted to this girl to a certain degree. Maybe it was romantic, maybe it was because she was easily the best looking person in class (and that said a lot in a classroom that had Tenya, Ochako and Yaoyorozu in it), but it was definitely a thing that was happening right now. Izumi knew she was one of the lucky few who not only came to terms with being bisexual in middle school but also had full parental support when she told her mother, so her new crush (???) being female was no dramatic twist. The only issue?

She had a track record of falling hard for straight girls, and there was no evidence to indicate that the mismatched beauty was anything but that.

Izumi was screwed.

Shouko was screwed.

She wasn’t familiar with romance in the slightest- she recalls her father saying weeks ago that romance belonged to a world she did not live in. However, the dam had broken today, the realization that Shouko could grow past him and into whoever she wanted flowing through like a wave. There were no ‘different worlds’- Shouko also lived in the one where friends got ice cream after school (it was hard not to overhear the conversation between Ashido and Kirishima) and bought matching earrings (she’d seen the golden stars in Ochako and Izumi’s earlobes) and talked about internet jokes
admittedly, she still didn’t know what a ‘Fortnite’ was or what it had to do with Kaminari’s strange dances). She shouldn’t act out of spite- she didn’t need to consider his feelings in the slightest as she acted, free to her own whims without even thinking of Endeavor.

(Except how she did, there was a gun pointed at her head and Shouko crushed the misery down. She wanted to be normal for one fucking day.)

All that said, it didn’t change the fact that Shouko’d never had a crush on anyone- with a deeply numbed heart, it was nigh impossible to even consider a relationship. Not to mention, if this was a crush, it was on a girl- one realization after another today, wasn’t there?

… Was she gay? Well, it was possible. There was also a chance that Shouko found her heart beating for Izumi simply because she was the person to drag her out of hell, her little saviour. Girls were supposed to fall for people who saved their lives if Shouko’s very minimal exposure to princess content as a child was any indication. Could this be like that? Would it pass? This would probably piss her father off, so- no, no, stop. She wasn’t thinking of him or his opinions of her anymore. Besides, the arena was cleared up- the next match would be starting soon. Rising from her seat, she gave a nod to her newfound… acquaintances? Friends? Izumi waved as Shouko left for the anteroom, and the mismatched girl pushed her feelings aside for the time being. She needed to focus on the tournament and her next fight. Shouko would hold this secret close to her chest for now.

Kirishima versus Tokoyami was very clearly a match with an advantage for the bird headed boy, so Shouko was not surprised to hear that Tokoyami had emerged victorious. Next up for the Dark Shadow user would be Bakugou, and she was quite certain that would be the end of the road for the boy in the seat in front of her own. As she walked onto the stage, the roar of the crowd still exhilarating. Hitoshi Shinsou approached in the other direction, and Ojiro’s glare from the stand felt stronger on Shouko’s next than Endeavor’s did- she knew the tailed boy was just about tearing his hair out after Ashido had flubbed her match against the General Studies boy. Well, Shouko wouldn’t disappoint.

The competitors stand across from each other, Shinsou cocking an eyebrow at her. “How’d your little selfie go this morning? Does your daddy know you think you can just slack off before the Sports Festival? Pretty typical Hero Course.”

Huh. This guy knew how to shittalk. It’s kind of impressive, really, and Shouko probably would have responded had she not been raised to know exactly when it was too risky to open her mouth. With a Quirk like his and a knowledge on how to use it, Shinsou seemed like he’d make a decent hero, and Shouko hoped third place would be enough to satisfy him. Midnight swung her flog to start the match, and Shouko stomped her foot, firing out a wall of ice. Without a physical Quirk and what seems like no physical training, Shinsou was caught in an instant, Shouko freezing him up to his shoulders like how she’d captured Hatsume. After a moment of deliberation, she pushes his ice up to cover his mouth, ensuring his nose was still uncovered. Couldn’t be too careful.

There’s an awkward silence as Midnight stares at Shinsou, who’s eyes seem to indicate that he is royally done with this shit. Sighing, the Eighteen Plus Only Hero runs a hand through her hair. “Shinsou, blink three times if you’re unable to move.” When the boy did just that (not before rolling his eyes, though), she swings her flog. “Shinsou is immobilized. Todoroki wins.”

There was no pep in her voice, and Shouko couldn’t blame her- she looked cold without her leather jacket, black strappy leotard not doing much for her bare arms and shoulders. Shouko was fairly sure she’d left it in the infirmary when she’d been given a new sports jacket, and made a mental note to return that sooner rather than later as she walked forwards to unfreeze Shinsou. The boy sighed as
soon as she melted the ice around his mouth. “Figured you wouldn’t fall for it. You’d better not lose next round, Canadian flag.”

“What is it with today and the nickna-” Shouko’s angry mutter was cut off as she felt a fuzz overcome her mind, Quirk deactivating as every part of her body drifted out of her control. And just like that, it was back to normal, Shinsou grinning in a way that reminded her of a certain Erasure Hero.

“Well, I can say I brainwashed Endeavor’s kid now. Little victories.” Biting her lip at the comment, Shouko went back to unfreezing the boy, eager to get this over with.

Natsuo wants to say he was surprised to hear that Sosuke didn’t think his cousin would beat Shouko, but… Well, her Quirk was pretty overwhelming, and it wasn’t shocking to anyone when his little sister emerged victorious with just her ice. Natsuo also wants to say that he was sure she’d only used her ice because fire was unsuited to the situation, but that didn’t stop his feeling of unease. He could hardly focus on the Bakugou kid’s utter beatdown of that Tokoyami guy- seemed like his Quirk was basically a hard counter to the bird headed boy- when he was wondering how the upcoming match was going to play out for his sister.

He had always been disconnected from Shouko- well, since her Quirk activated, anyways. Natsuo had been more present in the life of the family’s baby when she was Shouko-lat, smiley and cheerful with ribbons in her pigtails. He wasn’t much older than she was, but still remembered crowding the hospital bed with his siblings, staring in awe at the tiny little face swaddled in pink blankets and cradled in their mother’s arms. That was also the first day he got to hold her, flanked on both sides by Fuyumi and Touya who were concerned that his four year old hands may not handle their new sister with the gentlest touch. They didn’t need to be worried- Natsuo had been smitten the second he laid eyes on her. His own little sister! He remembered pointing out the beauty mark under her left eye, how Touya had a matching one, and all of the Todoroki children had marvelled at the simple occurrence.

(Shouko’s beauty mark wasn’t visible anymore. Natsuo pointedly doesn’t think about it.)

Their mother picked her name while Natsuo cradled her. They’d all offered suggestions when they found out Rei would be having a girl (Endeavor didn’t care as long as it wasn’t, in his own words, ‘something foolish’). Fuyumi’s choice had been Sango as far as he recalled, and Rei had seemed like that one charmed her quite a bit, while Natsuo had offered up the ever-useable ‘Natsuo Two’. Listen, he was four or whatever! In the end, Touya’s was the one they went with- Shouko. She’s the littlest, his reasoning had been, so she needs the character for ‘child’ in her name! Of course, there was always the chance there would be another Todoroki baby, but looking back at it, the thought of this one being the last exhausting pregnancy she was forced to go through most likely a part of why their mother selected it. Holding the newly-dubbed Shouko in his arms, Natsuo whispered to her that he would take care of her like his own big brother took care of him.

Well, he didn’t end up lying. Touya left them when Natsuo was only seven, and Natsuo was a phantom to Shouko.

“Hon? You alright?” There’s a gentle touch to his hand, and Natsuo jolts. Launi is looking up at him, concern in her big brown eyes. “You were doing that thing again.”

Whenever he gets lost in his thoughts, Natsuo has a habit of shaking. He’s not sure why, exactly, but his current theory is that thinking too deeply always brings him to his upbringing, something he doesn’t exactly regard with the highest of opinions. Maybe there’s another reason, but his psychology classes have yet to provide any insight. “Sorry, sorry. Just thinking.”
Launi purses her lips, eyes flickering to the rest of the room. Their other friends are all distracted by the impromptu arm wrestling match between Junya and Hiroyuki, Sosuke and Rio cheering them on. It gives the couple a moment of privacy as Launi looks back to her boyfriend. “You know, the campus therapists are free.”

Natsuo groans as his kneecaps crack while he gets to his feet. “Yeah, yeah, I know.” He goes to check the door, and he’s usually able to restrain himself when it’s other people’s rooms, but he thinks he’s entitled to double-check this time given how stressed the situation has him. Even so, Launi sighs.

“Alright. Just… you can talk to me if you need to, okay?” Launi’s accent slips in for a moment, the bizarre mix of Kyushu dialect from her hometown and Hausa from her mother being quickly pushed away as she switches back to the Chubu dialect she’d picked up quickly from him. Natsuo hates seeing her sad, so he swoops in to pick her up, relishing in her surprised squeak.

“It’ll be fine, okay? Scout’s honour.” He winks at Launi, currently held in his arms bridal style, as he goes in for a kiss. She giggles against his lips, kissing back. There’s a wolf whistle from the front of the room.

“Ah, young love!” Snickers Hiroyuki as if he wasn’t the youngest in the group. “Reminds me of my boyhood!”

Sosuke joins in, voice a sing song. “Use protection!” Launi laughs, the sound like music to Natsuo’s ears, and throws the scrunchie around her wrist at the cat-headed boy.

“You’re the worst!” She says despite the clear amusement in her voice, and Natsuo allows his heart to relax as the laughter of the room pulls him away from the darkness. He sets Launi down, planting a kiss on her forehead for good measure.

The past was the past, and all you can do is be part of Shouko’s life now. Be a good big brother.

Natsuo thinks of Touya, thinks of collecting bugs together and teaming up for pranks on Fuyumi and trying to cook eggs with his fire. Natsuo thinks he can be a proper big brother too.

The third place match comes and goes, and Shouko is actually surprised by the outcome. From what she knows of Tokoyami, he is stoic and unflappable, a very reserved and aware boy. And yet, whatever Shinsou says manages to rile Dark Shadow up, the Quirk roaring and rising to great heights as it moved into a striking position. Tokoyami had looked terrified for some reason, instantly turning to Midnight and announcing that he yielded. Even then, it looked like it had taken a minute or two to coax Dark Shadow back into its’ wielder. Shouko has seen Quirks that damage the user (up close and personal after that match with Midoriya) and ones that are a bit hard to control (she would never forget the time Fuyumi took a nap under the kotatsu and froze not just it but half the room in her sleep- what was with her family and damaging the poor kotatsu?), but Dark Shadow had looked… dangerous. Very, very dangerous. Despite having landed third place without even using his Quirk in the final match, Shinsou looks uncharacteristically shaken up as he exits the ring. Shouko doesn’t blame him, really- she’s not sure how well she’d handle being in the warpath of Tokoyami’s Quirk either.

But it is not the bird-headed boy Shouko needs to be concerned about right now- that honour goes to one Katsuki Bakugou.

She feels... uneasy. Izumi had prompted an awakening, opened the cage door, but there was still a collar around her neck that yanked her back. There was the tangible consequence first and foremost- Shouko was still on the path to an arranged marriage unless she pleased her father, a problem with a deceptively difficult solution. As free as Shouko had felt, as free as her revelation made her, there
was still a very real hand holding her back from her own life. And then there was the topic of the flame. After the adrenaline had died down, the bicoloured girl genuinely didn’t know how she felt about her actions fighting Izumi. It was her Quirk, that much was established, but… well, Shouko had been denying this power for years. Her fear, her hate, her misery— it did not all vanish after a single match. Once the rush was gone, she was simply unsettled as flame flickers under her skin, begging to be released again. Her Quirk, but one she feared all the same.

That’s a very bad feeling to have as Shouko walks into the ring, the roar of the crowd deafening. It’s the finale, the moment that just might save her from becoming a wife and mother at just sixteen winters, and she’s too damn conflicted for this. Bakugou, on the other hand, looks more than ready—his smile is feral, and Shouko notes that he was built to fight just as she was. Taller, larger muscles, but not as fast as you. Use your fire. Can you use that to your advantage? Don’t use your fire. Izumi mumbled something about his right hook. Use your fire. Watch the eyes, not the body. Don’t use your fire.

“Don’t even think about holding back, Icyhot.” Bakugou sneers from across the ring. “I’ll show everyone that even your full power isn’t enough to even scratch me.”

Everyone was just lining up around the damn block to see Shouko use her flames, weren’t they? Flipping her hair over her shoulder, Shouko got into position, cracking her knuckles. “I’ll fight how I want to.”

“I’ll steamroll you and your ice, and you know it.” Bakugou sneered. “You’d be stupid not to use your fire. Or was all that shit you dumped on Deku just to get her to go easy on you?”

Okay, that got her attention. Was he talking about…?! “What the hell do you—”

“Let the final match begin!” Midnight swings her flog, and Shouko shoved that feeling back. She would not have survived as long as she did in the Todoroki household if she didn’t know how to swallow her emotions in a heartbeat, how to switch directly into the swath of knowledge held through years of training. Ice shoots out in a glacier, the roars of her Quirk briefly drowning out those of the crowd.

Bakugou would break through this opening attack easily, Shouko knew that. But it would take plenty of explosions. The next glacier would take more out of him, and the next, and the next. He was a burst fighter, perhaps the only thing he and Izumi had in common. Despite what she’d said to her father, Shouko knew deep down that it would be Bakugou in the finals. As such, she’d watched him closely for a weakness, and she’d found one. He had taken Tokoyami down in two minutes, Kaminari in less than forty seconds. However, Uraraka (no, it was Ochako now, wasn’t it?) had taken almost nine minutes. He’d had to cause multiple explosions in a very small period of time, the brunette girl refusing to stay down for even a second when she was forced back by a blast. And that move he had to pull to destroy that debris? Well, Shouko knows what Quirk overuse looks like. And Bakugou had been suffering from it by the end of that match.

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Shouko, meanwhile, was an endurance fighter. It’s natural that you would develop an unnatural stamina and will to continue when you’ve been forced to train until your body physically gives out, where your sister has to carry you back to your bedroom because your legs are ignoring your brain’s plea for them to move, where you were injured on purpose to teach you how to keep fighting through it. She’d wear him down with barrage after barrage, and when he was at the breaking point, she could force him out of the ring. It would be difficult, yes, but Shouko had to do this. Her life was on the line— maybe her body would continue to move and speak, but she knows deep down that every part of her would die as soon as a ring was slipped onto her finger. The thing who married Hideomi Ondo might be named Shouko, but the real person would be gone forever.
Bakugou’s explosions crack the ice, and Shouko readies herself for a second wall.

She’s going to lose. Shouko’s going to lose, and Izumi is terrified for her.

This isn’t about their pride anymore, not some way to get your foot in the door of hero society. Izumi knows precisely what’s going to happen to her new friend if she loses, and she’s growing fearful of the prospect as Shouko starts getting sluggish. She’s clearly going for an endurance match, but the mismatched girl hasn’t truly seen Kacchan’s power or how far he’s willing to go if it means he wins (and isn’t his power so amazing, even if each explosion makes Izumi grit her teeth in a learned reaction, can’t erase what’s been done to her, wonders for the millionth time if he knows what his lackeys did that cold winter day when he wasn’t around, calls herself a hypocrite after what she told Shouko before). While the Half-Hot Half-Cold user indeed had more stamina than the Explosion wielder, Kacchan wasn’t holding back anything. Shouko’s movements were sometimes hesitant, and the only thing she was using her fire for was to thaw herself out- not offensively. Would that be enough for Endeavor…?

Izumi has thought, at first, to go to All Might with her illegally obtained audio recording (and yes, she’d googled it in the infirmary, confessions from the victim taken without their knowledge were inadmissible in Japanese court, so that was bad enough already). Obviously, the number one hero had enough clout to really get the gears turning, and he’d obviously do whatever he could to help Shouko! But… Izumi thinks of the backlash of the number one accusing the number two of being a serial abuser, of both partaking in a Quirk Marriage and facilitating one against the wishes of his underage daughter. She thinks of the news surrounding Stain, the way there are people who agree with his decree that hero society is corrupt. She thinks of the League, how bold villains we’re getting in attacking children. She thinks of All Might’s ever shrinking time limit, the rising crime rate, her own helplessness as a successor who is not nearly prepared.

… It would increase the chances of a conviction, yes. And it would also rip hero society completely in half during a very dark hour. Izumi thinks of the unnecessary deaths the safest choice would inadvertently cause. She can’t go to him first- she will not keep her beloved mentor in the dark, she’ll absolutely make sure he knows (and Izumi’s certain that he’ll still do everything he can to help, that’s just the type of guy the pro is), but he can’t be the one she talks to first. The Symbol of Peace can’t be the one doing the accusing.

Then how about an underground pro?

The Erasure Hero Eraserhead is unknown to the vast majority of the public. He holds neither public trust or distrust- they don’t even know who he is! That said, Izumi is a hero fangirl through and through, and could happily prattle off all the minimal facts she’s learned about underground pros over the years. She knows several things about Shouta Aizawa that the general public or even a less obsessive fan wouldn’t. He is known for having a passable relationship with several vigilantes and a couple… legally questionable individuals. He’d fostered five UA students temporarily before to get them out of abusive homes. And the most vital piece of information? He’s a registered social worker under Shizuoka jurisdiction, one of the few heroes who end up going to university for a degree in the profession. At the time, Izumi had mostly just been baffled as to how this grouchy caterpillar of a man was still alive with three time-consuming, people-oriented careers at once. But now these facts meant he may just be the best candidate for going after Endeavor. He was Shouko’s teacher, apparently had some connections All Might wouldn’t have as the Symbol of Peace, an occasional foster father, and has a degree in a career that had a heavy hand in the welfare of children. Pair all that with his nonexistent social standing, and Aizawa being the one to publicly point a finger meant that the chaos would be halved- now it wasn’t one beloved figure possibly alienating thousands (if not millions) of supporters by calling another A-list hero a monster, but someone who most have
never even heard of. Was this going to make the conviction harder to get? Absolutely. Would it risk Aizawa’s entire career? Absolutely, and Izumi felt horrible about that thought. But… not telling someone and leaving Shouko to suffer like this? Allowing an abuser to remain in the good graces of the adoring public? Izumi didn’t know Aizawa as well as All Might, but given the praise her mentor had offered her teacher when the man came up, but she knew in her heart that this man would do anything he had to do save Shouko.

A hand on her shoulder jolts her out of her thoughts, and it’s like a replay of earlier that day, Ochako’s concerned face making Izumi stutter. “Hey, are you okay? You looked kinda upset.”

“I-I-I’m okay!” Izumi squeaked out, eyes flicking from Ochako to the match, Shouko and Kacchan exchanging blows. “I’m, ah, worried about Iida. That’s all.”

The class president had received a call right before the start of the match, stepping out to take it, and he’d rushed back to the stands to grab his jacket with a haunted look in his eyes, saying he had to leave right away without providing any further details. Ochako nodded sympathetically. “Yeah… How about we text him after this?”

“That sounds good.” Turning her head fully to the battle, Izumi cringed as Shouko took the brunt of an explosion to the stomach, being flung backwards and stopping herself with an ice wall. “Ack, poor Shouko…”

“Can she win without her fire? It’s Bakugou, after all…” A concerned murmur from the back of the stands that sounded like Satou mirrored Izumi’s own thoughts perfectly. “I don’t get why she’s not using it.”

Another explosion, and Izumi’s eyes widened as Bakugou blasted himself in the air, higher and higher. No, she knew this move. She’d seen him during training, seen exactly what this one did. He was going for a Howitzer Impact. That was going to absolutely decimate Shouko if she didn’t do something right away. Before she could stop herself, Izumi was on her feet, rushing to the front of the box seats and leaning far against the railing despite her bandaged arms not allowing her to properly grip it, Yaoyorozu making a gasping sound from the seat behind her, grabbing the back of her sports jacket. Izumi didn’t even notice, mind racing in fear. Her thoughts were garbled, frightened, Shouko, you’ve been through so much today, don’t let your dream die so young, please please I want to save you, it’s yours, yours!

“SHOUKO! PLEASE DO YOUR BEST!” Is what leaves her mouth instead, screamed so loud that her voice cracks. Shouko freezes for a split second, and Izumi waits with bated breath as her friend slowly starts flickering with fire.

It hurts, explosions fucking hurt and Shouko hates heat, hates fire, hates those flickering sparks. It hurt her before and it’s hurting her now, a phantom pain howling from her eye as smoke clouds her vision. She’s heating herself up, is it enough? Will it be enough? Will he let her go? She can’t use her fire, Izumi was wrong, wrong, wrong and everything is spinning. Maybe it’s just the explosion seconds ago that felt like it blew out her eardrum, and she thinks she understands why Bakugou wears hearing aids now. Her ice is pushing him back, retaliation, but the boy was so fast with his Quirk, she wasn’t able to use her original plan of ice wall after ice wall. There’s so much noise, the explosions going off as Shouko dodges and hits and tries to ignore the trickle of blood down her forehead. Her mind is screaming with adrenaline, thoughts panicked and rushed.

For a moment, the booms stop. Her ears stop ringing, and the smoke she’s choking on starts to lessen. Did- did she do it? There’s a pause- no, they’re high above her again. Shouko looks up, eyes widening as she sees Bakugou descending, spinning, so fast so fast this is it she’s about to lose the
match, lose her life, lose her freedom right after her first taste of it…!

“SHOUKO! PLEASE DO YOUR BEST!”

… She’d lose her first friend.

Without thinking, Shouko’s arm lights up, and it’s pointing upwards as if possessed. Shouko grits her teeth, watches Bakugou grin as he descends with his palms extended. She’ll push him back with the flame, allow the burning fire to throw him out of bounds or knock him unconscious from the bout of pain. She can do this. It’s her Quirk, everything is on the line, fight, fight-

Endeavor is watching from the stands. She sees him smiling.

Without thinking, Shouko’s flames extinguish. I’m bad. I’m making him happy. Bad. Bad. He deserves to be unhappy, frown, frown, why can’t I see you? Why can’t I see you right now? The smoke and heat again hot hot hot HOT ON HER FACE BURNING PEELING NO PLEASE MAMA IT HURTS-

Everything is black.

A sister made to grow up too fast is silent, still as a mouse. Her nails have dug bruises into her wrists as she grips them. She will hide them as she always does.

A brother abandoned holds his girlfriend’s hand. His friends are saying something, but he’s counting one two three one two three one two three one two three as he stares at the TV.

A mother locked away covers her mouth with her hand. Her baby is hurt. It was not her this time. It still kills her to see.

The scarred man watches. His thoughts are his alone.

Izumi freezes. Shouko is slumped on a broken pile of ice that failed to stop the attack, out of bounds. Kacchan looks furious, he’s grabbing her unconscious body and holding his hand out in anger until a pink mist floats over the scene. He stumbles, slumping onto Shouko, two children pushed to their limits passed out on broken defences.

“... Todoroki is out of bounds. The winner of the Annual UA Sports Festival First Year Stage is Katsuki Bakugou!”

Though she is not a religious girl, Izumi pleads with whatever is out there to protect her friend. Please, you can’t end her story this soon.

Chapter End Notes

CONTENT WARNINGS

- Mentions/descriptions of child abuse
- Mentions of past bullying
- Mentions of forced marriage
- PTSD-induced panic attack

SPOILERS BEGIN!

- Remember how Bakugou was eavesdropping on the Todoroki + Midoriya talk about Endeavour in canon? That has not changed ;.) Nobody can keep a dang secret here.
- Fuyumi's original name choice for her baby sister is in reference to the absolutely wonderful female Todoroki fic 'Hers Not His' by sunkelles! I'm an absoloute neanderthal and have no clue how links work in the notes, so I'll just drop the full thing for you here: https://archiveofourown.org/works/16741501 . Check it out!
- Much of the Japanese legal information I can find is, unsurprisingly, written in Japanese. While I can read a decent amount, a lot of it is so formal and antiquated (much like English legal language) that I'm kind of just inferencing what they mean. I may get some facts wrong- sorry about that!

So, second place without using her left side as much as she could have... Wonder how Endeavor's gonna take that? Guess we'll just have to wait and see! Thank you so much for reading, please don't forget about that Discord server (https://discord.gg/bXjzUg5), and see you soon!
you must like being the victim, you've done nothing to get out

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone! Thank you all again for the comments- they really do mean the world to me. I hope you'll enjoy this chapter as well!

Please check the bottom for content warnings, and I'd like to remind everyone that I'm running a Discord server for this fic! It's very cozy and nice in there, so if you want to talk to me, other readers, or want to see me discuss Kaminari teaching Shouko Fortnite dances (I'm serious), please check us out!: https://discord.gg/xzceBuU

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The medals ceremony is… awkward. They’d managed to calm Bakugou down from his enormous temper tantrum before putting them on the podiums for the cameras, but Shouko was convinced he may jump down and try to make good on his threat to ‘blow you up so bad they’ll be scraping pieces of you off that heart monitor’ that he made when they both woke up in opposing infirmary beds earlier. He was uninjured past a pulled muscle in his right arm, but Shouko had apparently made off worse- a grade two concussion, dislocated jaw, and first degree burns up her neck. The concussion and jaw were reset and healed by Recovery Girl before she woke up, and the burns were healed to the point that the scarring would be gone by tomorrow. Shouko stands on her second place podium with bandages wrapped around her neck. They’re professional dressings, different from Fuyumi’s methods, loving but self-learned and full of bad habits. They feel too tight as camera flashes blind her.

She barely hear what All Might says to her, and Shouko simply nods at what seems like the appropriate time to do so as a medallion is placed around her neck. She suspects her father will not allow her to keep it. That’s fine by her- she’s not interested in keeping the memorabilia of her failure around. She stands there, face blank, as the newscasters get their desired shots. What a miserable trio of victors they are- Bakugou looks like he’s about to burst a vein in anger, Shouko knows she looks as uninterested as always, and Shinsou has not stopped looking tired since the start of this fiasco. Hopefully more of the focus will go to him, the General Studies boy who managed third above so many Hero Course kids. That’d be a preferable story to ‘idiot daughter of number two hero chokes at the last minute, first place tries to beat up her unconscious body’.

Shouko doesn’t pay attention to what’s going on around her, focusing on nothing and letting herself lift out of her body to be embraced by the static. It was calming- apparently calming enough that she didn’t register being in a classroom until she blinked a few times, realizing she was sitting at her desk with her medal around her neck. Huh. Had she been on autopilot again? Hopefully nobody had tried to talk to her. Mr. Aizawa was in the middle of speaking, and Shouko figured she ought to tune in now.

“- and I hope you now have a better concept of your weak points along with your strengths. Class dismissed; have a safe trip home, and congratulations to all of you. You’re part of UA’s history now.” Oh, crap. Hopefully he hadn’t said anything overly important while she was floating in space. Shouko looked to her side, her backpack next to her desk (did she bring it back with her?), dread pooling in her gut. She would be going home to Endeavor tonight, taste of second best on her tongue. Taste of having had a panic-induced flashback in the final match that lost her the tournament,
taste of shame and guilt and fear. Shouko wanted to run, run and run from Musutafu, from the prefecture, from the nation, from the planet. Let her live in the clouds forever, disconnected from the body belonging to everyone but her. But that wasn’t an option, was it? She was stuck here- her own failure had assured that. Shouko felt Izumi’s gaze on her, but she did not look back. She’d failed her first friend, too. Slinging her backpack over her shoulder, Shouko left the classroom, fully aware of the pain she’d be facing that evening. Briefly, she considered slipping away to Natsuo’s place, but she had no doubt her father would come roaring down upon his tiny dorm to drag her back. So rather than childishly fleeing to her older brother, Shouko did what she had done for years:

She put her head down, bit down her feelings, and headed home.

(That night, Fuyumi crawls into her futon again like they were kids. The freshly healed fractured eye socket Shouko received earlier is jostled slightly by the way her crying sister pushes her face below her chin in a mess of apologies, but Shouko doesn’t really care. For once in her life, she hugs Fuyumi back. They won’t talk about this in the morning, but for tonight, two sisters hold each other gently, as if they fear the other may break under their touch.)

If Shouta Aizawa wasn’t concerned about Shouko Todoroki before the Sports Festival, he sure as hell was now.

The girl had never seemed all that well, even from the start of the year. Where less experienced teachers may have labelled Todoroki’s habit of staring blankly at her desk for half an hour ‘zoning out’, Shouta knew dissociation when he saw it. He had seen her flinches whenever she was grabbed during battle. And most of all, there was that unfortunate incident Midnight had reported several weeks ago. The girl wasn’t even aware of what menstruation was, and Recovery Girl’s incident report stated that she had a dangerously low fat-to-muscle ratio with a risk of developing at least one condition in the female athlete triad provided she wasn’t already two thirds of the way in- whether she was simply a very late bloomer or had some type of amenorrhoea remained unknown, her diet was likely much lighter than it should be for a girl of her monetary bracket, and she absolutely exercised too much judging by her school facility permission forms. Shouta would have been concerned about his student by that alone- the last one was already a red flag for child neglect- but when combined with everything else, it painted a very concerning picture.

So when Izumi Midoriya approached him after the festival, not quite as bandaged as he himself was, and shakily told him he needed to hear something, he had a suspicion of what it might be. He just didn’t realize how bad the hidden story was.

What kind of teacher was he to miss this?

It had taken a lot of practice in all three of his careers (and no matter how many times Hizashi told him to take a break, all three were near and dear to him) to keep a steady face when hearing the unimaginable from a victim. And as he listens to the recording, hearing his student discuss the possibility of being forced into a marriage and assaulted with a casual voice that chills him to the bone, Shouta is immensely thankful for all his practice. Cursing and slamming his hands against the table in front of Midoriya would only make things worse than their currently abysmal state. As soon as the recording ended, he raised his eyes to the green-haired girl, Midoriya currently trembling.

“This was taken without Todoroki’s consent, wasn’t it?”

“I-It was, b-but I swear I didn’t know about the law until after! I, um, googled it in the infirmary. But I-I wanted to make sure you’d believe me, and this was the only way I had any real proof, and- I’m just-” Midoriya was babbling, wringing her hands, and Shouta raised one of his to silence her.

“It’s fine, Midoriya. You haven’t done anything wrong in my eyes. Even without it, though, I would
be taking this allegation seriously.” Shouta watched the way his student’s face visible relaxed, and he felt his own lose some of its tension. “You did the right thing in reporting this. Thank you.”

In his own experiences, people hesitated in reporting abuse of others if they were told not to- and when says that, he means his own experiences, and he’ll regret not saying something sooner every day- so Midoriya stepping forwards was an enormous act of bravery. A problem child she may be, but this girl had the courageous fire he’d seen in her on the first day, the only thing that kept him from expelling her when she’d came last. “Make sure that doesn’t get erased. Back it up on your computer at home if you can. Can you please tell me the full story you got from Todoroki?” Shouta pulled his own phone out from his podium, walking around and beckoning for the girl to follow him. Though he was borderline mummified from the bandages, that didn’t mean he couldn’t record a conversation instead of writing this down. “Follow me, we’ll sit down at the desks. I’m going to have you tell me everything Todoroki has told you about Endeavor and her upbringing. Are you alright with that?”

Midoriya made a meeping sound and nodded, following her teacher around. As Shouta sat down where Hagakure would have been seated had the classroom not be empty, the girl followed suit by sitting down across from him in Shouji’s desk. “Y-Yes, that’s okay. I-I’ll try not to be too rambly.”

“Just speak what comes to mind. This isn’t a formal statement, just something to have on file while your memory is fresh.” Settling into his chair, Shouta tapped the recorder with a bandaged hand. “My name is Shouta Aizawa, registered social worker, pro hero Eraserhead, and teacher at UA high school. I’m here with one of my pupils, Izumi Midoriya, who was told by her classmate, Shouko Todoroki, that she is currently living in an abusive household and is being coerced into an illegal omiai in the name of eventually facilitating a Quirk Marriage. Midoriya, this is an informal recounting of what you’ve been told by Todoroki. Do you understand and promise to be completely honest with everything you say to me today?”

“Y-Yes, Mr. Aizawa.” Midoriya squeaked, sounding even more intimidated than normal. And despite that, she started to speak.

She tells of being pulled aside to ask about a connection with the current No. 1, one Todoroki did not believe to be as untrue as Midoriya claimed if her next actions were anything to go by. She explained a man’s fruitless pursuit for the top spot, of his sham marriage and a horrifying history of eugenics spanning over twenty years and breaking countless hearts and bodies. Midoriya rambles at points, but is quickly reeled in, and there’s too much determination to tell the story of the girl who remains so silent to get too far off the path. Shouta sits quietly, the observer to the tale of twins where one vanishes and the other grows up too fast, and a Quirkless brother made a ghost in his own house. It’s his job to listen as Midoriya recounts Shouko Todoroki’s story, one with mothers pushed to the edge who lashed out at the wrong person and were ripped from the narrative, page after page of bruises and the denial of choice, and the most recent chapter of a marriage to a man closer to Shouta’s age than hers. When she is done, he very carefully turns off the recording device. “Thank you, Midoriya. This was a very heroic thing you’ve done today. I know it isn’t easy.”

“Thanks.” The girl has her hands digging into the fabric of her skirt, head tipped down. “Aizawa… Please be careful with this. I don’t- she seemed really happy w-when I said we could be friends. I don’t want to ruin that so soon… Or make her feel like I betrayed her right after she decided to trust me.”

Shouta understood more than she would know- he’d been the one in her exact situation before. The difference was that she acted when he didn’t. Reaching out, a bandaged hand did its best to ruffle her newly-short hair. “I have a lot of investigating to do before I can even start to make my case. It’ll take even longer to actually finish and launch the case officially. You’ll have plenty of time to warm her
up to the idea before she even becomes aware of it. And in any case, I want to remind you this was the right thing to do. You’re a brave kid, Midoriya.”

Though she’d blushed slightly when her hair was ruffled, Midoriya’s face broke out in a deep red as soon as Shouta told her that. “T-T-Thank you, Mister Aizawa!”

After that, he had sent her home. The girl had been through a lot today- emotionally and physically, it seemed. While he’d normally have gone to work at the staff room, there were likely plenty of teachers mulling about, and Shouta genuinely did not think he could handle them right now. Instead, he stayed at Hagakure’s desk, mulling over the tape recorder. In most cases like this, he’d file a request to have Todoroki temporarily removed from her home. She was a minor, after all. But… this was a case with various circumstances getting in the way of his attempts to help. For one, the confession came from Midoriya- the girl who had been beaten by Todoroki in the Sports Festival that very day. Much later down the line, Endeavor’s could easily spin a story about a girl scorned by a loss who decided to try and ruin her rivals life- and again, the audio was inadmissible in court. Secondly, this was Endeavor. The number two hero, exceptionally popular, a beacon of strength, victory, and most of all? Money. Lots of money. If Shouta didn’t have the perfect case planned out, they would easily be crushed in court, especially if the youngest Todoroki refused to testify or denied the allegations. And number three? The public response. If someone like Endeavor was accused of abuse, hero society would tear at the very seams. All Might could hold it together, yes, but there was no way Midoriya knew of his time limit. How much longer did their current Symbol of Peace have? How much destruction would be thrown across the nation if Endeavor was exposed? Shouta new firsthand that many villains came from impossibly difficult backgrounds, scared kids who never even had a chance to be good. It was part of why he pursued a degree when so many other heroes didn’t- he wanted to stop the problem at the root, cease crime before it started. How many villains would rise up from the realization that the number two hero beat his wife and kids, was forcing his underage daughter into a marriage? As much as he despised just letting his student remain in this situation, he knew this needed to be handled with kid gloves to prevent a major upheaval in an already fragile peace. Shouta would have to take this slowly, watch carefully and gather his evidence. He hoped to god the big-name heroes will get it together soon enough to let him protect his student before the worst case scenario occurred.

Hope. That really was all he had. Sighing, Shouta got up from the desk. He needed the best help he could get, and maybe a black coffee.

Shouko squinted down at the small dry-erase board, hoping her writing was legible. Their healer’s father had become suddenly ill, the woman taking off for a few days to care for him, so Shouko hadn’t been able to go this morning for her second round of healing- now her right eye, too bruised and tender to be covered in makeup, sat under an eyepatch. My sister accidentally elbowed me when I crouched behind her to grab something from a drawer is the explanation she gives Aizawa when he cocks an eyebrow at her. His bandages are off, and hers are on. Funny. Shouko also told him that she doesn’t feel energized enough for a safe trip to Recovery Girls’, which is a lot truer than the last statement. She’s indeed feeling tired, most of the night having been spent quietly talking with Fuyumi about anything to keep the girl from crying again and preventing herself from breaking down as well. But for the most part, she just doesn’t want Recovery Girl looking at her eye- the older woman would realize the real cause of injury in a heartbeat.

Now, though, this leaves her with the unenviable task of writing down her hero name with her bad eye. Why couldn’t her idiot of a father put his fist against the one that was already scarred and damaged? When she gets up to present, she considers herself lucky in the way that she doesn’t bump into any desks or trip. She shows her hero name to the confused, silent classroom: Shouko. The kanji of her own name are familiar even when she has blurred and cloudy vision, but she hopes she didn’t
mess up any of the lines.

She’ll be following this path along with Ii- wait, he’s Tenya now, isn’t he? In both the way Shouko has been allowed to call him and as a hero. They’d both chosen their given names as their titles, and while Shouko won’t press, she thinks it’s because of what happened to his brother yesterday- she’d seen the news about Ingenium. Midnight speaks up, sounding as hesitant as she did with Tenya.

“You too? Are you sure?”

“Yes.” Shouko nods simply, returning to her desk and almost clipping her hip off the side of Sero’s desk on the way back. She’ll be her own hero, she’s decided. The name ‘Shouko’ came from Touya, if she remembers Fuyumi and Natsuo’s words properly, not her father. Even though she barely knew him, Shouko would rather be named by the runaway Todoroki son than her father or his team’s’ multiple suggestions for a suitable name. Call it a reminder of who she was- her own person. Never his.

Midnight shrugged, moving onto the next person. Though she was hiding it with all the grace of a pro in the spotlight, Shouko was skilled at recognizing when someone was lying or trying to hide something, and the woman was putting on a smile for everyone’s sake. She knew why, too- last week, Ashido had gleefully pulled out an old yearbook from the library, and all of 1-A had crowded around to see Aizawa’s class picture as a first year. Amongst his classmates were Present Mic, Vlad King, Midnight, all four of the Pussycats, and…

Ingenium. Tensei Iida.

The same hero currently fighting for his life in the hospital after a run-in with Stain.

Heroes died all the time. Shouko was aware of this even if the rest of her class wasn’t- there was a very good chance their numbers would be halved by the time they were forty. Just looking over that yearbook last week, Shouko had noted that there were four heroes who’d died in the past- she couldn’t remember when the first two had fallen, but she’d known the hero team Water Hose only went down last year. The sixteen still alive were only thirty years old- they were doing better than most hero classes.

Even with that knowledge, Shouko pitied Midnight and Tenya. It couldn’t be easy knowing a classmate or sibling was injured, lying in pain while you couldn’t do anything to help.

*(She has seen that look of helplessness on Fuyumi multiple times.)*

Until now, Shouko had bought her lunch up onto the roof. She enjoyed the peace and quiet as she sat against the chain link fence, the whistle of wind and the clink of her chopsticks being her only company. But now that she’d been offered the opportunity for companionship, she couldn’t deny that she was curious as to how normal students spent their lunch hours. So as Izumi, Tenya and Ochako got up for lunch, she’d made a request to join them.

All three had enthusiastically agreed, and before long, they were in the cafeteria and seated at a table. Tsuyu had joined up with them in line, so now Shouko sat slightly squished between her and Izumi. She pointedly focused on the bowl of ochazuke in front of her and not the feeling of Izumi’s thigh touching hers. Neither the newly short-haired girl or the froggy student on the other side of her seemed at all troubled by the way they were pushed against her, so Shouko did her best to ignore the comforting warmth radiating off them both (and even if Tsuyu smelt slightly pond-like, the girl was undoubtedly hot-blooded). Ochako was the one to bring her into the conversation first, smiling brightly as she held up one korokke in her hands, two pinkies sticking out to keep her from floating her lunch. “Hey, Shouko, are you excited to see your internship offers today?”
Shouko shrugged in between a bite of her food. “In a way. My father said he sent out an offer for me to come to his agency, so I’ll be going there, but it may be interesting to see who else asked for me.”

She wonders if she feels Izumi stiffen a bit beside her, or if it’s just her imagination. “You know, Shouko, if you don’t want to go to your dad’s place, m-maybe you can come with one of us! I’m sure you got plenty of offers- maybe someone sent an offer out to you and Ochako or someone! I get the feeling not that many people reached out to me, hah…”

“Nonsense, Izumi!” Iida still sounded a bit out of it- not that Shouko could blame him- but his desire to cheer up his friend seemingly overrode that. “You made it to the same round as Ochako! If anything, I should be the one worried.”

And like that, Izumi was a stuttering mess, waving her arms around. “N-No, you did great! I mean, you didn’t make it very far, but your technique was seriously amazing! Not to mention the fact that you’re a legacy hero, too, so that already vouches for your skill and professionalism. Plus, your strategic thinking was evident all throughout your fight with Tokoyami, and you even had a Super Move planned so early in your first semester, and-”

“She really does watch everyone closely, ribbit. It would seem weird if it was anyone but Izumi.” Tsuyu spoke placidly as she nibbled away at her curry soba, prompting a slightly embarrassed meeping noise from the other green-haired student.

“In any case, I’ll likely just go with my father anyways.” Shouko plucked a particularly juicy looking piece of salmon from her ochazuke. Lunch Rush’s cooking seriously was out of this world. “I want to be a top-level pro, and he managed to do just that with only his fire. Even if it’s a little troublesome to work under Endeavor, I think he could teach me a lot.”

“If you’re sure…” Izumi still sounded concerned, but eventually gave in, turning back to her bento. Their group only had a moment of peace before a loud sighing noise from one side of the table drew their attentions. Shouko had to crank her head to see past her eyepatch, and despite the blur of her vision, the perpetrator was instantly obvious.

“Maaaaan, no fair! How come Iida gets all those babes when he’s such a goody two-shoes?” Mineta’s voice rang through in its usual grating tone. He was walking by with his lunch tray, an embarrassed (judging by the flush on his cheeks) and irritated looking Kaminari by his side. The electric boy nudged Mineta.

“Dude, come on. Just keep it to yourself.” Kaminari, for his part, hadn’t done anything particularly inflammatory since yesterday. Chances are he was embarrassed over the way he’d gotten chewed out by the girls about the cheerleader incident.

Meanwhile, Tenya looked absolutely scandalized, chopsticks clattering into his unadon. “I- Mineta! Nothing of the sort is happening here! As class president, I demand you apologize to both myself and my friends for the insinuations you’ve made about our relationship!”

“We all know what’s going on here, though! Don’t you lie!” Mineta cried out, pointing out accusatory. “There’s only eight chicks in our class, you can’t just steal away four to make your harem! At least give Midoriya over to the rest of us, she’s got the biggest bo-”

Mineta was promptly slapped by Tsuyu’s tongue, sending him skidding back and out of sight. There was a crashing noise somewhere, but Shouko found that she didn’t really care that much. Tsuyu croaked in annoyance, turning to a mortified-looking Kaminari. “I don’t know why you hang out with him, ribbit. Otherwise you’re a nice person.”
Kaminari opened his mouth to respond before closing it with a sigh. “I… I dunno. He was just really nice to me on the first day, and… I’m gonna go wrangle him over to a table. Sorry about all of that.”

Giving a quick bow in apology, Kaminari hurried off in the direction Mineta had been sent, shouting something about how he ‘told you not to!’ With that out of the way, Shouko turned back to the group, noticing right away that Izumi was leaning forwards, head buried in her hands.

“Izumi? Are you okay?” Ochako leant forth to pat Izumi’s head, and the girl made a groaning noise in response.

“He just yelled about my boobs in public.” She responded, dipping her head lower and leaning into Shouko’s side. The mismatched girl felt her heart skip at the unexpected closeness. “I… I hate when people talk about ‘giving me’ to people like I’m some sort of trading card and not a person. It just kinda brought me back to being an early bloomer in middle school, I guess.”

Ochako’s brow furrowed, face darkening. “… Did Bakugou ever-”

“No!” Izumi’s head shot up at light speed, and Shouko had to dodge to avoid getting an uppercut from the top of her friend’s head. “No, Kacchan never made fun of me for stuff like that! He was more focused on the Quirkless thing. But it was… Um, some of his friends… well, there were kids at school who weren’t so nice about it. B-But it’s not important! I’m here now with you guys, right?”

“I’m sorry that happened, Izumi.” Tsuyu croaked sympathetically. “Still, if your body developed quickly, it’s strange your Quirk came in so late.”

Izumi meeped, suddenly looking anxious. “Y-Yeah! The doctors said it was super rare, but not impossible.”

“Your Quirk was late?” Shouko cocked her head. This was the first she’d heard of that—aside from maybe Bakugou constantly calling the green haired girl Quirkless, of course.

Biting her lip, Izumi nodded. “Mmhmm… My Quirk didn’t develop til the last year of middle school. Apparently, it was because my body wasn’t strong enough to contain it. I ended up working a lot on my physical fitness that year, so that’s why it finally came in. Until then, everyone just thought I didn’t have a Quirk, so they picked on me for that, too. Even with this new power, I still hurt myself when I use it.”

“I’ve noticed.” Realizing that may have come out way ruder than she intended, Shouko quickly followed it up with, “My older brother is Quirkless, and he got made fun of in school. I’m sorry that happened to you.”

“A-Ah! I think I remember you mentioning him- Natsuo, right?” Izumi snapped her fingers as she remembered his name.

Shouko nodded. “You may have had similar experiences. All of you should come visit him with me someday- I think he’d like you.”

“That sounds like a lot of fun!” Ochako beamed enthusiastically. “When should we-”

“Apologies for interrupting, everyone, but class will start shortly.” Iida spoke with a smile, but his tone was a bit curt. Shouko realized a little too late that maybe she shouldn’t have mentioned elder brothers right now. She thought about apologizing, but figured it would just make things worse. Although half her lunch remained uneaten, she didn’t join Izumi and Ochako in their frantic last-minute rush to scarf down their food in time, instead shifting out of the booths with Tenya and Tsuyu to clear the rest of her tray. Despite Recovery Girl’s warnings, she still felt strange consuming a full
meal that wasn’t part of her father’s meal plan— her stomach always felt uncomfortably full, used to minuscule meals and whatever snacks she managed to hide away in her room. And so, the rest of Shouko’s ochazuke found itself in the garbage.

Time to pick an internship.

Fuyumi has had a very rough day.

One of her students picked a fight with an older kid, apparently defending Nito from a bully intent on teaching the ‘Quirkless wannabe’ a lesson. The bigger issue was that the defensive student in question happened to be Kaiko, and an uncontrolled burst of Mass Destruction flattened half the playground and a couple cars parked too close by. Now the Principal was saying they needed to avoid another Kaiko-related lawsuit and put her back on those Quirk suppressants, but Fuyumi had seen how the little girl had been a zombie on the damn things, and all she needed was a little more training to keep it under control and—!

Ugh. She needed a drink.

So that’s what she did when she came home later than usual. She was twenty three, perfectly allowed to have a glass or two of wine in her own house! Her dad was out for the next two days—reports of some shapeshifting villain girl out in Kyushu, apparently— which let her relax enough to break out the white wine. And while she had maaaaaybe said a glass or two, it spiralled into three. Then four. Then Shouko was here! She’d come downstairs in her comfy house clothes, sweats and a tank top. The bandage over her eye and the bruising around the girls neck reminded Fuyumi of last night’s screaming blowout where she’d been left to bridal carry her unconscious sister to the healer’s and clean the blood off the training room floor. Before thinking about it, Fuyumi is patting the barstool beside her. “Shouko, come have a seat!”

Her sister eyes the wine suspiciously, but obliges, sitting down next to her. “Good evening, Onee-san.”

“You did really well yesterday. Sorry I couldn’t congratulate you earlier.” Taking another sip, Fuyumi pours out another glass without thinking. “Want to try some?”

“I… Am I allowed to?” Her darling sister, so concerned. Fuyumi knows her ice Quirk is the only thing keeping her from reddening in the cheeks from the alcohol.

“Mmhmm! Dad’s not here. Have a drink with your big sis!” Pushing the glass towards Shouko, Fuyumi giggled at the way her face scrunch up after a swig. “Don’t drink it fast like water, sip it. How was today?”

Shouko shrugged, slowly trying a little more of the wine. “It was okay. I decided to intern with father’s agency.”

Fuyumi pursed her lips, nodding as she poured herself another glass— maybe it was two this time, she tended to get a little sloppy with portions when she got drinking— and took a deeper sip than she’d instructed Shouko to. She watched her little sister mimic her movement, feeling vaguely nostalgic for some reason. “Are you gonna be okay?”

Shouko made a snorting noise, finishing her glass. Goodness, she’d gone through it way quicker than she probably should have. Regardless, Fuyumi was teetering between tipsy and drunk at this point, and simply poured her sister a second glass. “I dunno, Onee-san. It’s father. It’s just something I have to put up with to get a better hold on my Quirk.”
“Well, I’m proud of you.” Fuyumi smiled brightly as she noticed the way her sister’s lips curled up slightly. “You’re really maturing.”

“I guess so.” There’s an extended pause as Shouko takes a gulp. “... Wine tastes terrible.”

Fuyumi breaks into giggles, refilling her little sister’s glass. “Want to know a secret?”

“Yeah?”

“I agree with you. It just gets me drunk really fast.”

Shouko chuckles breathily, taking a sip again. The two of them drink and talk about random things, eventually getting to the point where they’re passing the bottle in between each other. This was irresponsible, horribly so, and Fuyumi knew she would be yelling at herself tomorrow when she woke up with a splitting hangover and guilt pooling in her stomach. But for now, she was drunk, and so was Shouko. “Shooooouko, are there any cute boys at your school?”

“Ashido asked m’that too.” Shouko has her head resting on the cool granite counter, some ice speckled on her cheeks as she attempts to cool down her body. “I dunno. Some of them are good-looking, but… Onee-san, is it normal to just want to look at someone all the time?”

“Hm, I think it is.” Fuyumi nods, attempting to appear like she has much romantic experience past a boyfriend or two in university. “Is it a crush?”

“Maybe? I just… they’re really cute, and they’re so selfless, and nice. They’d never hit anyone unless it was a villain or a school fight thing.” Shouko pauses as if she’s thinking very deeply about what she’s about to say. “... Am I allowed to like someone if I’m gonna get engaged?”

Fuyumi wraps an arm around her sister, kissing the top of her head. “You’re not going to get engaged. I’ll kill that Ondo creep before he gets far enough.”

“Really?” Shouko tilts her head up to look at Fuyumi. “You’d do that for me?”

“Yes.” Fuyumi’s Quirk isn’t stopping the drunken flush anymore, and she smiles cheekily. “I’ll chop him up and dump his body in the river. They’ll never find him.”

“Onee-san!” Shouko laughs, actually laughs, and it’s a melody. She… She sounds like mother. Her laugh is elegant, ladylike even as she’s piss-drunk and slumped over a counter. Before she can think, Fuyumi has her giggling sister wrapped in her arms, pressing her face into her shoulder to hold back the tears.

“Shouko… You should visit mother with me tomorrow.” The girl tenses for a moment, and Fuyumi sincerely hopes she hasn’t said the wrong thing. But then Shouko wraps her arms around her too, and Fuyumi feels the balance of warmth and heat in her sister’s chest as she holds her with muscled arms that still feel too thin, like she’ll break under the weight of her own strength. Like the night before, but this time there’s no miserable sobs or tense faces- just two sisters in a drunken euphoria holding each other like they’re afraid they may not get to again.

“I’d like that, I think.”

They stay there for a few minutes, holding each other and breathing in the smell of wine and Fuyumi’s perfume and Shouko’s shampoo before Fuyumi finally pulls back. “C’mon, sis. Wanna make it a sleepover? You can drag your futon into my room.”

“Ok.” The two of them stumble upstairs, not bothering to clean up the mess they left on the counter.
Who's going to be there to see it tomorrow? Fuyumi tumbles into her bed fully dressed, and in a few minutes, Shouko enters dragging her futon behind her, plopping it beside Fuyumi’s and crawling inside. There’s a few minutes of silence before Shouko speaks up. “Onee-san?”

Fuyumi opens an eye, realizing she forgot to take off her makeup but not really caring. “Yeah?”

“I love you.”

“I love you too, Shouko-lat.”

There’s a shared glance, Shouko’s only visible eye currently being the one matching their fathers. But in this moment? The gentle crinkle as she smiles, the way white hair tumbles over her shoulders, the love Fuyumi can see aimed at her as she drifts off to sleep?

No, Shouko was always Rei’s little girl.

Chapter End Notes

CONTENT WARNINGS:

- Mentions of domestic abuse/injuries received from it
- Mentions of forced marriage
- Brief mention of eugenics/selective breeding
- Sexual harassment
- Underage drinking/adult giving a minor liquor
- Irresponsible drinking

Aaaaand that's that! A little shy on action, I know, but I wanted a bit of a 'cool-down' chapter before we hop headfirst into the Stain arc, haha. Thank you all again for joining me here, please don't hesitate to join the Discord server (https://discord.gg/xzceBuU), and have a fantastic day! See you soon!
you’ve been bitten once and now you’re twice as shy

Chapter Notes

Hi again, everyone! Thank you so much for your support- I'm sorry I couldn't get to responding to all of the comments! I promise I read all of them, and I appreciate each and every one of them <3

I know I say this every other chapter, but I'm not super satisfied with this one aha. I can't really place why... Maybe I need to pick up the pacing or something? Who knows! In any case, I hope you enjoy it more than I do haha.

ALSO HEY BIG CONTENT WARNINGS! Check the end notes for those!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Shouko wakes up with a tiny demon in her brain that is currently attempting to escape by ramming every side of her head again and again. Ah, the fabled hangover. That was... Too much wine.

Even though the light out in the hallway makes her want to shrivel up and die, Shouko manages to get to her feet even as Fuyumi snores from her futon, still asleep. She’s a good sister but not the most graceful sleeper, Shouko notes as the older girl drools on her pillow. Heading to the bathroom, she takes a shower in dimmed lighting, soothed by the warmth against her skin as she cleans the smell of wine off herself. Though nothing sounds better than a soothing bath right after, Shouko is genuinely worried she’ll fall asleep in the comfort of the warm water. Drying herself off and putting on one of Fuyumi’s many outrageously fluffy bathrobes, she turned to look at herself in the mirror. This robe was... a lot. It belonged more on Momo or maybe Aoyama than it did on her. For a moment, Shouko thought she looked like a widow with five ex-husbands who was just notified of her sixth husband’s mysterious death by the police and was pretending to act distraught like she didn’t order the hit herself. That was very specific, but it was a very un-Shouko bathrobe. She liked it anyways.

The bathroom door opened just before she was about to try a pose like a black widow might make, saving her from potential death by embarrassment by just a few seconds.

Fuyumi blinked wearily, work clothes rumpled from being slept in and makeup smudged on her face. “... Oh, Shouko! I’m sorry, I should have knocked. Those are soft bathrobes, aren’t they?”

“I didn’t have any other clothes.” Shouko offers as a half-explanation half-apology, and Fuyumi laughs gently, waving it off.

“It’s fine, it’s fine. I’m gonna shower and then make us breakfast, okay? What do you want to eat?”

Breakfast… Shouko was rarely hungry in the mornings, but for some reason, her stomach demanded as much protein and grease she could get her hands on. Was this another part of the hangover still pounding through her brain? “... Can we have bacon and eggs?”

Fuyumi smiled, nodding. “Sounds good. I’ll be out in a jiffy- can you set the table?”

It was the least she could do if Fuyumi was cooking, so Shouko agreed to do so. Exiting the bathroom, Shouko goes to return her futon to the proper room before making her way downstairs. It’s the weekend, but even now she’d normally be midway through her morning exercise routine. As
her eyes darted over to the clock- nine AM- Shouko mused that she’d have finished her morning run around the neighbourhood, and would have just started weight training before moving onto combat with her father. Now, though? The mere thought of walking outside and being exposed to the sun was enough to make her want to run upstairs and crawl back into her futon. So instead of doing either of those things, Shouko goes to set the table, forks and knives set out instead of chopsticks this time. She also takes a moment to clean up the wine glasses left on the counter- and good god, they almost made it through the entire bottle- to make things a little easier on her sister whenever she comes downstairs.

Fuyumi comes down in an equally fluffy bathrobe, hair still wet from the shower. Shouko takes a moment to muse over how ridiculous they both look in these things- unless they were aiming to be some kind of black widow sister duo, which might not be such a bad career path if heroism and teaching didn’t work out- as her sister smiles at her. “Thanks for setting things up. What kind of eggs do you want?”

“Over easy.” Hopefully those aren’t hard to make. Fuyumi seems sleepy too. Shouko realizes she doesn’t actually know how to cook at all - the duty had always fallen on their mother until she was taken away. Then it was up to Fuyumi, the one expected to cook for the household while Endeavor worked and Shouko trained. She was fairly sure Natsuo helped out from time to time, but given the boy’s (probably wise) decision to keep as far away from their father as he could, he rarely ate dinner with the rest of them, so Shouko doesn’t think he had much of a hand in the process. It’s always been the oldest Todoroki daughter’s job, and it makes the youngest feel slightly guilty- learning the complicated meal plan her father pushed on Shouko couldn’t have been easy for a middle school aged Fuyumi to try and handle.

Still, Shouko’s also thankful for it in a way- she’s never really felt comfortable in the kitchen, even when she knows their tea kettle is pushed away in the furthest cabinet, probably collecting dust. Bad memories. Maybe it’s part of the reason she rarely eats properly. But it looks as if she’ll get the chance to now as Fuyumi struts into the kitchen, two plates of eggs and bacon balanced on her hands. Shouko had lost a lot of time in her musing, hadn’t she? It was something that happened more and more frequently these days. Fuyumi puts Shouko’s plate down in front of her, and the bicoloured girl can’t remember the last time bacon smelt so good. It takes everything not to dig in until Fuyumi sits down across from her, and when the older girl does, Shouko digs in enthusiastically, her headache almost seeming to lessen as she scarfs down her food.

Fuyumi giggles, eating considerably slower than Shouko. “There’s no such thing as a hangover cure, but I’d say bacon and eggs are as close as we get.” Taking a few bites, the woman looks at her younger sister somewhat apologetically. “Uh, speaking of… Sorry for letting you get drunk. That was irresponsible of me.”

Shouko shrugs. It was irresponsible, yeah, but she didn’t really care that much. Fuyumi was a heavy drinker- no matter how well she seemed to hide it, Shouko knew her older sister generally knocked back a few a night. Several times, she’s come downstairs to cook breakfast looking frazzled and exhausted, the nail polish remover smell of vodka still on her breath as she rushed to get her siblings ready to go. If Shouko was going to drink underage, it only made sense that it was who Fuyumi introduced her to it.

… The elder Todoroki children were as much of a wreck as Shouko was when she thought about it. Fuyumi hums awkwardly, and Shouko remembers that she’s supposed to reply. “I had fun. Even if my head hurts.”

Her older sister chuckles, taking a bite of her bacon. “Hangovers. Just drink water and pray.” There’s a comfortable silence for a minute, both girls eagerly munching away at their breakfast (and good
god, grease had never tasted so good) before Fuyumi spoke again. “... But are you still up to visit mom today?”

Shouko tenses, just for a moment. Is she ready to see her mother again? Most of her screams that yes, of course she wants to see her, the woman who vanished so long ago and took that maternal touch with her. But on the other hand… Her scar itches. The swelling around her grey eye has gone down enough that she can cover the bruise with makeup and abandon the eye patch, but her blue eye… The scald is red and cruel as always. Her scar is hypertrophic and requires her to see a specialist with a hair growth Quirk every other month to ensure her eyebrow doesn’t vanish into the melted flesh and that she doesn’t have a massive bald spot on the left side of her head where water had splashed down. Shouko remembers each painful skin grafting session that did nothing but create ugly ridges around her eye, raised skin a memory of the bubbling scald. A low pang of resentment for the one who disfigured her hit the girl every time she walked past a mirror.

Her mother did this to her because she apparently found Shouko so unsightly that she had a mental breakdown. The girl would be lying if she said her stomach didn’t flip at the thought of seeing her again. But what Shouko remembers more than that fateful meeting in the kitchen is the days nestled up to her mother’s side as they watched the newest All Might special on TV, in their own world so far away from Endeavor’s rage. She thinks of being read storybooks about a kingdom of winter, Rei using her Quirk to create little ice sculptures to emphasize each illustration. There are so many beautiful memories with her mother that Shouko has fought tooth and nail to hold onto as her life turned into hell- being taught origami, bringing her handfuls of dandelions she believed to be flowers, running outside in early December to make snow angels- and they outnumber the burning ten thousand to one.

This isn’t to say she isn’t concerned. In fact, Shouko doesn’t even know if her mother will want to see her. But she needs to do this, at least for her own good. “... Yeah. I want to see her.”

Fuyumi paused for a moment, seemingly searching for words, before nodding and offering her sister a gentle smile. “Alright. As long as you’re ready.”

They had taken breakfast at a leisurely pace, which was probably for the best. It gave Shouko enough time to get over feeling like the human embodiment of a trash can whenever a ray of light from the window washed over her. Though she could never really relax in her own home even with Endeavor miles away (a hypervigilance bound to her as closely as the need to breathe), a calming breakfast put her in a mood as close to it as she could hope to get. After remembering that most of her clothes consisted of either workout clothes or pajamas, she’d been lent a proper outfit by Fuyumi so that she’d be well-dressed enough to visit the hospital. And now, here they were- just outside their mothers’ hospital room, Shouko trying to calm the beating of her heart. She toyed with the hem of her (or Fuyumi’s, actually) sweater as her older sister looked over at her worriedly. “If you’re not ready, we can go home-”

“No.” Shouko spoke before she was even aware of it, lips moving faster than her mind. “I’m gonna be fine.”

“... Okay.” Fuyumi looked like she wanted to say something else, but instead settled for reaching up to pat her sister’s shoulder. She’d always been petite, standing at five foot two, so it was always peculiar to see her next to her much taller younger sister. “She wants to see you, okay? Mom talks about you a lot.”

That quelled Shouko’s nerves slightly, enough so for her to manage a nod in return. “We can go in.” All of this still felt dream-like, as if she’d wake up in her futon at home any moment. The feeling persists as Fuyumi opens the door, remaining up until she sees her mother seated in a comfy-looking
To say that Shouko was an inexpressive person was the understatement of the century. Over the years, she’d become an expert at choking down feelings, smothering them for fear of punishment and learning to take them out on herself only when she was alone. Not only would any display of weakness in the training room be punished, but even as a little girl, Shouko had understood what excessive emotions did to people. They caused bad parents to lash out at children who couldn’t defend themselves, caused good parents to commit horrific acts of violence. She’d cried more since starting the school year than she had since elementary school, her emotionless act slowly starting to melt away with her newly-found heat.

So when her mother raises her head, eyes going wide as she looks into the face of her youngest for the first time in ten years, Shouko is not ashamed to admit how much emotion floods her heart in this moment. Rei looks older, lines under her eyes and around her lips, but her grey eyes are as clear as always. Brighter, maybe, as if the years away from her husband have done her good- and Shouko has no doubt that they have- but otherwise the same as she remembered them being. The woman looks like she’s not sure if she’s imagining things, book slipping from her hands and into her lap with a soft thud. “... Shouko?”

“Hi, mom.” Shouko’s voice cracks, and she realizes she always thought that was something she’d never have the privilege of saying again. She has no idea what to say next, but it turns out that she doesn’t need to- her mother stumbles out of her chair, rushing forwards and embracing her tightly, face buried in her daughter’s chest. Shouko is taller than her now by four inches, and it’s a jarring look into just how much time has passed since they saw each other. For one brief moment, Shouko is stunned silent. Then she feels the familiar cool arms of her mother around her back, processes the gentle grip after so many years, and she’s returning the hug before she can stop herself. It’s her mother, it’s mom, and she’s crying into Shouko’s chest. It’s a different brand of tears than what Shouko had always heard from her- there’s no misery in these, just a disbelieving joy as her hands scrabble for purchase in the back of Shouko’s sweater, like she’ll fade away if she isn’t held tight enough. She rests her chin on the top of her mother’s head, unable to do or say anything but hold her back.

“I’m so sorry.” Her mother cries into her chest, and Shouko doesn’t get a chance to reply before Rei says what finally brings down her last hesitant fear of this reunion: “I love you, darling. I love you.”

That’s what it takes. Heterochromic eyes squeeze together as tears prick at the corners, and Shouko has to concentrate hard to get her words out before the floodgates open. “I forgive you. I love you too.”

And it’s too much, she’s crying, mother is crying, Fuyumi envelopes them both in a group hug, and Shouko realizes these tears are like the ones that fell fighting Izumi. Elated bliss, the relief of leaving the agony of the past behind her, love love love. She loves her mother. Her mother loves her.

It does not fix everything. Shouko is learning that healing will never be that easy, even if she so badly wishes it was. But just for today, the pain of her mother has let her go.

Their visit is... well, Shouko never had much of a way with words, and she has trouble conjuring up anything past ‘heart-wrenching, but good’. They’d spent their allotted hour trying to play catch up after ten years gone, and they’d barely covered half of their lives. Given that she was a long-term resident, Rei’s room had a private bathroom (as private as a psychiatric ward could be, anyways) and a miniature kitchen that allowed her to take up baking as a hobby, meaning she was eager to share her latest batch of snickerdoodles with her daughters. As they nibbled away, Shouko learned that her mother liked cheesy soap operas and watched them with Fuyumi whenever she came to visit,
extending the offer to her youngest as well. And while Shouko thought the activity would be agonizingly brain-numbing, the fact that she’d be doing it with her mother made her agree to do so next time she came. In return, Shouko shared how she’d made a friend at school, Rei’s face lighting up excitedly when she mentioned that it was the green-haired girl she’d fought in the Festival. *She seemed like a very nice girl on TV,* her mother had said with a smile, *very cute.* Shouko agreed with that. She bought up sleeping over at Natsuo’s, how the bird feeder outside her window had led a robin to make a nest on the nearest branch, and how last week her homeroom teacher noticed a certain acidic classmate of hers sleeping in class and tied the girl’s shoelaces together so she tripped when she woke up. They talk… like family. Like a normal mother and daughters. The contrast to the clinical feel of the hospital and the way a nurses’ head pops in the window at twenty minute intervals is very strange.

When it’s time to leave, Rei asks for Shouko to stay back a minute while Fuyumi talks to one of the nurses about getting a proper repeated visitor pass for the youngest Todoroki. Her mother holds her hands, calloused and rough, in between her own slightly wrinkled ones. “Shouko… I don’t mean to wreck a wonderful day, but I have enough experience in the matter to know you’re hiding a black eye.”

If her mother hadn’t said it in that voice full of tenderness, Shouko might have flinched. “… He got angry when I lost.”

Rei’s grip doesn’t tighten like Shouko had worried it would. Instead, she runs her fingers over her daughter’s knuckles. “I’m sorry I can’t be there to help you. I have no business saying this after what I did, but nobody has the right to put their hands on you.”

Shouko thinks of being pulled around, slapped, punched, thrown across the room and into the kotatsu. She thinks of a certain someone rubbing her thigh through her kimono. Her entire life revolved around who was going to put a hand on her next. The thought makes her uneasy, but she pushes through it to correct her mother on something. “You were sick and afraid. You didn’t mean to hurt me.”

“But I did.” Rei’s voice is soft, and as she looks her youngest in the eyes, Shouko can see the decade of pain and regret behind ashen irises. “Even if I was sick, I made the choice to hurt you. It haunts me every day, Shouko. But… I noticed something today.”

There’s a vulnerability in the room that’s so foreign it makes Shouko swallow back a lump in her throat. “… What is it?”

Her mother brings one hand up, pushing a red lock of her daughter’s hair back. “I was wrong back then. When I look at you, there’s not a single part of you that feels like your father.” Rei leans up, pressing a kiss to the top of her daughter’s scar, and something buried deeply inside Shouko sings of forgiveness, of unconditional love, and she melts into her mother’s touch, releasing her hands only to wrap her arms around her. They stay like this until Fuyumi comes back, visitor’s pass in hand, and even then they stay close by the other. A mother and child, reunited.

When it’s time to leave, Rei hugs both her girls again, kissing their cheeks before sending them off with the warmest smile. There’s a comfortable silence between sisters as they exit the hospital, the older girl only speaking once they’re unlocking her car, an ancient old thing that was all a rookie teacher’s salary allowed for. “Are you happy you went?”

“Happy. Really, really happy.” Shouko settles into the seat, strapping herself into the taped-up seatbelt. Yeah, there was no way this thing was safe, but hey! The Todoroki family was not known for making choices beneficial to their long-term health. Putting the beast of a car in the back of her mind, Shouko tilts her head to look at Fuyumi. “Thank you for taking me.”
Her sister smiles, reaching over to ruffle her hair before starting up the car. “You’re welcome, Shouko-lat. You’re a brave girl.”

That may be true, looking at her own life. But looking at Fuyumi, Natsuo, their mother, the pain they went through and how they keep pushing through despite all of it… Maybe being courageous ran in the blood.

Wherever Touya was, she hopes he’s equally as resilient.

Their father comes back late enough that night that everyone is already asleep, so Shouko isn’t woken for training (though she’s convinced he would have done so anyways had the mission not exhausted him). But as per usual, Shouko’s alarm goes off at 5:30am, and she knows to meet him in the training room- the routine is all but written into her biological clock at this point. She’s only a minute or two earlier than Endeavor, which is fortunate considering how badly a lack of punctuality is punished. The man regards her with his usual stare. “I noticed you accepted my internship offer. Seems like you’re finally behaving.”

“Don’t get used to it.” Shouko makes a point of flipping her hair over her shoulder as she begins doing her warm-up stretches. “It’s only because of your skill with fire. If I had that under control already, I wouldn’t have even glanced at your agency.”

“I don’t know who gave you that rotten attitude.” Frankly, Shouko is lucky her father is probably still a bit out of sorts due to the mission he’d just returned from- a comment like that wouldn’t usually leave her physically unscathed. “Just because you’re no longer holding back your power, it doesn’t mean you’re a fitting successor yet, so don’t think you can get away with that behavior.”

Shouko rolls her eyes just as she rolls her ankles. “I told you already that I’m set on becoming a hero separate from you. Or are you going soft in the head from age already?”

That was a mistake, and she knew so before saying it, so she’s able to dodge the incoming fireball. Looks like the sparring was starting. Endeavor glowers at her, taking up a fighting position. “We’re focusing on evasion today. Your dodging is getting sloppy. You were made to surpass me, Shouko, and you will do so with the knowledge that you are my legacy. There isn’t a choice in the matter.”

Shouko takes her stance as well, carefully watching Endeavor’s movements to stay out of the way of incoming flames- she knows he’s going easy on her, even if the knowledge that he could absolutely demolish her by going all-out pisses her off to no end. She uses her ice to duck and slide away from two consecutive blasts of fire, her voice still steady. “There is a choice, and I made it already. The world will look at me without recalling you in the slightest.”

She creates a small ice barrier to briefly hold her father back as he moves in closer- it’s not intended to keep him away for more than a few seconds, and it’s melted in an instant, but it buys Shouko time to keep him at a distance and move back. His face emerges as ice vanishes, hard and angry. She knows she’s an idiot for purposely pissing him off, but some part of her can’t help it. “The offer with Ondo is far from being called off. I could have a proper heir with his Quirk in the picture, and I’m doing you a goddamn favour by not letting his family start planning your wedding already.”

“I’m constantly amazed by you.” Shouko shoots off a blast of her own fire, keeping him at bay. “You talk like considering not selling your child off to a pedophile is some great act of mercy.”

“Lower your arm when using suppressing fire, or your opponent can dodge under a move like that.” These lectures always continued throughout the battles, a strange rhythm that had been present in the training room for years. Even so, it’s clear Shouko is starting to raise her father’s hackles- the attacks
are getting rougher, harder to dodge, and she feels a flaming punch singe her side as she just slides out of the way in time. “And if you don’t quit acting like a petulant brat and focus properly, I’ll give you something to bitch and moan about. Can’t you see I’m doing everything I can to help you succeed?”

Shouko grimaces as she feels the temperature increase around her, but she’s already on the self-destructive path that she fell down so very often. She wanted Endeavor angry, wanted under his skin no matter the cost, couldn’t force his constant presence from her mind. He was always there, always there. “How, by following in your footsteps? Whatever, second best. Maybe I’m just the latest fuck-up in the line of failures that is this family!”

Yep, that about does it. Shouko gags as a punch hits her stomach, intentionally too fast for her to possibly be able to dodge. Endeavor sweeps her feet out from under her, and Shouko feels her teeth clack together as her head smashed against the ground. Her ears ring, but she’s clearly able to hear her father seething as he grabs her by the hair. “This is your own goddamn fault, Shouko. All you have to do is shut your mouth and work hard, and you insist on mouthing off about how you’re some sort of martyr. Do you like making me the villain? Making yourself feel like a victim?”

“Fuck off.” Shouko grits her teeth, struggling to get up until a kick to the stomach leaves her wheezing. That... Didn't feel right.

“Unbelievable.” Her father rolls his eyes, and it catches Shouko off guard as he stomps into her gut one last time. Last night’s dinner resurfaces in her throat, and Endeavor watches in disgust as the contents of her stomach are emptied onto the floor. “How do you not see that you bring everything onto yourself? You’re going to lose the privileges I’ve bestowed on you if you keep this childish attitude up. Do I need to start sending you to school with the chauffeur again?”

That had been her punishment for a year in middle school- the lack of freedom Shouko had suffered through by not even being allowed to walk home unwatched by her father had been terrible. “... No.”

“Then act like it. Clean yourself up and get to school.” Shouko feels dizzy, and she struggles to get to her feet as her father storms out of the room. Maybe a lot of these beatings were her fault- maybe it would be simpler to just keep her head down and shut up. But... Hah. Perhaps she really was just some punk trying to play the victim. It was possible she deserved all of this, was just collecting injuries as some kind of justification to feel as horrible as she always did. It takes her a few minutes to stagger to her feet, gripping her stomach as she heads for the showers. It’s probably a bad idea to go to class smelling like a mixture of embers and vomit.

Shouko exercises through injury a lot. It’s always been her only option, unless she wanted to accumulate more injuries which she’d still have to power through. That said, it’s a whole hell of a lot easier to fight through the pain in an ordinary middle school gym class and not in an intensive hero school training program. A part of her knew today’s Hero Fundamentals class wasn’t going to go too great. She just didn’t think it would end nearly as disastrously as it did.

She’d be looking forwards to it under any other circumstances- she’d put in a request for a redesigned costume from the Support Course right after the Sports Festival, and apparently a couple of the third years hopped on the opportunity to design the costume sported by Endeavor’s daughter. Today, she had the opportunity to wear it- a simple blue jumpsuit with a heater, loose fitting and with comfortable white boots. She already feels like she can operate better in it than in her previous design, lack of one-sided armour providing a stability she didn’t have before. That fact would be especially important this class- All Might announced that they were sparring again, this time on unstable territory. Something about maintaining balance even when they didn’t have a strong
foothold on the ground. Either way, it was something she’d be eagerly anticipating to if not for the persistent ache in her stomach.

Shouko had gotten changed in the bathroom stall to hide the ugly mess of purple bruising across her stomach and sides, so tender that leaning over too far in class made it ring out in pain. For some reason, her upper body felt tender even though there couldn’t possibly have been any damage to the area. It was all very strange. Their healer was set to return to work tomorrow, but that didn’t help the current situation in the slightest. It’s not like she could even go to Recovery Girl, lest a discussion on how exactly the bruises were acquired started. All she could have hoped for today was an opponent who didn’t have a Quirk that gave them good attacking strength. Someone like Hagakure or Koda would be ideal. Hell, she’d even take someone like Kaminari or Aoyama provided that she could keep them at a distance.

So because god apparently hated her, she got paired up with Kirishima.

Normally, she’d be confident she could take him. Sure, he’d be able to break through her ice, but with her fire? No sweat. But now, already suffering from a stomach screaming at her to stop twisting and turning as she fights to keep the boy at bay during their spar, she’s not so sure. Shouko grits her teeth, sending another wave of ice at the boy that he easily breaks through. The uneven territory isn’t helping any, and she has to bite back a groan of pain as she leaps off a damaged chunk of building to get out of the way of a hardened punch. She was slowed significantly today, vision in her good eye still not back to normal, and even Kirishima’s battle-hungry expression started to give way to slight concern as winces started appearing on the mismatched girl’s face. Okay, okay, hit him with a flame and send him back, he’s coming in with an elbow, back up and-

Shouko stumbles on torn-up concrete. The hardened elbow hits her directly in the stomach.

She’s pretty confused as to who just let out that blood-curdling shriek. There’s no way a noise so pained could have come from her own mouth. The back of her head hits the ground with a thud that sends lightning through her skull, and now someone’s talking to her. Her vision is doubling again, something that always seems to happen when her head gets smashed into things (and believe her, it happens a lot). Is it Kirishima? Shouko thinks it’s him, someone with gaudy red hair kneeling beside her and looking panicky. She wants to say it’s fine, she just needs a minute, but she ends up puking stomach acid and something red onto his shoes the second she opens her mouth. Well, that’s just embarrassing. Shouko would apologize if her head wasn’t filling with static, several unidentifiable people passing in front of her as the noise melts together in a strange melody. She’s just going to close her eyes, and…

…

Shouko wakes up in Recovery Girl’s office.

She feels strangely floaty, and a quick glance down shows that (unless her double vision is fooling her) that there’s an IV sticking out of her hand. The girl is familiar enough with the treatment to realize the wooziness is probably from some type of painkiller. That said, the girl still has enough energy to turn her head slightly to the right, and wow Recovery Girl doesn’t look happy. This must be the exhaustedly stern look Izumi sees almost daily.

The old woman sighs deeply, nails tapping against her clipboard. She’s seated in a rolling chair next to her laptop, and the way her short legs dangle off her seat would have been mildly adorable had she not been staring Shouko down like that. “Gastrointestinal perforation, Todoroki. Also known as a ruptured stomach. Why didn’t you come to me right away?”
Oh, jeez. Shouko should probably feel a lot more panicked about this than she actually does, but it’s either a lifetime of severe injuries or the painkillers that make her respond with, “It didn’t hurt so bad.”

Recovery Girl makes a sound between a laugh and a scoff, shaking her head. “Sure it didn’t. Do you know the mortality rate for people who go more than a day without getting treatment for the types of injuries you were sparring with?” Shouko remains quiet, which the doctor takes as her cue to answer. “Thirty percent, Todoroki. This isn’t just a broken bone or a bruise, it’s a life threatening injury!”

“Oh.” Yep, it’s the medicine making her say that, inadvertently admitting her nonchalance when dealing with the real possibility of death. Shouko has her fair share of mornings where she stares at the ceiling and wonders what reason she has to get up today. Wonders what the point of going through everything is. Things have been getting better, yes, but a few weeks don’t cure fifteen years of suffering, especially not when the good only seems to be sprinkled in between the miserable experiences. If anything, it’s more dangerous for her heart like this- she’s slowly bringing down her walls for Fuyumi, for Natsuo, and maybe even a bit for Izumi, and then people like Endeavor and Ondo have an easier time damaging her while her defences are down. She’s being pulled in two different directions, and Shouko sometimes wonders if she’s going to split straight down the middle to match her Quirk. She wants an easy answer to this, an easy way to handle what’s happening to her, and she’s not getting one.

“Hon, please focus on breathing.” A hand touches hers, and Shouko jerks away instinctively, brought back down to earth by Recovery Girl. Only now does she hear the frantic beeping of the heart monitor, going much faster than it should. Right, right. She inhales, exhales, tries to keep her heart rate steady even as she angrily demands answers for everything flashing through her mind right now. Why is it like this? Why does she get a wonderful day of peace, and then beaten within an inch of her life the next? Her heart wasn’t built for happiness, she knows this, but she’s gotten so many tastes lately that it’s driving her up the goddamn wall. It feels like she’s walking by a bakery, smelling the delicious cakes and cookies from the street but knowing she’s too broke to have even one. It taunts her by giving her a whiff of what she can’t have.

She feels Recovery Girl pat her hand again, doesn’t flinch away. “It’s five in the afternoon. School’s been out for two hours. I called your older sister, and she agreed that we should transfer you to a hospital for the night to be monitored. You’ve had surgery to repair your injuries already, but we can’t watch you overnight without sending you there.”

It’s still strange to know she attends a school equipped to perform actual surgery on their students, but she supposed that was UA for you. The painkillers still have Shouko chatty, and she unhelpfully keeps running her mouth. “My father won’t like that.”

“I don’t give a damn what he thinks, frankly.” The old woman lowers her glasses slightly, and if Shouko wasn’t as stoic as she was, she’d probably shiver at how determined that look in her eyes was. “I’m the one with the degrees, and you’re going to the hospital whether he likes it or not. That Enji Todoroki, same as when he was a student here. Too damn stubborn.”

Right, right. Recovery Girl had been here for just under fifty years now- she would have been around when her father was still studying. Shouko almost opens her mouth to argue, but closes it in defeat- there’s no changing a face that determined. “… Okay.”

“I’m glad you agree.” Recovery Girl pushes off from Shouko’s bedside, rolling her chair back to her computer desk. “We’re just waiting for a bed to clear up at the hospital before we transfer you. Just sit tight for now.” Shouko does just that, putting her head back against the pillow and counting the ceiling tiles. It's not the first time she's been put in the hospital by her father, and he's never been
happy upon her discharge. How could she hope to explain to these people that this was the worst thing they could do for her? How much did they know about how she got the injury? How deadly was this fallout going to be?

... She was hugging her mother yesterday. How fast this broken life could flip upside down.

Shouta Aizawa needs a nap.

This is by no means an unusual statement- he’s constantly somewhere on the spectrum between ‘might enjoy closing his eyes for ten minutes or so’ and ‘it’s been a week and he has forgotten what a bed is’. But with today’s class going belly-up midway through, he’s leaning further and further towards losing all memory of a mattress. They’d gotten the official confirmation on their former classmate today- Tensei Iida would never walk again, his career as a hero cut short. That on its own would have been enough to make Shouta’s day miserable. He’d spent the better part of an hour consoling a panicking Kirishima in the staff room and reminding him that no, he wasn’t the one who hurt her that badly, Todoroki was already injured and didn’t tell anyone, it isn’t your fault. Right after that, he’d returned to his class to find an uncharacteristically frazzled Ectoplasm trying to handle frantic questioning from his remaining students about their classmate and why exactly she had been puking blood all over Kirishima’s hero costume. Regaining control, Shouta had to give a sanitized explanation about a pre-existing injury Todoroki hadn’t disclosed (which was true) and how she was fine (which he wasn’t so sure about). Midoriya had looked pale when he’d caught her gaze, a distressingly knowing look in her eyes. Even so, she’d finally agreed to leave with the rest of the class when he informed her Todoroki would be heading to the hospital to be monitored.

If they lived in a proper world where the justice system functioned as it was allegedly supposed to, Shouta could have prevented this. He would have taken the recording Midoriya provided to the police, they would have arrested Endeavor, and no amount of power, money, or excellent lawyers would conceivably be able to keep the man from prison. But this was an imperfect world, and Shouta knew this better than anyone else. An underground hero, a social worker, a teacher- he’d seen this system fail so many children like it was failing Todoroki. He so badly wanted to go to the police now, file an order to have her removed from the home, but… God, he hates thinking of that saying about the needs of the many, but the many genuinely did need Endeavor right now. It’s killing him not reporting this on the spot just like he knows it’s killing Recovery Girl, but she’s been a part of the world of heroics far before Shouta was even born. She knows this needs to be handled carefully, knows they’ll have one shot at getting Endeavor tried and arrested before he learns to hide the evidence better and buries any chance of getting Todoroki out of that place. They both know many things. It does not make it any easier.

What matters to Shouta is that one of his students has shown up badly injured multiple times, is about to be sent to the hospital mere days after the Sports Festival, and there is not a goddamn thing he can do right now that won’t have devastating consequences for her and everyone around her. If Todoroki won’t testify, if they can’t get enough evidence admissible in court, if they don’t have a stable enough society to safely act, they’re helpless. It makes him want to tear his hair out as he waits outside the infirmary for any more news from Recovery Girl.

“A-Are you Shouko’s teacher?”

A shaky voice pulls him out of his frustrated thoughts, and Shouta has to ensure his emotions don’t leak onto his face to avoid frightening whoever that just was. A young woman stands a few feet away from him, shoulder-length white hair peppered with red streaks giving him a pretty good indication of who she’s related to. Though Todoroki has never worn an expression quite that scared, he sees the resemblance in the curve of their faces, the grey of the eyes, and the slightly crooked
noses that make him feel ill with the realization that they’ve probably both had them broken before. Pushing that aside, he nods, standing to properly greet her. “That’s correct. Shouta Aizawa, Eraserhead. I take that you’re Fuyumi Todoroki?”

“Yes, that’s me.” She holds her purse anxiously to her side. “Is Shouko okay?”

“She came in injured and didn’t tell anybody.” Shouta shifts from foot to foot as he watches Fuyumi’s face fall. “Her stomach was ruptured. The condition was aggravated during training, but Recovery Girl and our medical staff performed emergency surgery just in time to prevent further damage. We’re holding her in Musutafu General Hospital overnight to monitor her condition.”

“I-I-I see.” The woman looks slightly panicked. “Um, in regards to the last bit, our father-”

“Miss Todoroki.” Shouta cuts her off, tries not to feel bad about the way she winces. “I’m a registered social worker with a specialization in children and teens. I have an idea of what’s happened. She’s not spending the night at home.”

Fuyumi opens her mouth to say something, but closes it slowly, guilty eyes casting to the ground. “...Right.”

“Thank you.” He didn’t mean to intimidate her that much- she seemed like a victim just as the youngest Todoroki was, but he needed to ensure she wouldn’t try and protest this. “She should take a day off school tomorrow to regain her stamina. Is there a spare bed at your house?”

Fuyumi gnaws anxiously at her lip. “Um, I also live with father.”

Well, wasn’t that just peachy. Shouta sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose. “Do you have any trusted friends or family who may have room?”

“Our younger brother might be able to keep her in his dorm room for a night...” As the woman spoke, Shouta wracks his memory. Younger brother, younger brother... Didn’t Hizashi say he taught a Todoroki in General Education a few years ago? It wasn’t exactly a rare surname, but given that family’s legacy at UA, it wasn’t too far-fetched.

“Please ask him if he will.” Shouta’s phone buzzes in his pocket, and he checks it as quickly as he can without seeming rude. “...Alright, a hospital transport is on the way. Please take this.”

Fuyumi cocks her head slightly, looking confused until Shouta pulls a business card out of his other pocket, handing it off to her. “If your brother can’t take her in tomorrow night, my fiancé and I have a spare bedroom. Call this number, and I’ll make arrangements right away. That goes for you, too, if you’d rather stay with her.” The implication is clear- if you’re afraid for your safety, you come too.

“If you father has any concerns, you give him that and tell him he’s free to call and ask me about my decisions today. If he still has questions, he can speak with Principal Nedzu and Recovery Girl about it.”

It takes Fuyumi a minute to respond as she stares at the business card, scarcely remembering to take it as she awkwardly fumbles with it. She’s completely thrown off what little rhythm she had- how long has it been since someone offered this woman a way out? “U-Um, yes! Of course.”

Shouta allows his voice to shift, the authorial tone he takes with his students seeping in. “If you father has any concerns, you give him that and tell him he’s free to call and ask me about my decisions today. If he still has questions, he can speak with Principal Nedzu and Recovery Girl about it.”

If he went head to head with Endeavor in either the physical or legal sense, Shouta knows he’d go down in a heartbeat. He didn’t have the strength, the clout, the cash. It was true that he couldn’t protect Todoroki right now- the girl had even chosen her father as her internship employer, sending
her off to Hosu where he couldn’t even monitor her for incidents like this. His only shield right now was his authority as a teacher, and that didn’t extend far. But he was working hard, quietly observing from the shadows as he made his case. He’d made copies of Midoriya’s statement, ensured Recovery Girl stored the photos and descriptions of Todoroki’s injuries somewhere safe, dug deep into ancient police reports about a vanishing son all those years ago. He’d even called in some old favours from those vigilantes haunting the downtown area- and as much as Crawler could be a nuisance, the boy had done a stellar job digging up those reports about an ethically-suspect matchmaking company and the names frequenting it. Slowly, a very ugly picture was coming together.

Shouta wouldn’t be able to protect Todoroki for more than a day or so without risking the destabilization of hero society, not yet. That had to be left to his allies who stayed in the spotlight, tasks for Hizashi and Nemuri. But he needed to push his childish frustration aside- it was time to look at what he could do for now.

Chapter End Notes

CONTENT WARNINGS

- Implied alcohol abuse
- Semi-graphic depictions of physical abuse
- Victim blaming (from both others and in the victim's inner dialogue)
- Mentions of pedophilia
- Multiple instances of emetophobia

Bleugh, I'm not a fan of this one, but kinda needed to kickstart an original subplot before the Stain stuff starts up, so here we are. I promise we'll be getting back to canon very soon! Thank you so much for reading, drop a comment if you're so inclined, and please remember that this fic has a Discord (https://discord.gg/xzceBuU)! See you soon!
Update update!

I actually don't have much to say here, haha! Except for how you should REALLY READ THE CONTENT WARNINGS! I know people expect certain themes to pop up in a story with themes of sexism, but seriously. Check those out in the end notes if you're worried.

Anyways, with that out of the way, check out this fic's Discord server (https://discord.gg/pRruQ3C ) and enjoy!

EDIT: WAIT SHIT I forgot to link the beautiful art leewattsdraws made! It's of one of my favourite scenes in both the fic and in canon, they did an amazing job! (https://www.instagram.com/p/BsylhFTAGrs/?utm_source=ig_share_sheet&igshid=3jgy5s67wkei )

Shouko doesn’t remember the trip to the hospital. The painkillers and her own anxieties over what was to come did an excellent job in bringing her out of her body, brain trodding through the clouds even as she was wheeled in on her gurney. It was a good thing Fuyumi was there when they were checking in, able to provide medical information that Shouko hardly processes (no allergies to foods, she isn’t diabetic, wait a second, was she seriously lactose intolerant? How come Fuyumi knew that when Shouko didn’t? ) as she’s booked into a room for the night. In fact, she barely registers much until she’s somewhat settled into the room, the nurses having cleared out for the time being after checking her vitals. Fuyumi coughs awkwardly next to the bed. “So…”

“I didn’t tell him anything.” Shouko finishes the question her sister was about to ask. Fuyumi sputters a bit, waving her hands apologetically in front of her.

“R-Right! Um, but you know it’s not a problem if you do let your teacher know, right…?” The older girl offers cautiously. Shouko snorts in a humourless chuckle.

“I specifically never told any of my teachers growing up because I knew there wasn’t a damn thing they could do about it.” She shifts, ignoring the light aching in her stomach- even through the painkillers, it was palpable. “Aizawa doesn’t have the lawyers to take down father’s legal team, and there’s no way an underground pro would be able to do anything about the situation- we know Endeavor’s agency has paid off the media to keep things quiet before.”

An uncomfortable silence fills the room- both sisters know exactly what incident they’re talking about. Wasn’t it funny how news on the vanishing of Touya Todoroki was known only to the police? It would make sense for the media to be broadcasting the face of a missing ten year old everywhere, having him known nationwide so that perhaps someone could bring the boy home. But after their father had their true golden child, a daughter with the perfect blend of Quirks… Well, he’d had no need for another deficient child who couldn’t live up to his expectations. Why bring him back when he wasn’t worth a damn thing in the first place? It was never said out loud, just a silent knowledge amongst the house that the Endeavor agency had suppressed news on the subject, letting
Touya vanish into the night. Fuyumi dips her head slightly. “That’s true, but… I don’t know. I’m glad we found out about the injury before it got worse.”

Shouko could agree with that much, and she’d nodded in response. The two sat in silence for a few minutes before the younger girl opened her mouth again. “... I don’t think father meant to hurt me that bad.”

Did he mean to have her in pain? Absolutely. Were her persistent bruises and scrapes worn like scarlet letters, proclaiming her misbehaviour? That’s how it had always been. But all that said and done, Shouko knows all injuries this severe were merely mistakes- not out of any parental responsibility, heavens no, but because of situations like this. Hospital visits raised eyebrows, got people whispering, and that was simply a bad situation. Besides, in Endeavor’s eyes? Shouko was a masterpiece- a lucky, once in a lifetime child bred to suit his needs perfectly. He wouldn’t risk giving her permanent damage. There’s calculation in his cruelty, and an injury this bad was no doubt a slip-up. Thinking about how her father only really held back to ensure she’d be able to serve his purposes made her want to laugh just as it made her want to bury her head in the pillow and scream. She settles for doing neither.

Fuyumi looks surprised before cautiously nodding in agreement. “Yeah. It… It was just an accident.”

“An accident.” Shouko parrots. “We can go with that story, can’t we? I asked him for sparring lessons, and he mistakenly went overboard at the wrong time. Just an accident.”

It was far from foolproof- some might point out how the current Number Two should really be able to regulate his force- but it was a better cover up than nothing. Fuyumi, despite how conflicted she looks, finally sighs and agrees. “… Right. That’s what happened.”

They sit in silence, Fuyumi staring out the window as the day gave away to the evening, clock striking six thirty as the sun dropped further and further down the city skyline. Shouko, meanwhile, laid there and stared at her hands. She needed to trim her nails soon, didn’t she? And maybe she could ask Momo where she got that nice smelling hand cream hanging by a clip off her backpack- her palms were so calloused, she could use the hydration. Shouko sits like this for the better part of thirty minutes, methodically examining her hands and wrists. It was like watching paint dry, but it was better than ruminating on the events of today. The nurses would no doubt have more questions if she had an anxiety attack out of nowhere.

She’s so invested in a small scar shaped like a crescent moon on her left pinky that she nearly jolts at the sound of a knock on the door. She sees Fuyumi actually flinch, no doubt lost in her own thoughts as she stared out the window. Shouko puts on a neutral expression as a nurse walks in, smile on his face. He’s pushing a tray, something on top covered by a plastic lid. “There’s been a special delivery for you, Miss Todoroki.”

Shouko cocks an eyebrow. “Delivery?”

“It’s fresh!” As the nurse gets closer, Shouko’s stomach twists. It’s obvious what’s lying under the lid- a bowl of zaru soba sits, the printed plastic of the bowl indicating that it’s from her favourite restaurant. A little traditional Japanese restaurant ten minutes from their house, the first place she’d ever tried what would grow to be her favourite food as a child. It was her third birthday, and both her parents were there. Before she knows it, Shouko’s clenching her fists just to feel the nails dig into her palms. Fuyumi asks exactly what she’s thinking, sounding bewildered. “He… Our father did this?”

“She did!” The nurse looks cheerfully oblivious to the dropping temperatures in the room, Fuyumi
and Shouko both subconsciously chilling their surroundings. “The associate said Mister Endeavor noted it was your favourite and that you must be a bit frightened in the hospital, so he ordered take-out for you. There’s a card with it, too! Isn’t that great?”

“It’s fantastic.” Shouko’s voice is emotionless, clenching back a torrent of questions. Why…? Why would he send her food? Why would he care if she was scared? Why did he send a card? *Since when did he know her favourite food?*

“I have to get back for my rounds, but I’ll just leave this here.” Lifting the tray, the nurse places the meal on the bedside table. “Have a good dinner, Miss Todoroki!”

Shouko nods mechanically, waiting until the nurse closes the door behind him until she can turn to the baffled Fuyumi and utter exactly what she’s thinking. “What the fuck is this?”

“L-Language!” Her older sister doesn’t look as scandalized as she normally would, eyes frozen on the dish. “And… That’s… Um, it’s zaru soba and a card?”

“Yeah, from *dad.*” Shouko stares at the plate of noodles apprehensively. Even through the plastic lid, it smells delicious. She could feel her mouth start to water, eager to dig in, and she could not be more confused. The card, white envelope and all, sat next to the dish as it waited to be opened. Shouko regarded it like a loaded gun before hesitantly reaching forwards, picking up the envelope with an uncharacteristically dainty grip. Tearing the corners like she usually did, she carefully removed the cream-coloured card, eyes narrowing in suspicion at the delicate images of pretty purple flowers making up the cover. There were no words, just the hand-painted pattern that indicated this wasn’t cheap.

Fuyumi speaks from beside her, Shouko not having realized she’d gotten up to come investigate until she heard her from next to her bed. “Purple hyacinths. They… They mean ‘Regret’. ”

That inspired little confidence in Shouko as she opened the letter, eyes widening as a bill fluttered into her lap. Ten thousand yen. Her father had only ever given her money for things like school trips or New Years, and never this much. Pulling her eyes from the bill, her gaze travelled up to the inside of the card. It took her a moment to really understand what she was reading- Shouko was certain she was misreading something somehow, that the kanji were twisting in her mind to create a false sentence. There was just no way the words on the paper were real.

*I’m sorry for my poor judgement this morning. My intentions were never to harm you. Please buy yourself something nice.*

*Sincerely,*

*Your father*

… What the hell? What the *hell*? Shouko rereads the card again and again, searching and scanning for answers that might explain the absolutely impossible message she was currently seeing. Endeavor had never apologized for anything in his life- why now? After so many trips to the healer, all the bruises covered up, the way Shouko tensed whenever she saw All Might or Vlad King in her peripherals (*men that big, that strong, their silhouettes reminded her of being snatched from behind for some perceived wrongdoing*), and now she got an apology? This wasn’t even the first time he’d put her in the hospital, so why the hell did this get him to say sorry? Why? Why?
“Ah, Shouko!” Fuyumi’s voice pulls Shouko from her thoughts, and she jolts as she notices the smoke from her left hand. Quickly extinguishing the flame threatening to lick up the page, she turns to her sister, who looks as confused as she was. “Are… you okay?”

“I’m fine.” Her answer is a little too tense, a little too quick, and Fuyumi notices. The older girl puts on a hesitant smile.

“Um, this is good, isn’t it? An apology.” Fuyumi puts her hand on Shouko’s shoulders. “Maybe things will be better.”

Heterochromic eyes flick down to the card again, rereading the words again. Better… Wouldn’t that be nice? A normal life, a normal family. Shouko can see it- a caring husband, a loving wife, four happy kids. But as she tries to paste her own family onto the stock images in her mind, nothing fits together. It’s like trying to put square pegs in a round hole, two things that fundamentally do not work together. He said sorry. Did he say he would stop hitting her? Did he say their training would end in favour of letting her live the life she chooses? Did he say he’d get mom out of the hospital? Would Natsuo get his apology? Would Fuyumi? Where was Touya? Would he call off the marriage? Would he apologize to the world, admit his sins, give up his title and face the consequences of torturing his family for years?

One ‘sorry’ for knocking her to the ground and kicking her so hard that her stomach ruptured. My intentions were never to harm you.

What a bunch of bullshit. Before she can stop herself, Shouko sets the card ablaze.

“S-Shouko!” Fuyumi yelps, encasing her hands in ice and grabbing the paper from Shouko’s hands. It sizzles under her sister’s ice, the older girl grimacing as the discomfort of using her Quirk hits. As she extinguishes it, Shouko is pleased to see she thoroughly scorched it in such a quick time period. But then Fuyumi looks over at her in irritation, and some of that satisfaction drips away. “You can’t set things on fire in a hospital!”

“Sorry.” She is not sorry. “I just got mad.”

Fuyumi sighs, rubbing her forehead as she throws the remaining burnt scraps in the garbage can next to Shouko’s bed. “… It was an apology, wasn’t it? I thought you might be happy for a moment.”

Feeling a pang of annoyance, Shouko looks away from her sister, suddenly very interested in the wall. “He’s only sorry because he injured his ‘prized creation’. He forfeited the right to apologize a long time ago.”

“I know you’re justifiably angry, I really do! I’m mad at him for this too.” Fuyumi wraps her arms around herself, gripping her elbows. “I just… I’m trying to be optimistic. Isn’t this a good first step?”

As much as she hates to admit it, Shouko feels the same way to a degree. She’s had her own fantasies about a happy family life, parents who were around and who loved her. This letter was table scraps, yes, but Shouko was starving- she reasonably would gobble up any bit of kindness. A very strong part of her begged to believe it, begged to believe things would be better now. But years of her home feeling more like a prison had demolished her ability to picture her own family as happy- she had to insert herself into some fictional family, needed an entirely different life to even dream of that kind of joy. In that way, these scraps tasted too rotten for even her to eat. Shouko refuses to look at Fuyumi. “Whatever. Feel how you want.”

“Please, Shouko, can we not fight?” Fuyumi gently places a hand on her sister’s arm, and Shouko jerks away.
“We’re not fighting.”

“But you’re mad at me…”

“I’m not.”

“Shouko, I just-”

“Just stop, okay?!” Shouko snaps, whipping her head around to see Fuyumi instinctively backing up. “I’m not mad, we’re not fighting, but I’m not going to let him trick me into believing he’s changing until he actually goddamn shows it past some food and a wishy-washy card. Ok?”

Fuyumi’s face falls, gnawing at her lip, and Shouko feels a pang of guilt. She probably shouldn’t have yelled at her- she knows how well the Todoroki children react to people raising their voices at them. “Sorry…”

“… It’s fine.” Shouko doesn’t have the energy to continue this conversation, doesn’t have the energy to sustain any more thought on Endeavor. There’s silence until an exhausted Shouko finally drifts off to sleep an hour later, the only positive thing she can muster up about her father on her mind as she falls into a dreamless slumber: The man never, ever gives up on his goals.

(And it doesn’t matter who has to burn for him to reach them.)

Apparently, Recovery Girl had come by a few times in the night to accelerate her healing, fulfilling her duties as a travelling doctor. This decrease of energy while she slept explained why Shouko slept from seven in the evening to one in the afternoon the next day, waking up groggy and badly needing to brush her teeth. Fuyumi hadn’t been there- she’d apparently headed out around nine as visiting hours ended, replaced by Natsuo in the morning. He’d helped sign her release sheets, called the taxi, and overall tried to keep up a cheerful attitude even as Shouko hit him with silence.

The soba stayed uneaten on the desk as she finally left the hospital room. It was fine- she’d gone longer without food.

“So!” Natsuo tried for the hundredth time to get more than a few words out of Shouko as he helped carry the suitcase Fuyumi had packed for her into his dorm room. “What do you wanna do? I don’t have any class for the rest of the day, so we’re pretty much golden.”

“I don’t care.” She shrugged, standing still by the door as he locked and unlocked it three times.

“There’s plenty of fun stuff!” Natsuo tried again, setting her suitcase down by his closet. “We could go get a late lunch, we could play Mario Kart again- you liked that last time, right?”

Shouko shrugged again, silent this time. Her mind was focused on last night, on burning letters and an apology she couldn’t believe in even if that small, childish piece of her wanted so badly for it to be true. It made it hard to focus on whatever fun her brother was trying to inject into the situation.

Natsuo sighed, sitting in one of the chairs on the small table. “... Hey, Shouko-lat. I heard you and Nee-san kinda had a fight?”

“She thinks we fought. We didn’t fight.” Shouko crossed her arms, leaning against the doorframe. “Father sent me a card and we didn’t agree about something it said.”

“What did it say?” Natsuo cocks his head.
“He apologized for hurting me and gave me money.” Shouko pulled the ten thousand yen bill from her jeans pocket, waving it around a bit. “I kept that, but I set the card on fire.”

Snickering, Natsuo covered his mouth. “Haha, holy shit. That’s one way to handle it.”

“Onee-san suggested that it was ‘a good start’. Like I should feel grateful or something.” Tilting her head up, Shouko focused in on a mysterious stain that somehow got on the ceiling. “He apologized because he put me in the hospital. Because we lost days of training to let me heal. It was my stupid fault anyways, so this wasn’t even when he should have apologized.”

“Wait, hold up.” Her brother cocked an eyebrow. “Your fault? How?”

Shouko ran a hand through her hair, letting red and white intersect. “I provoked him on purpose. Calling him second best, saying the family was a line of failures- he just pisses me off so much that I have to say everything I can to get under his skin.”

“Still doesn’t make it your fault, though.” Natsuo pointed out. “The bastard’s been a hero for ages, he should know not to seriously hurt someone just ‘cause they piss him off. He wouldn’t have made it as far as he has if he crippled or killed villains when they monologue at him, y’know? It was his choice.”

There wasn’t much she could say to that, so she stayed silent. It all sounded logical, but Shouko’s mind was constantly at war with itself over whether making her father unhappy was good to see his reaction, or bad because she’d wound up in hospitals more than once over it. Watching her brother stand up, Shouko sighed as he made a beeline for her. She predicted what he was going to do, stepping aside to give access to the door. “... I really don’t know why you do that with the door.”

Natsuo laughed ruefully as he checked the lock. “Neither do I. It just… makes me feel safe feeling that it’s locked. Like the old man’s not gonna come scream at me in the night because I talked to you for too long.”

Oh. Now she felt like kind of a dick. “... Did that happen before?”

“Yeah, a couple times.” The white haired boy shrugged like it wasn’t a big deal. “You were on the other side of the house, so I don’t blame you for not hearing it. He’d hit me if he was mad enough, and it’s not like we ever had locks on our room. Now that I do, it’s just… I dunno. I’m still afraid of him, to be completely honest. I just need to keep reminding myself that he’s not coming to hurt me.”

It looked like she wasn’t the only one who had to stay hypervigilant. Growing up walking on eggshells left each one of the siblings constantly wary with even the one who got away not being spared. “Then what about doing everything in threes?”

“Three is a good number.” Natsuo looks down at his sister wistfully. “It’s past bad numbers like two. It just feels like everything will be alright as long as I can do things in threes. I just have to get through the rituals, and you guys will be fine. I’ll be fine.”

Not liking two… Shouko understands. She’s never been a fan either. “... Maybe you should see a doctor.”

Natsuo laughs, bringing a hand down to ruffle her hair. “Launi told me that too. I dunno how much I can tell a doctor, really. But I do appreciate the suggestion. We’re all just kinda coping the best we can, and that includes Nee-san.”

Subconsciously leaning into the touch, Shouko found that she missed it when Natsuo removed the hand from her hair. Shaking off her disappointment, she just shrugged. “Is she?”
“Nee-san really wants a normal family. I mean, we all did, but she really wants things to be normal and happy for everyone.” Natsuo smiles. “It’s just the kind of person she is. And given that it’s only you two and Endeavor living in that big house anymore… I think she’s trying to hold on to what she has left, even if the remnants aren’t necessarily good for her. So sometimes she’s too optimistic about our old man’s chances of becoming some kind of perfect dad. It used to frustrate me to see her try and please him so much, but I know she just wanted to feel like she had family beyond me when we were kids. Even if that meant she’d get slapped around for being in the way.”

For a moment, Shouko is silent. Natsuo grew up around Fuyumi more than she did, the two rejects allowed to stay near each other while she was isolated for the most part. Not to mention, she knows he’s taking psychology classes- her brother must know his stuff. “I… didn’t think of it that way.”

“It’s ok that you didn’t, kiddo. Nee-san won’t be mad or anything, just give her a hug when you see her next. We’re all just doing our best in our own ways.” Checking the lock one last time, Natsuo smiled down at Shouko, his form large like Endeavor’s but possessing a soft sense of joy that their father had never had. “Now, have you changed your mind about Mario Kart?”

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Today has been rough for Izumi, to say the least.

Shouko had apparently been discharged from the hospital and would be coming back to school tomorrow, but that didn’t mean she wasn’t still worried about her. Was she at home with Endeavor after everything…? Izumi couldn’t imagine that would be good for her recovery at all. That sense of worry for her friend would have been enough to have her feeling cruddy all day just by itself, but of course the world decided to hurl another curveball at her.

It shouldn’t have bothered her as much as it did, really. She kept telling herself it was fine, she was over it. Middle school was behind her, and The Unfortunate Incident From Second Year could be safely packed up and never thought about again. But it never seemed as easy as Izumi felt it should be. She remembers reading a quote explaining how people were products of their pasts and feeling a sudden wave of sadness- if that was true, what kind of defective product did she turn out to be? And what had triggered the memory was so simple that it was just about mortifying. It had been last period, and they were supposed to get into groups of two for Cementoss’s Japanese assignment. Thoughts of Shouko (both those of concern and the embarrassingly romance-tinged ones she was tried her best to push away) had Izumi so distracted by this point that she didn’t hear the instructions. So as a cheerful Ochako bounced up, hands slapping down on her shoulders playfully, she was bought somewhere else instead.

*The fundamental truth of the situation was that she was alone in the classroom after school, her partner for cleaning duty having skipped out on her. The fundamental truth of the situation was that Kacchan was out with a cold, his lackeys left to find their own amusement. The fundamental truth of the situation was that she was a Quirkless girl, ninety pounds soaking wet at the time, and she couldn’t defend herself against the shortest bully in her class. The fundamental truth of the situation was that Futsuki and Yusa grabbed her by the shoulders.*

Izumi had screamed, Ochako had yelped in surprise and accidentally activated her Quirk, and a panicking Izumi had been shot five feet into the air by Zero Gravity. As Ochako released her in a sea of apologies, Izumi hit the ground running from everyone’s shocked questions, out the door in a blink of an eye. *You’re safe,* her mind had been pleading with her, *it’s UA, not middle school, nobody will hurt you here,* and yet she couldn’t stop running until she reached the bathrooms, all but jumping into a stall and slamming it shut with such force that she almost tore it off the hinge. How hilarious- she was stronger physically, months of training with All Might to harness a Quirk that seemed to hate her every time she used it, and yet she was still the pathetic baby she was in middle
Izumi had doubts every single day. Doubts she could live up to the expectations on her shoulders, doubts that All Might made the right call making her his successor, doubts that she could save anyone in the end. And now, crying in a bathroom stall because her best friend touched her shoulders, Izumi is more sure than ever in her own uselessness.

Once the whole-body sobs eventually simmer into gentler tears, she fumbles in her pocket for her cell phone— it had been buzzing for a while, and it seemed like just over half the class had texted her in confusion. All the girls (Ochako alone had sent close to ten frantic apology texts), Tenya, Kirishima, Kaminari, Satou, and… Shouko? Izumi blinked away tears, confused as to why the last name was lit up. Did someone text her about this stupid meltdown? The entire class exchanged phone numbers after the Sports Festival at Yaoyorozu’s insistence, but Shouko hadn’t texted her once yet— though to be fair, Izumi hadn’t texted her either. Now, staring at the lit up messenger, she hesitantly opened it.

**Shouko**: I do not like Waluigi.

**Shouko**: His smug aura mocks me.

… Izumi stares in confusion for a moment, taking the messages in before bursting into hysterical laughs. What on All Might’s good earth was she talking about?! It was like her feelings had taken a complete one eighty, humiliated misery to raucous belly laughs thanks to the instability that comes with such an emotional state. The message, the person it came from, the fact that it was literally the first thing Shouko had ever texted her— it was perfect. Once Izumi was finished wiping the tears off her cheeks (some from the earlier meltdown, some from how hard she’d been laughing), she managed to get out a response.

**Izumi**: what!!!!!!! waluigi is great!!!

**Izumi**: also where does this come from all of a sudden?

**Shouko**: I’m at Natsuo’s. We’re playing a game called “Mario Kart”. Maybe you’ve heard of it? I don’t know if it’s popular.

**Izumi**: its a pretty popular game :) also that sounds nice!!!! tell natsuo i say hello

**Shouko**: He said hello back and then did a peace sign.

**Izumi**: btw how are you doing after yesterday? :0

**Shouko**: I’m alright. Recovery Girl healed me overnight, so I’m just a little tired. I’ll be back tomorrow.

**Izumi**: thats fantastic!!!! also i dont mean to pressure you while youre recovering but do you think youre ready for internships?

**Shouko**: I think I am. Are you?
Izumi: i sure hope i am!!! turns out i got one offer from a small time pro near hosu, so im heading there. thats where endeavors agency is, right?

Shouko: That’s correct. Maybe we’ll see each other.

Izumi: thatd be awesome!!!! tenya is in hosu too, how cool would it be if we all met up?

Shouko: That sounds like fun. Let’s hope we can work something out.

Shouko: I should get back to the game now before Natsuo can strategize against me.

Izumi: haha gl!!!! lets talk soon :)

Just knowing her friend was okay was a huge weight off her back. And it seemed like she was in a playful mood judging by her first texts- or maybe she was just kind of weird. Either way, Izumi would admit with a lot of bashfulness that it was cute. And helpful, considering the well-timed bizarre message had stopped an anxiety attack from blowing up right into a panic attack. Shouko was calming in the strangest way, cool and rational in a way Izumi knew she herself couldn’t be, and she held her phone to her chest with a deep breath. Okay, yes, this was a crush. Bigger than the little one she’d had at the start of the year that was formed solely because she thought Shouko was good-looking. No use denying that, but she’d just have to grin and bear it until her feelings smoothed into more platonic ones. She’d done it before, and she could do it again.

Bringing her phone back up again, she finally opened the messenger to reply to Ochako. She’d have to apologize back in class, and while there was no way she could explain The Unfortunate Incident From Second Year, she could be vague enough to satisfy everyone's confusion for now.

… Izumi knew she’d need to tell someone eventually. But for now, this was held closely to her chest, nestled right next to newly-developed feelings for a mismatched girl.

Meanwhile in a certain someone’s dorm room, Shouko Todoroki has just frozen her cell phone.

She hadn’t done it intentionally, mind you- that was just a waste of a perfectly good cell phone. It had happened because Natsuo was a real bastard, and just as she was finishing her conversation with Izumi, leant over her shoulder and said in the smuggest voice possible, “So you have a crush on her, don’t you?”, which prompted her to jump and accidentally coat her phone in a nice layer of ice. Well done. Better than burning it, maybe?

She and Natsuo were now seated at his tiny dorm table, phone mostly dug out from the ice and now sitting in a bowl of rice. Her older brother was still trying to hide his giggles over the whole situation, Shouko sitting with her face in her hands. “Oh, shut up.”

“Are you kidding? That’s the funniest thing that’s ever happened to me!” Failing to contain the chuckles, Natsuo bursts into laughter again, leaning back so far in his chair that it threatens to tip over. “You basically answered the question for me and everything!”

“I did not!” Is this what having an older brother was supposed to be like? Just getting tormented constantly? “I didn’t say anything.”

“You sure did! You yelped and then iced your phone!” Natsuo manages between laughs, wiping a tear from his eye.
Shouko lets out a groan. “I’m not even gay or anything.”

Natsuo’s laughter slows to a more reasonable chuckle, the boy leaning forwards. “Shouko, I’m bisexual. If you’re afraid I’m gonna judge you, I’m not.”

Oh. That’s what she gets for assuming otherwise just because he had a girlfriend, Shouko supposes. “… I don’t know yet. I never had crushes growing up, but… I like this girl. I think.”

“I could tell because of your face when you were texting her.” Natsuo smiles, half cheeky, half sincere. “You looked exactly like I did when Launi first texted me. Totally lovestruck. And it’s not like you to pause a competition to text some girl unless you’re trying to get with her. Plus, you were blushing.”

“Was not.”

“Was so! On one half of your face and everything.” Natsuo puts his elbows on the table and plops his chin down in his hands. “You gonna ask her out?”

Shouko shrugs, now consciously monitoring her heat to try and cool down her face. “I don’t know if she likes girls yet, and since we’re already friends… It’s a risk.”

Nodding sagely, Natsuo looks at his sister like he’s about to dole out some wisdom. “Well, I know a way that won’t confirm it, but it can be a helpful hint.”

Cocking her head, Shouko narrows her eyes. “What is it?”

“It’s all in the fingernails. Your chances are better if they’re short. Trust me.”

That… wasn’t what she was expecting. “What do you…” It does take Shouko a minute, but the realization as to what he’s implying finally hits her like a freight train. She sputters, throwing a spoon at him. “Wha- gross! Don’t tease me!”

Natsuo whoops, barely dodging the spoon and a tiny ball of ice that follows it up. Damn his athletic lifestyle. “Just check this Midoriya girl’s nails and get back to me!”

“You’re the worst!”

“You love me!”

And as Shouko contemplates throwing a fork next, she has to acknowledge that she does. They’ve been distant for a long time, forced to by circumstances of their birth, but Natsuo seems like he’s wanted to be a big brother for a very long time, relishing in the chances to interact with the sister he was locked away from. He’s crude and goofy, excitable and god-awful at Mario Kart, and Shouko has to admit that she feels that same warm comfort around him that she does around Fuyumi.

So for the night, Shouko doesn’t think about Endeavor or conflicting feelings on apologies. She doesn’t think about the upcoming internship, about tea rooms and stuffy furisode, about what could have been if she wasn’t born into this family.

All those things be damned. She will hold tightly to the tiny moments of joy she is permitted.

Chapter End Notes
CONTENT WARNINGS

- Discussion of abuse
- Scene that can be read as an abuser manipulating his victim via gifts
- OCD brought on by abuse
- Implied past assault
- Anxiety attack

CHAPTER SPOILERS BEGIN

So! I'm basically still dawdling before the internship arc, eek! Sorry, we'll get there soon! Also, no points for guessing what song inspired this chapter (in case the chapter title didn't instantly tip you off), ehehe. I sincerely hope you enjoyed, here's a Discord link again (https://discord.gg/pRruQ3C), and please let me know what you think in the comments below! Thank you for reading, and see you soon!
i imagine it's quite nice for you to have so many chances

Chapter Notes

Hi again, folks!

Things have been a little hectic in my life, so updates might slow down slightly- sorry about that in advance! I'll try to keep a steady flow going.

There's not really many warnings in this chapter (call it the calm before the Stain arc blows up), but please check out the end notes if you're concerned about any of your squicks/triggers showing up! Thank you, and enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Like last time she’d slept over at her brother’s place, Shouko goes straight to school from his dorm (Fuyumi had graciously packed her uniform in her suitcase). Quirks really were miraculous- what would have otherwise been weeks of recovery had been resolved in two days. That didn’t mean that the class wasn’t treating her with kid gloves as she walked in that morning, circling her to pepper her with questions while still keeping a few feet from her. Kirishima in particular was mortified despite her insistence that he wasn’t the cause of the injury, presenting her with a box of chocolates and a slew of apologies in what she had to admit was an extremely kind move. She was supposed to be putting on weight, wasn’t she? Maybe these would help- Shouko knew she wasn’t exactly the best at healthy eating, but any calories had to be good at this point, right? Maybe? She didn’t know. If you asked her about exercise, Shouko could easily list off a routine to build muscle and increase your stamina, but nutrition was left up entirely to whatever her father told Fuyumi to cook.

For a while these past few weeks, she knows on some level that she’s been ignoring Recovery Girl’s advice on purpose. Yeah, she can’t get out of training and dad would be furious with both Shouko and Fuyumi if the younger girl asked her sister to make her unapproved food (the bacon and eggs of their shared hangover morning are a secret held as close to their chests as the drinking itself), but she’s got hidden food all over the house. She could spend her newly acquired ten thousand yen on a veritable mountain of treats at lunch today. She could even slack off in school if she wanted to lighten the exercise load, tell Aizawa she still felt bad from the injury. Shouko had multiple ways to regain her health, and yet… she wasn’t trying. Last night, Natsuo had offered to buy a pizza again, but she declined, the boy having to talk her into eating a bowl of plain white rice.

Hunger was a tool in her household, used as punishment when she fell short of Endeavor’s expectations, used in training as she was taught how to fight even at her lowest points, used to keep her miserable and sick and obedient. It was the only constant in Shouko’s life. Maybe she clung to it for the sense of stability she didn’t have anywhere else.

… On second thought, she’d share the chocolates with her friends at lunch. They’d probably like that.

Oftentimes, Shouta had to remind himself that light progress was good when facing huge opposition.

The impatient part of him wanted to charge into the Todoroki household and get those two girls out of there himself. It had been a grand, foolish fantasy devised after staying up all night after a patrol to
painstakingly shift through the “borrowed” hospital reports that Pop Step had nabbed for him about a certain long-term psychiatric resident- a dream about saving the day, about getting two victims out of danger, of somehow not making everything worse by swooping in. But Shouta was a logical man, and he knew deep down that he was never the type to try something that reckless and flashy. But goddamn if he didn’t want to at least change where her internship was taking her. He wouldn’t even have shown her the offer if he’d known about Endeavor at the time.

But of course, there was light progress. With Recovery Girl now in the know about this debacle, she was starting to track Todoroki’s injuries, singed skin and terrible purple bruises photographed and catalogued to be used as evidence later. Hizashi was in the know as well- it would be pointless to hide it from his fiancee given how their apartment was currently full of paperwork and files. The Voice Hero had been just as stunned and enraged as Shouta had been, and convincing the other man not to, in his own words, ‘tear that child-beating scumbag a new one’ on national radio had been challenging. Instead, Hizashi had just vowed to quit mentioning Endeavor at all on his show- like his fiancee, it seemed like he realized there wasn’t much he could do without risking hero society as it is.

And of course, Nedzu was in the know. The mouse-bear-principal had his suspicions from the start, and Shouta had asked him to divert some of UA’s money to pay for the expensive lawyers and court fees they’d no doubt be needing to deal with. Nedzu had agreed it would be a good idea… if not for the fact that UA got a mix of government and private funding, a good chunk of which came from one of it’s most famous alumni: Endeavor himself. No doubt the man would have to be notified along with the others who kept the lights on (and kept those fake cities looking pristine), which was not the best plan if they were going to attack without time for him to put up a proper defence. The principal did agree with Shouta’s strategy and assured him that UA would be able to stealthily provide enough money for the Todoroki children to rent space in an apartment with security should this case somehow blow up too early.

Things were moving slowly, and he had to appreciate that, but it was hard sometimes. He was just packing up at the end of the day when a tiny knock outside the classroom door caught his attention. “Mr. Aizawa?”

That was Midoriya’s voice, slightly muffled by the separation. “You don’t need to knock, Midoriya. It’s your classroom.”

“R-Right! Sorry.” The girl excused herself as she entered the room, closing the door behind her. Midoriya always seemed to be in a state of perpetual fear over something or the other- and to say he was suspicious of the relationship she shared with Bakugou after the girl apparently had a meltdown over being touched in Cementoss’s class was an understatement- but she managed to look even more worried than usual. “Um, I wanted to ask about Shouko?”

Shouta had figured as much. “Todoroki has recovered for the most part. I can’t tell you much legally, but her father hasn’t seen her since the day of the incident. She’s been with her siblings until now, and she’ll be spending the week in Hosu for her internship starting tomorrow.”

“Ah…” It seemed like Midoriya shared his own concerns over that whole affair. “Do you think it’ll be okay?”

“I would hope so.” Shrugging, Shouta straightened out some papers just to keep his hands from fidgeting in frustration over the whole situation. “She chose the internship herself. I wouldn’t have shown her Endeavor’s offer if I’d known about this beforehand.”

Seriously, he learned about the abuse less than an hour after Todoroki returned her form. Talk about bad timing. Clasping her hands at her chest and anxiously toying with her nails, Midoriya sighed sadly. “… Right. Thank you, Mr. Aizawa.”
“It’s not a problem. You’re a good friend, being so concerned for her.” The kind of friend you should have been whispers a voice in the back of Shouta’s head before he forces it away. That was years ago and the situation had been long resolved, but guilt itched at him whenever he looked back at high school photos, seeing the first-year Nemuri’s smile and how sad it seemed in retrospect. “Make sure you’re looking out for yourself too.”

Big green eyes blinked in confusion, the girl cocking her head like a puppy. “What do you mean?”

“I mean that I heard about yesterday’s incident from Cementoss.” Shouta follows up quickly when he sees the girl flinch. “I’m not going to press you if you don’t want to talk to me about it, but I can show you how to set up an appointment with Hound Dog if you’d like. And I’m sure you know how much All Might favours you- I’m sure he’d be willing to help if you go to him.”

The last bit had been meant as a bit of a joke, but Shouta couldn’t help but wonder why it made the girl so nervous. “R-Right! Um, really though, I’m okay. Just a bad day was all.”

“Like I said, I won’t press.” He honestly might have under different circumstances, but they were racing against the clock with Todoroki, and Shouta didn’t want to lose a potential source of information by implying something was up when he was just overthinking it. “But I’m here if you do need someone to talk to, and that goes for the rest of the faculty. In any case, you should probably head out, kid. Big day for you tomorrow.”

“R-Right!” Bowing deeply, Midoriya’s smile shakily began reforming on her face as the mention of her own internship was brought up. “Thank you, Mr. Aizawa.”

“You’re welcome. Don’t get into trouble on your way home.” Sending her off, Shouta looked back to his things, still waiting to be gathered up. He’d have to grade last week’s pop quizzes as soon as he got home if he wanted to have those done before his patrol in the afternoon. He also promised his supervisor he’d come along to that meeting with the Yoha family tomorrow- another social worker was on the case, but apparently their little daughter’s unstable Quirk caused another incident at school, and he was useful to have around hard to control powers. That would be right after he supervised the students as they headed off to their internships, and after that he’d arranged a meeting with that promising kid from General Education. In between, he’d settle for pawing through Todoroki’s case to try and find any news on how that huge scar had occurred.

Was Shouta so busy he’d no doubt get about an hour of sleep tonight? Would Hizashi be exasperated with his fiancee pushing himself so far? Would he wake up looking and feeling like a cave troll tomorrow? The answer to all of these questions was a resounding yes, something he’d long since stopped caring about. Because for all his gruffness, Shouta Aizawa had known since he was a child that he wanted to dedicate his life to helping others. If that means running his stamina into the ground, then so be it- he’ll work until he’s satisfied with the world around him, even if it takes a lifetime.

With that on his mind, he gathers up Todoroki’s files and pulls them to the front of his briefcase as he packs up. He’ll start diving into the information about one mister Hideomi Ondo on the train- Shouta would help Todoroki no matter what it cost him.

Home that night had been quiet, mainly because it was only her at home. Shouko had almost forgotten that the Todoroki family owned many properties around major cities in Japan (it’s not like she really got to see any of them- vacations were almost unheard of for her), only being reminded of their existence by the realization that Endeavor was staying the night in their Hosu penthouse in preparation for her own arrival the next morning to start her internship. The realization that she wouldn’t even have Fuyumi to try and make peace between her and their father is disquieting to
Shouko, but she attempts to push that aside in favour of catching up on the work she’d missed. Speaking of Fuyumi, her absence was a lot stranger- the note was rushed and vague, something about a student of hers and a social worker? Whatever. All it really meant for Shouko was that she was eating the convenience store sushi Fuyumi had provided for dinner and going to bed blessedly early. It was quiet enough for once, no noises except the settling of the house and the occasional air conditioner hiccup.

Shouko liked the silence. She could fill it with whatever she wanted, or leave it be. Something just for her.

She had laid in bed, staring up at the dark ceiling, and she had allowed her thoughts to come together and attempt to piece together a grand mystery. Why had Endeavor apologized to her? He’d put her in the hospital with worse injuries before- the only thing that stuck out more than the memorable incident at age eleven where she’d been thrown down a flight of stairs and earned a broken jaw was her radius bone as it jutted from the skin- so what was so special about this one that it warranted an apology? Was it because a teacher finally noticed it, actually did something to keep her away from his grasp? Was it because he wanted to keep her close by now that she was using her fire, trap her with presents and affection she’d never had from him before? Was he actually, truly, feeling bad? Would he stop?

… No. No, Shouko couldn’t let this overwhelm her mind again. She was working so hard to get his taste out of her mouth, to tear him out from under her skin and remove all thoughts of him from the new life she wanted to forge. As far as she was concerned, he was a monster with no sense of love, and he’d have to do a whole lot more than throw gifts at her to get her to think otherwise.

(She's drowning in too much guilt over her life and how much her presence has taken from those around her to add more as she ignores everything Endeavor gives her.)

The next morning consisted of finishing up her packing and getting ready for school, though Fuyumi caught her just as she was heading for the train station, handing off a thermos. “Oh, Shouko! I almost forgot you were leaving early, so I didn’t make a full breakfast. Here, there’s miso soup in this.”

Shouko had to work hard not to scrunch up her nose- not at the soup, but at Fuyumi. She looked messy and smelled like she’d just spent a week in a pine forest, which was to say she was definitely drunk on gin last night. Regardless, Shouko accepted the thermos. “Thanks.” There’s a minute where she contemplates what Natsuo told her a couple nights ago, and she braves the alcohol scent to go in for a hug. “Sorry if I upset you in the hospital.”

The youngest Todoroki never initiates hugs, not since their mother left. The few times she’d tried hugging her father over the years… well, the best outcome after all those incidents was an extremely awkward and stiff Endeavor. The worst was a new bruise. So even now, Shouko feels strangely robotic as she wraps her arms around Fuyumi, who seems surprised until she relaxes into the touch, hugging her sister back with much more practiced arms. “It’s okay, Shouko. I’m sorry for upsetting you too.”

Shouko has no idea when to let go, just following Fuyumi’s lead after a moment, and notes the way the older girl has to get on her tiptoes to ruffle her sister’s hair. “Now have a good internship, okay? Be safe.”

After their goodbyes, Shouko makes her way to the station, the rest of her class gathered just inside. Izumi’s face lights up when she notices her arrival, which forces the bicoloured girl to shove down the butterflies in her stomach, and quickly makes her way over, flanked by Tenya, Ochako, and Tsu. “Shouko, hi! Are you excited?”
“I’m looking forwards to it.” ‘Excited’ is pushing it, but this is as close as Shouko gets. Despite it being with her father (especially after everything that’s happened recently), she knows there’s plenty to learn under his watch. Mount Lady, Kamui Woods- some of the top young pros today worked as sidekicks to Endeavor after graduating high school, and Shouko has the chance to study under him in a setting where he can’t hit her without raising eyebrows. It’s as good as it gets with him, really.

Everyone else seemed excited too- Momo and Kyoka were practically beaming as they spoke, Bakugou’s smirk seemed like it was half feral and half thrilled, and Ashido and Kaminari were whooping and laughing as they did those weird dance things together. Frontline? Force Right? Foil Might? Shouko can’t remember, but they look very happy in any case. And that wasn’t even talking about her friends. Izumi looked like she might start crying out of excitement (though that was sort of par for the course at this point), Ochako was almost vibrating with glee, and even Tsu’s calm smile seemed to be carrying extra energy behind it.

They were all happy. What was up with Tenya?

The boy was standing off to the side, and though he looked as proper and polite as always… Something was off. Shouko could feel it in his expression, little complexities that might be overlooked by anyone else. She’d seen those pursed lips on Natsuo when it was time to her to leave, on Fuyumi whenever her father summoned Shouko to the training room. That was the face of a man resigned to something that went against his own wishes, someone who’s been cornered with only one unpleasant option to go with. Before she knows what she’s doing, Shouko is approaching Tenya, touching his arm gently. “Good morning, Tenya. How are you?”

Sticking her nose into someone else’s business like this- Izumi sure was wearing off on her. Tenya takes a moment to react, too deep in thought for his usual reaction time to kick in. “Hm? Oh, Shouko! I’m well, thank you.”

“That’s good!” A noise from beside her almost makes Shouko jump out of her skin as Ochako bounces in next to her. Gosh, she’s excitable this morning. It’s not like Shouko can blame her, though.

“Yeah! Actually, Tenya, I wanted to just say something quick.” Izumi is a lot quieter than Ochako, but Shouko somehow notices her presence sooner as she slips in to flank the brunette girl’s other side. “Just… keep us updated on your internship, okay? We’re friends, so we should be sharing all the cool tips the pros give us!”

There’s something forced there that Shouko picks up on- she’s trying too hard, and the mismatched student can’t help but wonder why. Izumi is the kind of person who doesn’t need to put on airs to make someone else listen to her (even if she doesn’t realize it herself), so this is more than a little confusing. Tenya regards all three of them with a concerningly sad gaze before his lips curve up in a hollow smile. “Thank you, really. I’ll keep in touch.”

His voice isn’t the Tenya she’s familiar with, and Shouko shifts in discomfort as Aizawa calls them together for a last meeting before they head off. Something is wrong with him, she knows this even with her admittedly stunted social skills, but she’s also new to his friend group. It’s not her place to push through any further, and when Ochako and Izumi move to catch up with him as he heads for his own train, she hangs back with Tsuyu.

The frog-like girl puts a finger on her chin in contemplation. “Are you worried about him, too?”

“After his brother was hurt, he hasn’t seemed right. I feel like something’s going to happen.” Shouko looks down at her companion. Tsuyu, just like her, had joined the original three a bit later- chances are she feels this isn’t her place too.
“Our whole group is concerned. It's too bad, ribbit. All we can do for now is support him from the sidelines.” Tsuyu dips a large hand into her skirt pocket to fish out her phone. “My train is leaving soon. I hope you enjoy your internship, Shouko.”

“You too. Good luck, Tsu.” With a pair of polite nods, the girls are both off, the two casting a gaze back at Tenya as he walks away from Ochako and Izumi. All four girls wear grim faces, as if they were watching him go off to war.

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War was not where he was going. But unbeknownst to all, Tenya Iida and two others would soon be facing a situation every bit as bloody.

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Shouko is really, really wishing the tea lady would hurry up.

She and her father are seated in his office, about to go over the plans for her internship and waiting on their tea orders (English breakfast with milk for him, matcha for her). The tension in the air is thick enough to cut with a knife, and Endeavor is clearly aware of that as he finishes up today’s patrol plan, putting the papers down on his desk with a thwip. “So that’s the route. Pros generally take different patrol paths each day to keep villains from getting the drop on us, so this will change tomorrow.”

“Okay.” Shouko shifts, and despite this updated costume being much comfier than her previous one, she can’t help but feel a bit unnerved in it after what happened last time she wore it. Her stomach aches, a phantom pain.

“... Did you get my delivery a few nights ago?” Her father asks the one question she’d sincerely hoped he wouldn’t, and if it weren’t for the way she’s used to being still as a statue in his presence, she might have winced.

“I did.”

“Good.”

For maybe the first time in history, neither Endeavor nor Shouko seems like they know what they want out of this conversation. There’s the worst, most awkward silence before Shouko finds her thoughts spilling out before she can stop them. “I don’t want presents anymore.”

Endeavor sighs, bringing a hand up to his temple. Shouko marvels at how the office seems to calm him- it’s more of a home to him than their house it, really- or at least how it turns a potential shouting-worthy misdemeanor into a minor annoyance. Can’t beat your kids when an employee can walk in at any moment, at least. “This is what I meant about making me the villain. You know I’m doing what’s best for you, don’t you?”

“Throwing gifts at me won’t change anything. Don’t do it again.” It’s as open as Shouko can get to admitting the unsaid truth between them out loud- she despises him, really and truly does, and the acts of strange and inexplicable kindness that kept her up for hours at Natsuo’s as she tried to puzzle over his actions only served to agitate that further.

Just as it looks like Endeavor will respond, there’s a gentle knock on the door. “Mister Endeavor? Miss Shouko? Your tea!”

“Come in, Kocha.” Her father beckons the tea lady back in, the young woman stepping into the room with a smile. Her Quirk is unclear, her appearance lacking any mutations, and in her hands she’s holding a tray with- ah. That would be a tea kettle.
Shouko doesn’t realize how hard she’s gripping the arms of the chair as the tea is poured in front of them, steam and heat too close for her to dare open her mouth. She’s trying to count her breaths, remind herself that she’s fifteen years old training to be a hero and not a frightened five year old cornered in her kitchen, remaining silent when her father thanks the tea lady out of fear that she’ll say something regrettable as long as the kettle is in her sights. Shouko lets out a breath she didn’t know she was even holding as Kocha finally leaves the room. Noticing her father regarding her strangely, she tries to catch her breath and prevent the panic attack before it starts by avoiding eye contact with him, suddenly interested in her boots. “Tea kettle. It’s… Tea kettle.”

“… You’re going to need to get over that if you want to work in a professional setting. Tea is a part of business in this industry, you know.” Endeavor responds with annoyance as the clinking noise indicates he’s picking up his cup. Shouko grits her teeth, toeing her boots into the carpet.

“Okay.” Her deadpan voice mostly just indicates that this is a conversation she doesn’t want to have, but indicates that she’s still under a considerable amount of stress over the unexpected appearance of a trigger object. Shouko is in no mood to try and push her luck after last time, flurry of conflicting emotions still battling within her head. “When are we going on patrol?”

Endeavor sighs, pinching his nose. “… One hour. I’m going to go brief the sidekicks on today’s plan, but you’ll just embarrass me going out there looking like you’re about to cry.” He pushes the papers he was just reading from in Shouko’s direction, standing up. “Re-read the map I went over with you until you’ve memorized today’s route. Stay in here and don’t cause any trouble.”

With silence from Shouko’s end, her father sighed, standing up and walking past her. She didn’t lose her tenseness until she heard the sound of the grand double doors closing again, body relaxing instinctively as the heat in the room diminished.

… Maybe it wasn’t just the teapot that set her off. Maybe it was heat in general.

What a funny realization.

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Izumi has some conflicting feelings about her internship.

On one hand, she’s learned so much! Gran Torino helped her develop her newest technique (albeit somewhat inadvertently- in the future, she probably won’t tell people they were developed from taiyaki), and she hasn’t even broken one bone so far! Recovery Girl should be pretty happy about that. It’s been a whirlwind couple of months- she’s gone from Quirkless and bullied to having freaking All Might’s Quirk and an ever-growing circle of friends! Everything is going good.

On another hand, ow. Gran Torino doesn’t let up during sparring, does he? Izumi won’t be surprised if her back is so thoroughly bruised that her future bloodline will feel it. They’re taking a break before heading out on a patrol in Tokyo- a real patrol, can you believe it?— which reminded her that they’d be passing through Hosu city on the train. Naturally, two faces popped into her mind: Tenya and Shouko. How were their internships going? Izumi couldn’t help but feel the urge to check up on her friends and see if they had any interesting details to share. She knew she sure did! Well, as much as the whole ‘top secret Quirk’ thing allowed for, anyways. She could at least inform them about getting beat up by a senior citizen half her size.

Tenya was… well, kind of a non-starter. He’d been uncharacteristically ignoring her texts, and while the optimistic part of Izumi hoped it was just because he was busy with Manual, the smarter part of her knew something was wrong with Tenya. Had been for a while, really. It didn’t take a genius to figure out why, either- having been an only child her whole life, Izumi couldn’t imagine the struggle he was going through after his brother had that terrible run-in with Stain. The closest she could get
was picturing her own mother being gravely wounded by a villain, a thought process that distressed her so deeply that she couldn’t bear it for more than a minute. Tenya was clearly suffering, and Izumi knew she could do very little to help him until he opened up and let her in. That knowledge did very little to soothe the discomfort in her gut—call it basic anxiety, call it woman’s intuition, but she had a feeling something was terribly wrong with her friend right now.

Shouko, on the other hand, was a lot more reachable. They’d had a chat last night (albeit a brief one) about how their days had gone. Izumi had mentioned developing a new technique that kept her bones thankfully intact, and Shouko had mentioned learning to increase the heat of her flames on a precise degree-to-degree basis. As much as it made Izumi uncomfortable to know her friend was with her father during all of this, she begrudgingly reminded herself that nobody knew how to use fire better than the Flame Hero. Well, ‘hero’ didn’t seem right anymore—god knows Izumi had dumped all her Endeavor merchandise in a box and shoved it in the back of her closet the minute she got home from the Sports Festival. Either way, Shouko seemed content, and that was what really mattered in the end.

… Ugh, she needed to get over this crush fast! Even if it wasn’t going to help matters at all (and she should probably be napping before heading out on patrol later), Izumi pulled out her phone, bringing up Shouko’s contact.

Izumi: hi shouko!!!! hows everything going?

There’s a few minutes before the response, and Izumi has to berate herself for how fidgety she feels when waiting on a text from the mismatched girl.

Shouko: I’m well. One of the sidekicks is teaching me about contracts with marketing firms. Not fun, but I suppose it’ll be important.

Izumi: oof that does sound a little bland. but hang in there!!!

Shouko: I will. Is there any particular reason you texted me?

Izumi: not really, just wanted to say hi!!!!

Izumi: eep sorry if im being annoying ／＜／

Shouko: You aren’t. I like talking to you.

Izumi’s heart skipped a beat, and she almost had to slap herself. Can you not be useless for two seconds, dummy?! Just talk to your friend! Look, she said something else while you were being a hopeless romantic!

Shouko: Also, that reminds me that I recently learned from my brother how to do those little faces you and some of the girls make with the letters. I’ll make one for you.
Shouko : ¯\_(ツ)_/¯?

Shouko : Do you see him? It is a bear.

*OH SCREW IT, SHE’S TOO PRECIOUS!* Izumi spends a moment screaming into her pillow before managing a response.

Izumi : i see him!!!!!! i love it!!!!!!

Shouko : " • "

Shouko : I can make him look to the side, too.

Izumi : ooooooh! whats he looking at?

Shouko : ¯\_(ツ)_/¯ ξξ(∵◕◡◕∵)

Shouko : He’s looking at you. Do you see the freckles and curly hair?

She’s gonna die here. Izumi is gonna have a heart attack and die and it’s all because Shouko doesn’t realize how adorable she is when she texts. She makes the most embarrassing wheezing sound as she manages a reply.

Izumi : it is me!!!!!

Izumi : (・_・)ノ*°*°° here’s you! youre using your quirk!!!!!

Shouko : It does look like me.

Shouko : ¯\_(ツ)_/¯ ξξ(∵◕◡◕∵)ξξ (・_・)ノ*°*°°

Shouko : We are spending time with each other and the bear.

Izumi : god i wish that was me

Izumi : youve really got the hang of these things havent you?

Shouko : Natsuo is good at them, so he showed me.

Shouko : Anyways, the sidekick is coming off break soon. I should put my phone away.

Izumi : oki doki, dont lemme hold you up! it was great talking to you!!!!!!!

Shouko : You as well, Izumi.
Shouko:♡♡

Did… Did her eyes deceive her? Did Shouko ‘Ice Queen’ Todoroki just send her a heart emoticon? Was Izumi hallucinating? Did she concuss herself during training?

… Oh jesus, it was real. Two hearts and two direct hits to Izumi’s emotions.

Instead of napping, Izumi proceeded to spend the rest of her break with her face buried in her pillow, making high pitched squealing noises in a mixture of joy and complete mortification. The universe wasn’t going to let her get over this, was it? A friendly pair of hearts was obviously just Shouko acclimating to teenage girl text-speak (Ochako sent her hearts all the time, after all!), but given that Izumi was finally acknowledging how head-over-heels she was for the most-likely-straight girl, they just punched her right in the actual heart.

Thank goodness they were just passing through Hosu. Izumi isn’t sure her little bi heart could handle much more of the mismatched beauty for a while.

Was that the right move? Shouko stares nervously at her phone screen, and although her face remains as blank as ever, she knows she’s at risk of sweating through her costume. After finally coming to terms with what she was tentatively referring to as a ‘crush’, she’d asked Natsuo what steps she was supposed to take (after throwing a variety of household items at him in regards to that fingernail comment, of course). He’d suggested a variety of options that sounded far too intimidating (‘tell her how you feel’? What a foolish move!) before suggesting the more subtle route of dropping little hints. One of which was to sign off with a heart or two.

Well, it was signing off. So there was no way to know how Izumi reacted- she probably didn’t even notice or care, really. It was silly to imagine she was out there swooning over a couple pixels, but even so… Shouko didn’t know how else to do this.

Romance had never been present in any part of her life up until Natsuo mentioned Launi, and there’d been even less mention of romance between two men or two women. She just… didn’t know how to act here. What if, against all odds, Izumi reciprocated? What were they supposed to do at that point? Hide it? Go public? Was she going to have to come out?

Shouko was too early in this realization to comfortably say it out loud, even in the privacy of the currently-empty meeting hall that Endeavor’s sidekick would soon be returning to, but… well, she’d never been attracted to men in her life, and looking back at it, her brief fixations (not really crushes thanks to how numbed she’d been to connection, just distant interest) in middle school had always been on girls. So yeah. She was probably a lesbian. What would her father think? She knew he interacted fine with openly LGBT heroes like Hawks and Ryukyu, but… Well, he had to be nice to them. They were, in a way, his co-workers, and having an image that suggested you were homophobic or transphobic was just a bad move in such a modern society. So maybe he supported it, maybe he didn’t and had to play nice. But there was one big elephant in the room in regards to Shouko’s case:

Even if she escaped her fate with Ondo, Endeavor would one day expect a brood of grandchildren with incredible Quirks from her.

That could be an issue.

Granted, maybe by whatever point he expects her to get pregnant, she can be an established hero
who could raise him the middle finger and support herself without any influence from him. Shouko longed to be eighteen, graduated and licensed and living in some garbage studio apartment just to be out of that house. She’d never understand why Fuyumi didn’t up and leave the second she turned eighteen, frankly, even if she’s thankful she stuck around. But then could Endeavor use his influence to pressure her into a marriage anyways?

Ugh. Shouko’s not allowed a crush like a normal person- there’s so many factors to consider given her situation, so many variables that ensure one misstep could lead to complete disaster. It was almost easier when she was shutting out every emotion, refusing to let even one slip through her carefully refined shield. But… friends had been nice. Sitting at lunch, casually talking, forgetting what awaited her at home each evening…

No, she wasn’t going back. This was where Shouko belonged, with people she cared about and who cared for her in return.

If she had to go through some extra tribulations to reach the happy ending Izumi promised was available to her, with or without this teenage crush, then she’d fight for it. In any case, Shouko put those thoughts aside for now as the sidekick returned with even more legal sheets to peruse. The sooner she got through these, the sooner they’d get to go on evening patrol, something she was decidedly looking forwards to.

(That probably wouldn’t be the case had she known exactly how tonight would go.)

Chapter End Notes

CONTENT WARNINGS

- Disordered eating
- Mentions of abuse
- Character being triggered/withholding anxiety attack

CONTENT WARNINGS END, CHAPTER SPOILERS BEGIN

Yeah, not my cleanest ending, but I didn't want to try and cram the Stain incident in here at the end and either A) rush it or B) have a chapter that took an extra five days to complete. So instead we just end on a weird note, haha.

Thank you so much for reading, don't forget about our Discord server (https://discord.gg/pRruQ3C), and please drop a kudos or comment if you enjoyed! See you soon!
deny, ignite, and close your eyes

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone!

I'm back with those good ol' fight scene nerves ;w; I'm extremely grateful for all the kind comments people gave me on the Sports Festival fight, but I feel like this fight came out a lot weaker than that one. I hope it's still enjoyable!

I don't have any special notes for now, so please enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The monster stands in the middle of the street, absorbing every blow the circling pro heroes try to hit it with. It shouldn’t be able to withstand the targeted attacks, not with a neck so ghoulishly thin that it shouldn’t even be able to contain vocal chords, but it’s full of surprises as it lets out an absolutely mortifying screech.

Yeah, Shouko kind of wishes she had gone with Edgeshot’s offer instead. Sapporo sounds a lot more fun than this place at the moment.

It had been a perfectly normal evening patrol, their route leading her father, his small pack of sidekicks, and herself into the densely packed downtown residential zone. Endeavor’s mere presence was enough to frighten most villains away (Shouko learned this from a starry-eyed sidekick that she wanted so badly to throttle after hearing Endeavor this, Endeavor that for an hour), so it was more of a preventative security measure than anything else. Her father handled the excited staring like a pro, face stone cold as he marched ahead without acknowledgement. All Shouko could do was hope that she stayed equally as emotionless as whispers pointed her out as both his daughter and the second-place Sports Festival victor. There were some strange noises in the distance which seemed to pique Endeavor’s interest, but the man didn’t react all that much until a building on the horizon burst into flames.

Things went to hell extremely quickly when the shrieking Noumu emerged abruptly from an alleyway, its enraged screams synching up with what sounded like many more amongst the city. Shouko had to cover her ears as explosions like firecrackers boomed- some close, some far, all terribly loud and painfully real. This was a real attack, and she tensed up, mind rolling into training mode as her father quickly directed her and some of the sidekicks to evacuate civilians, something she moved into with a trained diligence. She couldn’t fight yet, not without a license or if she was directly attacked, Shouko instead shouting out a warning that it could have regeneration abilities as she ushered a panicked group of middle schoolers out of the danger zone. She pointedly doesn’t react in fear as she feels the heat wave from one of her father’s attacks nearby. The speckles of ice that cling to the middle school boy’s uniform as she pulls him back are purely coincidental.

Battle is natural to her, but working from the sidelines is something she was trained to do as well—maybe the only thing that her father and Eraserhead have in common is the belief that you couldn’t be a pro with only one trick. Kneeling next to a middle aged salaryman with a cut across his forehead, Shouko runs through the basic first aid questions before popping open the capsules on her belt to get out the disinfectant. If the confused shouts of the sidekicks into their comms were anything to go by, it looks like this wasn’t the only Noumu in Hosu. Things looked like they were shaping up
as a full-blown attack, and Shouko figured this was the best way she could help considering how overwhelmed the paramedics were going to be- as long as she couldn’t use her Quirk to fight, anyways. As she moved the man’s glasses to clean the wound, the spectacles reminded her of a certain classmate in the same city. Despite her best efforts, dread pooled in her stomach as the memory of Tenya’s expression back at the train station haunted her. A man on a mission, dead set on something Shouko couldn’t quite pick out. That resigned look on his face… It still didn’t sit right with her. And now all this?

She could only hope he was okay.

Tenya isn’t okay, but that’s fine. He knows he deserves this.

He’s laying in the alleyway, his own death several feet ahead of him, and he didn’t think it was possible for paralysis to hurt. Tenya’s glasses lay shattered to his left, helmet lying beside them, and he would laugh if the pain wasn’t forcing him to just about bite through his tongue. His costume had been created to represent a legacy, the next generation of Ingenium that he would proudly carry on. But from where he is now, the broken bits and pieces of armor seem almost poetic- he went down so easily, so impulsively, and look where it’s got him. He didn’t deserve that title, that belonging to a proud generation of heroes. It was like Stain had said- he was a child, too young and blinded by revenge to understand the real burden of a legacy.

Speaking of Stain, the man finally speaks up for the first time since he’d forced Tenya’s body to go limp. His Quirk, presumably, but it’s not like that mattered at this point. He wasn’t Izumi (she tried to help you, she tried, why didn’t you listen?). “Foolish boy. Let it be known I’m not in the business of harming children, but it’s clear as day that you’ll grow to be another corrupted hero. Your heart is already blackened. I’ll just burn the problem out at the root with you.”

“I’ll… kill you…” Tenya chokes out, half-hearted as he finds himself resigned to this fate. He thinks of Tensei, lying in that hospital bed with a broken voice as he delivered the news that he’d never walk again. Tenya at least wishes he could say goodbye, apologize for failing the Iida name so disgracefully. Childish as it is, he wants to hug his brother one last time, something he knows he’ll never get to do as Stain unsheathes a katana from his back. He wants to tell Izumi he’s sorry, that she tried her best, that she’s a marvellous friend and an even better hero. He wants to talk to that boy in Class 1-B that made his heart flutter at least once, tall and enthusiastic with the flashy wind Quirk. He wants to tell Ochako she’s not a bad person for her motives, tell Shouko he’s so grateful to have met the real her, tell Tsuyu her calming presence was always a delight.

But he’s not going to get any of that, and just as well. Goodbyes were for true heroes, people that deserved them. He didn’t save Native, he ran in blind, and now he’s getting exactly what he deserves. In a way, it’s peaceful. He won’t have to face Tensei with shame in his eyes, worry about anything ever again. Tenya closes his eyes as Stain approaches, praying to whatever deity might be listening to his pathetic self that this is quick and painless. Footsteps stop, the air above him moves, and-

Something crunches, and it isn’t his flesh and cartilage as a blade rips through his skin- Tenya realizes he hasn’t been stabbed. His eyes open in confusion, blinking away tears. Green lightning crackles in front of him.

Stain gets up faster than Izumi had hoped. It was expected of a villain like him.

She’s panting, adrenaline rushing through her body along with the flowing energy of Full Cowl. Her punch had been strong enough that she’s certain the man must be missing some teeth, and unheroic
as it was to think, Izumi hopes that it hurts. Seeing him standing above Tenya like that, sword drawn, moving down-

Well. No time to think about the roaring mother bear in her chest whenever one of her friends is in danger. Izumi stands as tall as her diminutive form allows. She’s in her new costume, bodysuit still form-fitting and green, but now a dark olive tone that featured guards for her legs and arms. Power surged just under the fabric, controlled in a way that allows her to make this borrowed Quirk her own. If it wasn’t for Full Cowl, she’d never have made it off the train tracks ever since that Noumu came flying in. Even so, it was pure luck she’d made it- if she hadn’t stumbled upon Manual yelling for Tenya… No, she wasn’t going to think about that. Speaking of, the boy breaks the brief silence, voice hoarse and disbelieving. “... Izumi? How…?”

“On the news, they always said… The Hero Killer went after victims where there weren’t many people!” Taking up a fighting stance, Izumi narrows her eyes at Stain as he rises. “I figured… I’d find you somewhere like this alley.”

“Clever girl.” Stain stands tall, breeze blowing the scent of blood around the alleyway. Izumi almost gags at the metallic stench. “I can see why Shigaraki was interested in finding you.”

*Shiga- does he mean the League?!* Izumi bites her tongue, pushing that thought back and ignoring the murderer in favour of turning to Tenya. “Come on, we have to run back towards the main streets!”

“I can’t move at all.” The boy creaks out. “It’s his Quirk… When he cut me and got at my blood…”

A paralysis Quirk- something Izumi could have worked with had she not seen Native shoved to one side of the alleyway. Carrying Tenya was something she could manage thanks to all her training, but two people with the height and weight of grown men… She knows she can’t yet. Tenya speaks up again, and his words seem almost unbelievable: “Izumi, go… This isn’t about you! Get to safety!”

“You came to save your friend, but I have some bad news for you, little girl.” As Izumi’s eyes shoot back to Stain, her heart drops to her stomach- this man’s aura… she could almost feel it. This was a murderer with a heartless drive to take a life no matter the cost, and tonight? He wanted *her* friend. “One of us shall die tonight. And it will be the false hero sprawled behind you.”

Slowly, a hand snuck back behind her. Izumi reached, gloves fumbling for her phone. She’d left the class group chat open, and she’d have one shot at this. *Just keep him busy, don’t let him see!* “Hero Killer… How can you call Tenya a fake? He’s a stranger to you! How much can you really learn about a person in a few minutes?”

“I attacked me first.” Stain replies, and Izumi is cursing internally as she fights to get her password right when she’s not looking at the phone. “A true hero would have tried to save the injured pro, and yet he prioritized his petty revenge. He’s sullying the mantle like so many others.”

*Buzz, buzz, come on… There!* Izumi inhaled deeply as she felt around for the proper command, praying she was still in the class chat. “He’s just a kid! You were as young as us once- haven’t you changed since fifteen? You have no right saying he should die because he made a mistake!”

Tenya hisses behind her, and she hopes it’s only because of the pain. He’s wounded enough without her desperate stalling cutting as deep as the other injuries. Izumi wants to cry in relief as the tiny ‘ping’ confirms that she sent the group chat her location. It might be useless, but… she couldn’t take Stain by herself. She needed someone, anyone for backup! Shouko was in Hosu, she was their best bet, but who was in nearby Tokyo? Kacchan, Mineta, Yaoyorozu and Hagakure- could one of them make it in time? Would they even understand what she needed?
It was all she had. And so, her thin lifeline shot out to nineteen cell phones across the nation as Stain smirked. “Ideals do not change so simply. This one will only grow to plague the world like every other fake hero before him.”

“Izumi, please go!” Tenya cried out, voice uncharacteristically miserable. “This doesn’t have anything to do with you!”

She couldn’t explain why, but for some reason… that really pissed Izumi off. Was this the same Tenya who fought so ferociously at the Sports Festival, who saved everyone’s lives at the USJ, who laughed with them at lunch? Izumi spun her head back, all but glaring. “Tenya, are you serious?! If you think that this doesn’t involve me- doesn’t involve everyone - then what are you even training for?! We fight for each other, or we fight for nothing!”

Turning back to the Hero Killer, Izumi’s lips curved in a shaky smile- one she’d seen so many times on her mentor. “After all, isn’t meddling where we don’t have to what makes us heroes?”

Stain smirked back, and it took everything in Izumi’s power not to shirk away from the intensity of his gaze. What could he even be thinking…? In any case, the stakes were now too evident. Tenya was helpless, a pro was bordering on unconsciousness, and unless she got lucky? It was her and Stain. Not giving him time to respond, Izumi shot forward like a rocket, sliding between the Hero Killer’s legs and twisting behind him. He was used to fighting pros, not diminutive teenagers like her, and his slice missed. Sometimes, not even reach five feet tall had advantages. One of his knives came close enough to chop a lock of hair, and the girl grit her teeth as she flipped upwards, looking for a weak spot like they’d learned in class. **Up, over, let Full Cowl move with you!**

**His head, the top of his head!**

“Five percent... Detroit SMAAAAAASH!”

Several streets over, Shouko is aiding in crowd control when her phone buzzes. Who the hell is texting at a time like this? Grumbling as she manages to corral a group of teenagers back from the danger zone, Shouko fumbles with her phone in her pocket. It could be Fuyumi or Natsuo, worried, or maybe Kaminari fried his brain again and sent incomprehensible gibberish at the worst possible time. But for some reason, she was compelled to open it. The group chat icon should have made her put it right back in, but that compulsion…

**Izumi Midoriya :** [Has pinned their location.]

Some back alley in Hosu.

What… Was she doing there, precisely?

Something was wrong.

Calling out the location to the nearest sidekick and instructing him to tell Endeavor and any other pros to get over there as soon as they could, Shouko took off, ignoring the calls of her furious father. He could be pissed at her later- Izumi might be in danger, and the pros here had the situation as controlled as they could. The breeze and her speed whipped her hair behind her back, feet stomping on the pavement as her eyes scanned the street signs of the unfamiliar city, Shouko looking to and from her phone to ensure she was going in the right direction.
“DON’T!”

A scream of terror echoed from her left, and Shouko’s heart almost stopped. That was Izumi. Her legs moved before she could think, bolting towards the narrow alleyway, and-

Posed above a trembling Tenya was the Hero Killer, sword aimed to kill. Izumi was collapsed behind him, screaming for him to stop. Without thinking, Shouko shot out a potent blast of flame, fire causing Stain to curse and leap backwards and away from both students.

“Next time, be a little more clear with your instructions, Izumi.” Slamming a foot into the earth, Shouko allowed her power to fill the alleyway, ice lifting her friends and the nearly-unconscious pro out of danger and behind her. Now there was no interference between the Hero Killer and herself, Shouko raising an iced fist threateningly. “The pros know where we are, and they’re coming.”

“Tsk. Annoyance after annoyance with you kids. Endeavor’s girl, aren’t you?” Shouko grits her teeth but says nothing, Izumi’s yell pulling her back to the matter at hand.

“Shouko! Don’t let him cut you!” The girl yells frantically from where she’s sprawled on the ground. “He got me on the calf when I was sliding under him! I’m pretty sure he can paralyze you if he tastes your blood!”

“Then I’ll just stay at a distance.” Shouko tilts her head towards Stain, glowering, and is promptly cut across the cheek with a throwing knife that she never had the chance to see coming. What the-?

The sting is ignored as Shouko sees Stain coming towards her, and she fires up a pillar of ice in between them. She’d known this guy was good, but to think he was faster than her…!

Izumi’s voice cries out in a panic. “Above you!” Shouko’s eyes flicker up to see the spinning sword heading downwards. Why would he-

Despite how well-intentioned she was, Izumi’s warning gave the Hero Killer just enough time to grab her by the straps of her heater and yank her forwards. Shouko gasped as a disgustingly long tongue snuck out, foul metallic breath reeking until the heat of flames erupting over her face pushed him back. That… That was too close.

“Please!” Tenya cries out, sounding broken beyond belief. “Please, I can’t watch this! Both of you… This is my battle! In the name of Ingenium… For the life he ruined, I need him dead by my hands!”

“Oh, you’re Ingenium now?” Shouko snarls, bringing up a massive ice wall to block Stain off for just a moment as she casts her gaze back at Tenya. “The Ingenium I knew never had that kind of look on his face!”

“Blocking off your view of an opponent faster than you?” There’s a slash as Stain breaks through her barrier, shooting forwards. “Rookie mistake!”

Arm lighting up in flame, Shouko grits her teeth. “Come and get me if you’re so- gyah!” The pain is sharp and sudden, and the mismatched girl widens her eyes as she realizes what’s happened- two throwing knives are deeply embedded directly in her left arm. It’s horrible, agony piercing up through her limbs, and she stumbles despite herself. Stabbing is a new type of pain, one that sends shockwaves through her arm whenever she moves it, and Shouko’s eyes widen as the pain finally subsides enough to see Stain above her, katana in hand, flying down-!

Izumi is in the air, grabbing Stain by the shoulder and dragging him across the side of the building. Windows shatter, rubble falls- was this the technique she’d mentioned?! Shouko is crying out before she can stop herself, casting a small wave of ice to protect the still-idle Native and Tenya from debris.
“Izumi!”

“I can move now!” The green haired girl yells, teeth bared. “Native, Tenya! Can you get up?”

“I can’t move a damn muscle.” The pro groans, barely conscious. Shouko scolds herself for not noticing how bad his injuries were at first- then again, it’s not like she’d have much time for first aid with a villain in sight. “She went down last, but she’s the first one up…”

The mystery as to why that is gets pushed aside as Stain sends the blunt handle of his katana into Izumi’s solar plexus, the girl wheezing and losing her grip as she tumbles to the ground. Stain lands on his feet, and Izumi scrambles to get out of the way as Shouko yells out in warning. “Izumi, dodge!” A wave of ice is sent out where the other girl was just standing, jagged and angry, providing a brief barrier as Izumi scuttles towards Shouko. “That’ll buy us a minute while he cuts through it. Why could you break out first?”

“I have no idea…” Izumi gets to her feet, eyes darting from Shouko to Native and Tenya. “Can you carry one of them?”

“Not like this.” Shouko lifts her left arm, hissing in pain as blood drips from where the knives are embedded. She’s running purely on adrenaline here, and has to resist the urge to make a stupid medical decision and pull them out. “We have to figure out his Quirk to fight him. Does it get weaker the more people it’s used on?”

The ice rumbles, and Izumi gulps. “That doesn’t explain why I got out first. Maybe it doesn’t work as well on women, or maybe it’s something else. Blood type, maybe?”

“I’m blood type B, if that’s it.” Native offers as well as his strained voice allows him.

Tenya, meanwhile, is quiet as he speaks. “I’m type A…”

The silence is shattered as Stain finally breaks through, Shouko instinctively leaping in front of the three and creating a small barrier. It’s down in a second, but it protected them from the shards now surrounding the Hero Killer, who looks pleased as punch. “Smart kids. You figured it out.”

“Dammit…” Izumi bites her lip, crouching into position as she prepares to launch off if needed. “He’s so fast, he can even dodge your attacks, Shouko. You’re basically unguarded here.”

“Then all we can do is hold him off, avoid getting too close, and wait for the pros. They’re going to be here any minute now.” Shouko holds out her uninjured arm, feeling ice dance around her skin as it prepares to be released.

Nodding, those brightly coloured lines glow over Izumi’s skin as the girl crackles with lightning. “I know it’s risky, but I can distract him while you support me from the rear. We need to protect these two!”

“Got it.” Shouko tenses in preparation for battle as a feeble voice cries out behind her.

“No… The two of you…” Tenya looks miserable, eyes quivering as if he’s going to weep at any moment. “You can’t do this… for some fool like me! Run away, goddammit!”

“Stain’s moving in! Shouko, ice!” Izumi looks like she wants to hang back, plead with Tenya to just quit this, but their lives are on the line. The green haired girl darts in, electricity crackling as she swings at Stain’s head, missing by a hair’s breadth. Shouko shoots forwards a thin pillar of ice that knocks the knife from the Hero Killer’s hand, giving her friend time to back away.
It’s up to Shouko. Tenya’s a mess— they don’t know how long Stain’s time limit is on his blood type, and for all she knows, the boy could get up now and just cannot will himself to. She’s seen the face of broken children, accepting terrible fates with shame burning them up from the inside out, and Tenya is long past that point. He’s the smoldering embers left after everything has been burnt away (why is she thinking of Touya? What has she forgotten?), helpless and feeling like his world is ending. Shouko is not Izumi. She is not nearly as perfect, kind, loving, nowhere near the hero the other girl is. But she knows what it means to be saved, knows the freedom and joy that can emerge once you learn to let go. Tenya Iida does not deserve to die.

How does Izumi do it? How would the girl Shouko is currently supporting with a protective ice barrier do this? There’s no calculation in Izumi’s moves— she speaks from the heart, something Shouko has only recently learned to melt. She has to try. Tilting her head to Tenya, the mismatched girl grits her teeth. “Tenya, I need you to listen to me! Do you know who my father is?”

Tenya truly is on the brink of tears, though he looks up in confusion. “... Endeavor?”

“He’s a child-beating son of a bitch.” Shouko continues going despite the scandalized look on Tenya’s face. “He forced my mother into marriage for her Quirk and used her like an incubator until I popped out. I’m a tool to him, something made so he can live vicariously through me. My other siblings are either gone, miserable, or mentally ill all because of that man. He’s trying to set me up in a Quirk Marriage! I never used my fire until the Sports Festival because I didn’t want to be like him!”

Understandably, Tenya looks… well, ‘shocked’ doesn’t seem strong enough for the expression on his face. ‘Horrified’ and ‘revolted’, maybe. Shouko takes the opportunity to aim a burst of fire at Stain, forcing him to retreat as Izumi attempts to corner him. Even so, she’s speaking, a mess of pain and adrenaline and let me save you like she saved me. “And you know what? Izumi showed me it was my Quirk, not his! I was so dead-set on revenge that I risked destroying my entire career, hampering my chances to save people by becoming a pro! Do you understand, Tenya? I’ll never forgive my father for what he did to me. You should never forgive Stain! But if you want to be a hero, to be Ingenium? You can’t afford to lose yourself to hate! If you want to make your brother proud, then you had better stand up! Become the hero you want to be!”

There’s a moment where neither Izumi or Shouko can react in time, and Izumi gasps as Stain manages a cut across her leg. The bicoloured girl uses her fire to push him back, but he’s not following up on Izumi like she predicted— why? His tongue licks his blade, and the green haired girl cries out as she collapses against the wall, paralyzed, and all the while, the Hero Killer is running for Shouko. Her arm lights up, but he’s fast, too fast, and a blade barely misses her torso and slides next to her armpit. This is it, Shouko realizes with a strange calm, the final attack she can’t dodge. She’s either going to die or lose her arm here, and it feels like the world stopped spinning for a moment as the blade gets closer, closer—

Tenya screams, and Shouko’s hair is pushed forward in a burst of hot air as the boy’s engines roar, kicking down at Stain’s weapon with a crack. The sword snaps, and it buys Shouko just enough time to leap backwards. She almost died, the more rational part of her brain realizes in horror, but she shoves that back in favour of looking at the panting Tenya. He’s shaking, no doubt still suffering from some residual effects of Stain’s Quirk, but he’s on his feet. “Tenya, are you alright?”

“Tenya!” Izumi cries out in joy even as she’s limp on the ground, fallen like a ragdoll. “You’re up!”

“Both of you... Thank you.” Tenya speaks between gasps of air. “Todoroki... You were right. I have no right to call myself a hero now that I’ve dragged you both into this, but... I have to start becoming worthy of the title! Neither of you will! You will shed any more blood on my behalf!”

“Hmph.” The Hero Killer pulls another knife from his arsenal, examining the two teens still standing
as they take up fighting positions. “A person’s ideals don’t change in just a few minutes. You’ll never be anything but a fraud defiling the name of heroism.”

“Want to bet on that?” Shouko chuckles humorlessly. “Don’t listen to this fundamentalist murderer, Tenya.”

The boy grimaces, and Shouko and Izumi’s eyes both widen in tandem as red drips down his white armour. His shoulder… The knife must have been dislodged when she wasn’t looking. “No, he’s right. I’m no hero right now… Maybe I never will be. But Ingenium’s name does not die here!”

“Pathetic!” Stain rasps, leaping at the two. Jumping out in front of the more injured boy protectively, Shouko lights up in flame, forcing the Hero Killer back. Looking at her own arm now, she notices the bleeding increasing- Tenya wasn’t the only one who somehow lost the weapon they were stabbed with. They must have fallen earlier, Shouko too focused on keeping Izumi safe to notice.

“The pros are coming! We just need to hold him off!” She parrots her earlier statement despite how everyone seems to be aware of that- Stain included. He’s getting faster, more desperate, and he knows he’s on a time limit. Shouko is circling to keep him away from Tenya and Native, but she can’t hold this pace for much longer.

“Shouko!” Tenya yells as she briefly knocks the Hero Killer back. “My engines are shot- I need you to freeze my calf without plugging the exhaust! Can you regulate it that closely?”

The bicoloured girl is in the middle of nodding when Izumi screams in warning, a silver blur heading her way. Shouko almost gasps as Tenya leaps in front of her, arm stuck out- the arm that now had the knife previously heading for her face sticking out of it. He’d taken the hit for her, and Shouko barely manages to summon the fire needed to keep Stain back from the boy now collapsed to the ground. “Tenya! I can, but—”

“Just do it!” He shouts, wildfire in his eyes as he looks at Shouko. The blade looked deep enough to pin his arm to the ground, Shouko realizes in muted horror- it would have killed her without a doubt. *You said you don’t want us to bleed on your behalf, but that level of sacrifice…*

She has no time to think, crouching and carefully icing his leg while avoiding the exhaust. There’s a noise behind her, and Shouko barely manages to summon the fire needed to keep Stain back from the boy now collapsed to the ground. “Tenya! I can, but—”

There is a lot of heat in Shouko’s life. Historically, it has never been good- something she’s always associated with pain and suffering. But as Tenya propels himself upwards, flames hot enough to burn blue pass by her head as his engines roar out, she realizes that she may have just associated the feeling with the wrong hero. Izumi is up, Quirk overtaking her body as the two leap together while Shouko watches from the ground. Despite herself, she finds a smile creeping onto her face as their victory comes closer, whispering despite the roar of clashing Quirks filling the alley. “Go get him, you two.”

They swing an arm awash with power, a leg with the momentum of a truck, and it’s over.

The chaos was winding down when Izumi noticed it.

It took her a minute to see what was off. She was wounded, but not nearly as badly as the other three, all of whom were being attended to by the pros until paramedics could arrive. Stain was unconscious and being guarded by multiple heroes, but that didn’t stop Izumi’s gaze from constantly
flickering anxiously to the man who had just tried to kill them. As her adrenaline levels gradually return to normal, she has enough time to acknowledge that that was terrifying. Do most high schoolers almost get murdered twice within three months of their first year?! They didn’t mention that in orientation!

But in all seriousness, Tenya was off. Not like before, thank god- it looks like he had finally released his rage, let himself mourn the loss of his brother’s career properly. But he looked still wore a cold anger, stern features pulled tight as he sits almost protectively close next to Shouko. There was a brief pang of jealousy that she quickly pushed aside to focus on Tenya’s face instead. His angry gaze was pointed at the hero currently questioning them- Endeavor.

That… Wasn’t like Tenya at all. He had nothing but the utmost respect for pro heroes, and while Izumi could hardly keep up the facade of politeness given what she knew about the Flame Hero, Tenya would have no knowledge of the man’s crimes… Would he? Shouko was shouting something at him back while Izumi was trying to hold Stain off, and whatever it was seemed to be the only reason Tenya was able to get off the ground. Given the Sports Festival incident, Izumi was well aware that her mismatched friend had a habit of dumping a lot of her history on people at once. Could she have said something about that? Was Tenya just in a foul mood? Was Izumi overthinking this?

Her thought process was rudely interrupted as a winged Noumu snatched her by the costume.

The attacks on Hosu had been so vast that the hospitals were totally overwhelmed. The only reason the three students weren’t lying on gurneys in the hallway with the other mildly-injured was their deep involvement with both the Hero Killer and the Noumu that almost carried Izumi away, ensuring the trio got a room to themselves. It did mean that hospital policy was broken by rooming the mixed-gender group, but that was frankly the last thing any of them cared about at the moment.

It was the day after the attacks, and the three friends had finished their cruddy hospital breakfasts. They’d all been treated for the time being, though Shouko had currently stepped out to take a call from her older sister (apparently she and their brother were stopping by later, which was nice! Izumi had wanted to meet them for a while), leaving just Izumi and Tenya in the room alone. Where the two would normally be chattering enthusiastically about something or other, there was a pointed silence- Tenya’s pensive face hadn’t changed at all since yesterday. Izumi finally decided she’d been quietly playing with her hair for too long, speaking up gently. “Hey, Tenya? How are you holding up?”

“As well as I can, really.” He nodded politely, though his eyes were still looking as if he wanted to say something more. “… Izumi, I’m about to ask a very serious question.”

Well, if that wasn’t the most anxiety-inducing thing someone could say to her. And Izumi hadn’t even taken her Lorazepam today- it was still at Gran Torino’s with all her other personal effects, and she had to breathe deeply to avoid going into an anxiety spiral over a simple statement. “U-Um, go ahead.”

“What do you know about Shouko’s family?”

Izumi’s heart thumped, and her mind flashed back to a Sports Festival hall whose walls now held onto tales too terrible to name. “… I know enough.”

Tenya looked down at the floor, foot toying with the slippers just beside his bed. “We need to tell the police.”
“Um, Aizawa knows.” As the boy looked at her in confusion, Izumi quickly followed up. “I’ve known since the Sports Festival. She told me about her dad and… Well, everything.”

The dark-haired student blinked in surprise before sighing, settling back into his bed. “And has he done anything?”

“He has!” Izumi quickly responds. “Um, he’s trying to? It’s really complicated, so he can’t act quickly.”

“That’s not really enough considering how serious everything she told me was.”

“But if we called the cops directly, how do you think Shouko would react?

“What am I reacting to?”

Izumi and Tenya startle in perfect synchronization as their heads swivel towards the door. Shouko is standing there, cell phone in hand, looking moderately confused. Izumi coughs awkwardly as she replies. “Oh, Shouko! Um, it’s nothing!”

“It didn’t sound like nothing from how serious that tone was.” Shouko cocks her head, narrowing her eyes slightly.

“… We’re discussing calling the police in regards to what you told me about your father.” Tenya finally speaks, and Shouko’s eyes go from narrowed to dinner plates in a millisecond. Before Izumi can get a word in, Shouko is vehemently shaking her head.

“My father has silenced the police once before, and he could do it again. Absolutely not.”

Izumi finally cuts in, shaking her arms wildly in front of her. “W-We weren’t gonna call the cops! We just… it’s serious, so-”

“I told both of you what I did because you needed to hear it.” Shouko speaks firmly, crossing her arms. “I don’t mean to sound harsh, but now I need you to hear something else: if you tell anyone about what I told you in confidence, our friendship is over. The last thing what family I have left needs is for everything we’ve gone through to be publicized and torn apart by Endeavor’s fans. Okay?”

… Izumi’s heart dropped as she thought of Aizawa. Thought of the explicit testimony from her he had recorded. Did she screw up…?

It was a few hours from the tense conversation regarding confidentiality (Shouko was fairly sure neither of them had told a soul, thankfully), and she felt like the atmosphere had improved considerably since then. They’d gotten their personal items from their internships dropped off, and very few things helped the mood like watching a scandalized Iida react to the game of Cards Against Humanity that Izumi surprisingly had in her suitcase (Shouko thought he was actually going to have a stroke when he heard Izumi ‘Pure As A Kitten’ Midoriya read a particularly interesting card about the female body and odours). Shouko didn’t get half of the references, but their respective grins and dropped jaws were enough to let her forget the earlier conversation for a bit. In fact, she was caught up enough in trying to figure out what a ‘dank weed’ was or why Iida was embarrassed to say it that she forgot her siblings would be visiting until the door slid open.

“Shouko!” Fuyumi was the first in, hurrying across the room and enfolding her sister in a tight hug,
careful not to disturb her bandaged forearm. “I was so worried when I saw the news!”

“Don’t embarrass the kid in front of her friends, Nee-san!” A chuckling Natsuo followed suit, delicately balancing a variety of McDonalds bags in his arms. “Anyways, guess what’s better than hospital food!”

“Oh, you must be Fuyumi and Natsuo!” Tenya bowed as deeply as his arms would allow him to, cheeks still flushed from the game. “My name is Tenya Iida! It’s a pleasure to meet you!”

“Izumi Midoriya!” Izumi beamed. “Nice to meet you!”

Natsuo’s smile looked almost catlike as he set the food down, casting his waggling eyebrows at Shouko as Fuyumi released her. “Midoriya and Iida, huh? Great to meetcha in person!”

Rolling her eyes, Shouko nonetheless was drawn to the food. “Is that for us?”

“No, we brought three bags of McDonalds so you can watch us eat it.” Natsuo teased. “Of course it’s for you guys, Shouko-lat.”

“Shouko-lat?” Izumi cocked her head. The sound of the cozy nickname coming out of her crush’s mouth was a direct hit to Shouko’s heart, and she instantly felt the familiar heat that meant she’d briefly set her head on fire. She extinguished it to the noise of Natsuo’s laughter and everyone else’s confused squawking as she attempted to get herself together.

“Did you just tell me not to embarass her and then go and pull that? Seriously!” Fuyumi gently knocked Natsuo on the side of the head (the boy dramatically leaning back like he’d been shot) before turning to the group with a smile. “Anyways, are you three feeling alright? Yesterday must have been so frightening!”

Tenya nods on behalf of the group. “I think we’re as well as we can be given the situation.”

“That’s such a relief.” Fuyumi smiles softly, pulling out one of the chairs from the table near the front of the room before pausing and making a small squeaking noise as she pushed it back in. “Ah, I’m sorry! I’m being presumptuous, we won’t hang around and bother you three too much. We just wanted to see Shouko and drop off some food- we all know how hospitals are.”

“O-Oh, you don’t have to leave!” Izumi speaks up. “You must have come a long way from Musutafu, right?”

“You guys can stay.” Shouko nods, secretly delighted to have almost all of her favourite people in the same room. It was… Safe. Cozy. “Company might be nice.”

Tenya looks relieved beyond belief. “Please do! This game needs a responsible adult to put it to a halt!”

“Game?” Natsuo steps forth to their set-up (they’d pushed their beds together in the center of the room to facilitate a comfortable place to play cards), plucking a card off the bed and slowly breaking into a grin. “Filling every orifice with butterscotch pudding’. Nee-san, you ever played Cards Against Humanity?”

They’d played for hours, Iida and Fuyumi eventually relaxing enough to read most of the cards (though Shouko could go without ever hearing Izumi talk about smoking crack ever again). When time came for their visit to end, Shouko followed them out as far as she could go, which in this ward meant the large double doors before the staircase. “Thank you for coming.”
“No problem! Thanks for hosting us!” Natsuo beams brightly. “That Midoriya girl does have short nails, by the way. I checked for you.”

Fuyumi blinked in confusion as Shouko flicked her brother on the forehead before deciding to leave that one where it laid, smiling placidly throughout the minor chaos. “I’m glad we got to see you today. I was so scared getting the phone call from the hospital… They wouldn’t tell us how you were for hours! I was worried that… Well, you know. Please be more careful for your big sis, okay?”

Shrugging as she finishes scuffling with Natsuo, Shouko flips her hair over one shoulder. “I wouldn’t be a very good hero if I didn’t take risks to help.”

“You’re not a hero yet, you’re a kid, okay?” Fuyumi reached up to pat her sister’s head. “We both love you so much, Shouko. Promise you’ll stay safe?”

Shouko had a hard time guaranteeing that, but for now, it was best to just nod along. “I will.”

A creaking noise from behind the siblings indicated that the door was opening. Stepping out of the way in anticipation, Natsuo looked over at his little sister with a smile. “Anyways, we should… Shouko?”

Neither of the siblings would understand why she froze up so suddenly, staring ahead with eyes like a deer in the headlights, not even when they turned around to see the charming-looking blue haired man with slightly iridescent skin. His business casual attire and large bouquet of white lilies wouldn’t indicate anything past an average visitor if not for the way he smiled too pleasantly at their baby sister. “Shouko, hello. I was just going to your room. Special delivery!”

“… Hello, Ondo.” Shouko is tense, completely stunned. Why was this creep here…? Fuyumi and Natsuo recognize the name, and both of them visibly bristle in anger. The temperature drops as Fuyumi’s jaw clenches, and Natsu’s cheerful gaze turns dark as his fists clench.

The eldest Todoroki daughter speaks next, no forced politeness in her voice. “What are you doing here?”

“Ah! You must be Natsuo and Fuyumi? Hideomi Ondo- pleasure to meet you. Mister Todoroki gave me your hospital room when I learned what had happened and asked his permission to pay you a visit. I just came to give Shouko my condolences and a gift.” Ondo smiles as if nothing is wrong, though Shouko can see the smug satisfaction in his eyes as he moves past Natsuo, her brother glaring helplessly as the bouquet is handed off. “As stunning as always, Shouko. I was so concerned to hear you were attacked.”

“Thank you.” Shouko awkwardly accepts the flowers, teeth grinding as she remembers she’s forced to be nice to this man, lest she draw Endeavor’s ire.

“Visiting hours are almost up. Her roommates are tired, too- maybe you should go.” Natsuo’s voice carries a warning, and Ondo chuckles all-too-kindly.

“Of course, of course. I was just dropping off a gift for her. Protective big brother, I take it?” He puts his hand on Natsuo’s shoulder like they’re old friends, and Natsuo’s lip curves in a small snarl. “Don’t you worry. I’ll treat her right.”

Fuyumi is still dropping the temperature whether she knows it or not, and her grip on her purse is so tight that her knuckles are turning white as she hisses out a warning, voice tinged with the protective rage Shouko had only ever seen on parents. “Don’t push your luck.”
Ondo smiles brightly, chuckling again. “Haha, I’m not sure what you mean. In any case, I should be out.” He turns to face Shouko, who has been trying not to bite through her lip in stress because Ondo and Izumi are in the same building, two parts of her life that were never meant to meet. “Shouko, seeing your face made my day. I eagerly anticipate our next meeting.”

“Thank you.” Shouko repeats herself, trying to forget the phantom touch of a hand on her thigh as Ondo drops to one knee, kissing her hand that he gently pulls from the bouquet. She wants to bring it back to slap him, but holds back as he smiles sweetly at all of them and makes his leave.

The second he’s out the door, Natsuo growls, turning and fumbling for something in his pocket. Fuyumi speaks then, voice sounding angry and tired. “Natsuo, I don’t care if you’re stressed, don’t smoke in here.”

“I’m not looking for my cigs, I’m looking for my keys.” Natsuo’s voice is just as angry, his teeth barred. “I’m gonna run out there and key that motherfucker’s car.”

“Don’t.” Shouko can’t believe how exhausted she sounds, and some of the anger melts off her siblings’ faces as they turn to look at her in worry. “Just… I had a good day. Can we just pretend this didn’t happen?”


Fuyumi slowly tugs on his jacket sleeve. “... She’s right, Natsuo. Can’t we keep today nice…?”

“Pretend, pretend, pretend. Is that all we do?” Bringing up his hands, Natsuo runs them down his face, stretching his skin as he takes a deep breath. “… Fine. But I won’t forget that smug jackass.”

“I won’t either. It’ll work out in time.” Shouko doesn’t believe herself as she moves to throw the bouquet in the nearest trash can. “… I’ll see you tomorrow, Onee-san. I’ll text you, Onii-san.”

Even if the temperature around them is returning to normal as Fuyumi calms down, Shouko notes that the tension in the hall matches the feeling in the room earlier when she’d shut down Tenya’s desire to tell the police- nobody was happy, just resigned to something they knew they couldn’t change.

(A feeling the three in the hall knew oh-so-well.)

Chapter End Notes

CONTENT WARNINGS

- Canon-typical violence
- Mentions of abuse
- Some slightly NSFW dialogue

CONTENT WARNINGS END, SPOILERS BELOW

Yay, Stain fight! And now Iida's in the know as well- he's one of my favourites, and I
hope I do him justice when I write. Also, Iida/Yoarashi is my favourite rarepair, so that may be a minor ship at some point now that Yoarashi is at UA.

I want to quickly note that the next update might take longer than usual- just some real life issues popping up. Thank you so much for reading, don't hesitate to join us over on Discord (https://discord.gg/pRruQ3C), and have a great day! I'll see you soon!
like real people do

Chapter Notes

Hello hello!

So I want to quickly say that THERE ARE MULTIPLE HUGE CONTENT WARNINGS FOR THIS CHAPTER! You can find them in the end notes; please PLEASE check them out if something that upsets you risks showing up in a fic like this! Sorry, just needed this out of the way.

I'm back and taking tons of liberties with canon, whoo! This is very much a 'cool-down' chapter before we start the exams arc, so it's focused more on exploring characters and developing some side plots. I hope that's something you enjoy! Anyways, on we go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Exactly what Shouta needed right now: more paperwork!

If he wasn’t so relieved to hear that Iida, Midoriya and Todoroki were safe, he might have gone down to Hosu himself and knocked their heads together. Even if the story of their fight against the Hero Killer was being covered up, Endeavor getting credit for the rescue of three students and a pro, he’d been informed that Iida had tracked down Stain, Midoriya and Todoroki coming to the rescue. The recklessness in these kids… Well, he’d add some extra lessons on heroic law into the semester. It was clearly needed.

But for now, he was here, shifting through the necessary paperwork that comes with kids encountering and illegally defeating a serial killer. This would be easier if he was at home—despite Shouta’s class being out on their internships, he was still required to show up and work from the staff room. At home, he could be wearing his pajamas and have his cats nestled up in his lap while he worked. Here, he had his hero suit on and all the chaos of the UA faculty room. Shouta groaned, laying his head down on his desk in exhaustion.

“Somebody need a nap?”

The drumming of pointed nails on his shoulder would have indicated exactly who that was, even if her voice didn’t. Shouta sighed, not moving. “Hello, Nemuri.”

Laughing, the woman sat down on Hizashi’s empty desk (the man had a General Studies class this year, meaning he was still teaching) as Shouta slowly raised his head. “I heard three of yours got into some hot water in Hosu. I take that you’re having fun with all that paperwork.”

“Oh, I’m just thrilled.” Shouta deadpanned. “Why are you here?”

“I can’t come by just to talk to my favourite grumpy pants?” Nemuri grinned, though it quickly faded into more of a subdued, sympathetic smile. “But I do have a reason. We may need to step outside.”

That was unusual. Nemuri rarely had a problem shouting whatever was on her mind no matter the appropriateness of their location. Shouta moved his eyes around the room where a few other teachers were at their desks, minding their own business. Whatever Nemuri had to tell him must have been
Alright. Make it quick, I’ve got work to do.”

Nemuri nodded at him, the two pros getting up and exiting the room, standing just outside the door. The woman, though still smiling lightly, had an aura of concern about her. Whatever Nemuri had to share was clearly something she was unsure about. “Now, this could be nothing, but I felt I should report it anyways. It’s about one of your students?”

For god’s sake, what did one of those idiots do now? “Which student?”

“Shouko Todoroki.” Nemuri sighed, and Shouta felt his concern levels rising. ‘I’ll be honest, I’ve been a bit concerned about her ever since that incident just after the USJ. I know her mother’s not in the picture, and she’s clearly lacking a female role model in her life to teach her about women’s health. Doesn’t she have an older sister?”

“She does, but I have a hunch they didn’t grow up close.” It wasn’t a hunch- Midoriya had reported on how the Todoroki daughters were often forcibly separated growing up- but it was what he’d call it for now.

Nemuri pursed her lips, nodding. “I see. But that’s not what I’m here to discuss, really. Shouta, you know about… all that from our first year.”

Did he ever. Guilt rose in Shouta’s stomach as he nodded. “I remember.” There’s a long pause. He knows they’re both recalling it.

He knew Nemuri before he knew even Hizashi- they’d both started off in General Studies, their Quirks inefficient against giant robots. She’d been quieter then, a lot more subdued, and the two of them naturally found themselves together a lot thanks to his equally introverted attitude. Shouta noticed some of her stranger mannerisms- the way she always seemed to have a raspy voice, apparently from constant sore throats, how she would shirk away from being touched, the persistent stomach aches- but hadn’t connected them until they both made the podium in their first Sports Festival and were transferred to the Hero Course come summer. That’s when things got worse- Nemuri’s grades dropped, the girls whispered that she changed in the bathroom stalls, and she’d look for excuses to get out of the hero training she’d worked so hard to be able to partake in. She wouldn’t talk to him or their newly found third friend Hizashi about much, isolating herself and spending entire classes staring at a blank sheet of paper.

He was concerned- she was his friend, after all- but Nemuri didn’t seem like she would budge. But it wasn’t until their December training trip where she finally broke down on the balcony of her hotel room, snow falling as Shouta vaulted over the gap between their rooms to try and comfort her. He heard the story of a father dead since toddlerhood, a mother remarrying when her daughter was in middle school, of a new stepfather that grabbed and felt and did things that still made Shouta queasy to think about today. Victimizing anyone like that, much less a child? He would never understand those who preyed on children, and he never wanted to. Nemuri had begged him not to tell, going so far as to say she’d die if anyone found out, and Shouta, in all his youthful ignorance, hesitantly promised. Maybe she really did have it under control like she claimed. Maybe Nemuri would find a way out, and all he had to do was be a good friend. Wasn’t listening to her wants the heroic thing in this situation? He wanted to help, not betray, and so when their teacher asked him if he knew what was causing Nemuri’s decline, he said nothing. He was silent.

In early March of their first year, Nemuri Kayama lept off her apartment building. Shouta knows she still has ankle braces built into her hero costume after she shattered most of the bones in her legs. Shouta had learned the price of staying silent when he looked at his friend unconscious in a hospital
bed. Nemuri’s stepfather had been arrested, her mother charged with knowingly endangering a minor, and the girl was put into foster care. She blossomed- support brought her back to life, revealed a teasing and happy Nemuri Shouta had never properly met, created a girl full of life and joy who chose her heroic persona in her third year as a way of reclaiming the sexuality that was once someone else’s. She was Midnight, confident and mature and a survivor. But even so… It took ages for the guilt to start lessening- no matter how much Nemuri swore it wasn’t his fault, no matter how many times Hizashi worked him through anxiety attacks over it, guilt remained a part of his life for years. Even now, when he knew he was a kid who didn’t know any better… In any case, Shouta didn’t work three jobs dedicated to helping others just for fun. Maybe some part of him was still repenting for failing to save someone who was right in front of him.

Nemuri finally breaks the long silence. “... Well, maybe I’m paranoid because of my own experiences. But Todoroki seems like something’s wrong at home.”

Shouta had figured he would end up telling Nemuri eventually. They were friends, after all, and she would want to help in any way she could. Sighing, Shouta pokes his head back into the staff room. Three minutes until twelve. “... How about we grab lunch off campus? I have some news I think you need to hear.”

Nemuri inhaled deeply, removing the hand from her forehead and sliding her elbows off the oak table. The two had settled on lunch at a little restaurant just off campus, one that saw staff and students enough that two pros in full costume didn’t even raise eyebrows. Here, Shouta had quietly recounted everything he knew about Todoroki’s situation to the Eighteen Plus Hero, the woman’s eyes growing softer and softer with each new horrible revelation. “I had suspected abuse, but to think it’s been this bad… How did nobody notice this with the other children? Didn’t Endeavor’s older kids all attend UA?”

“Well, the oldest son’s been AWOL for years, which is concerning. We weren’t here for the oldest daughter, but I couldn’t find any reports of abuse for her, and Hizashi taught the younger son. He just said he seemed like a nice, quiet kid.” Shouta sighed, poking at his curry rice. This had soured his appetite. “I didn’t mean to leave you out of the loop. I’m just trying to keep this as quiet as I can until I can move in with a legal team.”

“It’s fine, that’s a fair reason.” Nemuri took a small bite of her ramen, not looking overly hungry either. “Those poor kids… Please don’t tell me there’s any sign of sexual abuse?”

Shouta shook his head. “No. Not including the arranged marriage, it doesn’t appear to be like your situation was.” He watched Nemuri’s shoulders fall in relief, the woman exhaling deeply.

“Thank god for small miracles. Does Todoroki know you’re working on it?” She brushed a piece of hair away from her face, her mask pushed back as she ate.

“She doesn’t know that I’m aware at all. Midoriya had to obtain her evidence without consent or knowledge, and Todoroki doesn’t want anyone else to find out.”

Nemuri made a humming noise. “If she doesn’t know you’re working on a case, I suppose I can’t offer any direct support or guidance. You’re a social worker- do you have any advice on what I could do to help her in this situation? I just… Maybe being a hero made me the type of woman who meddles where I’m not needed, but I can’t leave this alone.”

That was the side of Nemuri that those who just knew her as Midnight never got to see- the caring, sweet side under the leotard and leather jacket, the woman that became a hero because she knew the taste of suffering all too well, wanted to save people because of it. Underneath all her showboating
and her flashy public persona (he rolled his eyes upon hearing that she and Mount Lady had faked a catfight on TV for all the publicity), she had a very good heart. “Don’t go directly to her, talk to all the girls at once. You’re one of the only female pros on staff- let them know they can come to you if they need guidance or have concerns. God knows one brat keeps giving them trouble.”

“Is it bad that I know exactly who you’re talking about?” Nemuri rolled her eyes as Shouta nodded grimly.

“He has potential, and I think he could conceivably get over himself and become an excellent pro. But considering how unsafe he makes the female students feel, I’m not sure how much longer he has to change before the cons outweigh that. I’ve already looked into expulsion, though, and until he does something physical, there’s very little the board is going to let me do.” Mineta was… A lot to handle. For all of Bakugou’s nonsense, at least the explosive boy never tried peeking up skirts.

Shouta was losing hope with him more and more every day. “But in any case, make sure Todoroki knows you’re there to support her by making sure everyone knows. This is a difficult situation, but I’m sure you can reach out to her. You’re good with people.”

“... Thank you. I hope I can help her.” Nemuri’s smile looked genuinely touched before it became a bit playful. “Ooh? Are you hitting on me, Shouta?”

Rolling his eyes, Shouta leaned across the table to flick her on the forehead. He was fairly sure this exact situation had occurred over a cafeteria table back in high school. “The ring on my finger says otherwise.”

“You loooove me!”

“Eat your damn ramen.”

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Ever since Hosu, things had calmed down a lot. Sure, there was the buzz around the classroom when it was revealed that Izumi, Shouko and Tenya were attacked by the Hero Killer (and Izumi noticed both of her friends tense up whenever someone mentioned how Endeavor had ‘beaten the Hero Killer and saved them’, the cover story being infuriatingly wrong!), but things had gone back to normal for the most part. It was two days since returning from their internships, and Recovery Girl had finally fully healed all three of their injuries, which meant returning to hero training! Izumi laughed along with the other girls as they all entered the changeroom after an exhilarating stealth lesson, sweaty and pleased with their progress.

“- Then I was like ‘pow!’ and whacked Sero right in the face!” Mina swung her arms around, mimicking a punch. “I had him down in one good slugger!”

Yaoyorozu chuckled from slightly behind the group, wiping sweat off her brow. “We all saw, Ashido. He was your teammate.”

“Well, he scared me coming around the corner! And it was a good hit anyways!”

Laughing, Izumi made her way to her locker, smiling as Shouko slid in next to her to get at her own uniform. “Wasn’t that exercise amazing, Shouko? You’re really good at stealth!”

The girl nodded, opening her locker and taking out her skirt. “I enjoyed it. And you’re not bad yourself.”

Giggling nervously, Izumi started unzipping her suit, leaving it around her waist as she went to change out of her sports bra and into her normal one. “No, no, not at all. I did terribly that match! Tsu and Ojiro totally had us on the ropes.”
Ochako hopped into the conversation, the girl wiggling out of her chunky boots. “That’s only because you were paired with Aoyama! He couldn’t be stealthy to save his life.”

The good mood continued, laughter and conversation abounding until Jirou suddenly raised her hand to call for silence. Her brow was furrowed, face looking suspicious. “Wait. I hear something. Someone give me their phone.”

Taking the cell handed to her from Hagakure’s floating glove, Jirou plugged one her earphone jacks into it. Slowly, she inched across the wall until she was just to Izumi’s right where the lockers became concrete wall. Her other jack moved to plug itself into the wall, her Quirk broadcasting the noise of the other room right through Hagakure’s cell phone. There were several scolding voices, and one much louder and unfortunately familiar tone rung out:

“- Asui’s tenderly thick thighs! Uraraka’s charmingly curvy body! Todoroki’s surprisingly shapely butt! Ohh, you gotta see this! Midoriya’s totally topless! Those boobs are just asking to get felt up! And Yaoyorozu’s-“

… There was a peephole.

Jirou gasped, unplugging from the phone and ramming her jack directly through the tiny hole none of them had noticed before. Even without the wall, the sound of someone shrieking could be heard. Izumi, of course, didn’t notice any of that. Asking to get felt up. Asking to get felt up.

*With a rack like yours? You’ve been asking to get felt up like this for the whole year!*

“Izumi? Izumi!”

Ochako’s voice brought her back to reality, where a cool touch on her bare back made her realize she was lying on the changeroom floor, hyperventilating. Scrambling to get up and cover herself, Izumi found herself sobbing before she could even get a bearing on the situation. “I-I-I-!”

“That piece of garbage!” Yaoyorozu’s voice was uncharacteristically furious, and a quick glance showed that a black piece of electrical tape was created and smacked over the hole in record time.

“That’s crossing a line!”

“Izumi, are you alright!?” The tears were starting to cloud Izumi’s vision, but she saw genuine fright on Shouko’s face as she fumbled in Izumi’s locker for her bra, quickly helping the other girl put it on. All she could do was try to stop hyperventilating as she sat uselessly while her crush tried to redress her- a situation that would have had her a blushing mess had she not been having an anxiety attack. There was still a blush, but it was more of a completely humiliated full-faced red. She’d fought a serial killer, almost died in an alley, and she was still such a weakling over a few stupid words. “You collapsed, are you hurt?!”

“I think she’s having an anxiety attack.” Jirou came into view, face unreadable thanks to the blinding tears. “Midoriya, do you have something you can take?”

Somehow, Izumi managed to cough out a few words. “Lorazepam- backpack, green p-p-pouch!”

“Gotcha.” After some fumbling noises and cursing over zippers getting stuck, Izumi found that one hand was being slipped her medication while Ashido gently closed the other hand around a water bottle. Slowly sipping as she tried not to choke on the water, Izumi swallowed the small pill, trying to focus on the soothing words of her classmates and the gentle touch (*gentle touch, gentle touch, you’re here and you’re safe and this is a good touch*) on her skin as Shouko was joined by Ochako in redressing her.
Lorazepam worked wonders, really. Izumi found her muscles relaxing, tears subsiding as the medication brought her back from hell. The only downside was that, while calming her down, it tended to work a bit too well. Eyelids drooping, Izumi struggled to keep herself fully conscious and aware. “I’m… I’m so sorry…”

“Don’t apologize.” Shouko’s voice was smooth, softer than usual, and Izumi’s heart skipped a beat. “Why should you apologize for something Mineta did?”

“I c-cried like a baby. Everyone else… You’re all sssso composed, and handled it… and…” Izumi felt tears bubbling up again as embarrassment hit her, medicine meaning she barely twitched when a soft hand touched hers.

Raising her exhausted head, she blinked away tears to look into Ochako’s gentle face. “Izumi, you might not have seen it, but we were all really upset. I cried! Look at how puffy my eyes are- it’s like the Sports Festival again!” Ochako giggled, laugh catching in her throat in a post-tearful cough. Izumi was dearly familiar with those. “There’s no shame in crying, that was really awful!”

“It wasn’t even that bad, I just… I’m being crazy. So stupid.” Izumi tried to get up only to find that her legs didn’t seem to be in full working order.

“‘Not that bad’? Midoriya, he talked about us like that in front of everyone! It was disgusting!” Moving forwards, Hagakure joined Ochako in kneeling in front of Izumi. “You put yourself down so much. I have an anxiety disorder too, and I know it totally sucks, but nobody thinks you’re crazy or anything, ok? We’re all on your side! I bet all the other boys will be too.”

Izumi’s eyes were becoming suspiciously moist again, but she suspected it was a different type of tears. “G-Guys…”

“It’ll be ok.” There was a hand in her hair, Tsu gently stroking her. “Something set you off, and that’s not your fault. Why don’t we take you to Recovery Girl, ribbit? You can rest.”

Growing up, Izumi never had much of a support system. There was her mom, of course, and she was great, but… it’s not like Izumi ever told her about the bullying. She never had friends past Kacchan, and it wasn’t like he considered her to be his friend after her Quirk failed to develop. Futsuki and Yusa had been her friends in childhood too, in a way, but they stuck with Kacchan in middle school, and then they’d perpetrated The Unfortunate Incident From Second Year. So, um, not quite friends anymore. There was almost nobody she found herself safe by, someone to laugh with and fall back on and trust. Those were pipe dreams, not something she could ever have.

And yet, Izumi realized all three of those dreams had come together today even under the worst circumstances. Travelling in a pack of girls and laughing about something silly with Ashido. Falling back on Shouko, the girl redressing her and preventing the flashback from getting worse. Hagakure trusting her and everyone else with the knowledge that she had a mental illness.

People were looking out for her. These girls all cared about her.

As Izumi was slowly supported by Shouko and Ochako as the other girls hurriedly got changed and prepared to take her to Recovery Girl, she learned what it was like to be cared for by someone who wasn’t obligated to. Of friends.

Once again, she cried. But there were people to hold her up this time.

As soon as Izumi is left in Recovery Girl’s care, Shouko snarls.
She is pissed.

How dare that little creep hurt her cru- her friend, she was that first and foremost. Izumi was the nicest person Shouko had ever met, maybe the last true hero on the planet. And while she doesn’t know precisely why the other girl looked so haunted, why she collapsed like that, she does know the grape shit has to pay.

It looks like she’s not the only one with that idea. Ochako turns to the rest of the group outside of the nurse’s office, facial expression hard. “So what are we doing for revenge?”

“R-Revenger!!” Hagakure sputters. “Isn’t that a bit serious?”

“He made Izumi cry and humiliated all of us.” Shouko intentionally lets the temperature of the hall drop. “He needs more than just a lecture from Aizawa.”

“I agree.” The energy radiating off Ochako… Well, Shouko is thankful she’s not on the receiving end. “Mineta’s gotta pay for this.”

Momo dips her head in agreement, crossing her arms. “I normally wouldn’t go along with that, but I feel terrible for poor Midoriya. She’s never hurt a fly.”

Nodding rapidly, Ashido speaks up next. “Can we beat him up!!”

“That would get us in too much trouble.” Tsuyu speaks placidly. “I have an idea, ribbit.”

Kyoka cocks her head. “Fire away, Asui.”

“Call me Tsu. Does anyone have a tampon?”

“Oh, do you need-” Ochako is already digging through her bag when she remembers something, looking up in confusion. “Wait, but you don’t get periods…”

“That’s not what I need it for. Trust me on this.” As Ochako relented and handed one over, Tsuyu nodded in thanks. “Ok. Follow me.”

Shouko shared a glance with Ashido, who shrugs and starts walking. Like a group of angry and confused ducklings, the girls followed Tsuyu down the hallway, attempting to figure out where she was going with this. Their journey stopped in front of a vending machine, and the frog-like girl turned back to the others. “Can I borrow two hundred yen?”

“I don’t need it back.” Momo fished some change from her pocket, placing it into Tsuyu’s hand. “Are… Is your plan to get a drink?”

“Yes, but not for the reasons you’re thinking, ribbit.” Sliding it into the machine, one of Tsuyu’s big fingers selected a red Gatorade. Shouko, who had been stewing in silent rage, started to slowly put the pieces together. Was she going to… Yep, Tsuyu dipped the tampon into the drink, staining it red. Looking back at the group, who all wore slow expressions of amazement and mild horror, Tsuyu’s placid face didn’t even twitch. Shouko made a mental note to never piss this girl off.

“Damn, Tsu.” Ashido’s voice was breathless, almost reverent. “What… What are you gonna do?”

Shrugging, the green haired girl looked back at her drink. “Maybe get a couple more of them and stuff them in Mineta’s bag?”

There was a beat before Momo all but leapt forwards, excited fire blazing in her eyes as she rolled
back her sleeves, the twinkle of Creation starting up. “I’ll make twenty!”

Maybe it was in Izumi’s defense, maybe it was their own, or maybe it was their innate need to make Mineta suffer, but the entire female population (sans one, of course) of Class 1-A found themselves camped out in front of the vending machine, several more drinks purchased, feverishly dipping tampons into them. “This is gross.” Hagakure whispered as if she wasn’t delicately bagging the finished products.

“So is Mineta.” Shouko found herself saying, the heads of the others bobbing in agreement. This was a petty thing to do, and they all knew it, but given that they’d all been peeped on, maybe they were entitled to some ice cold revenge. As the process finished, the actual amount of dyed tampons close to fifty, they were bagged and tucked into Momo’s backpack so she could slip them into Mineta’s bag from her seat. As the group headed back upstairs, a very solemn Aizawa was waiting for them by the door of the classroom. “Girls, I want to tell you that I would have expelled Mineta for this if the board allowed me to.”

“Wait, you aren’t allowed to…?” Ochako cocked her head.

Aizawa sighed, nodding. “I expelled an entire class two years ago. It looked bad for the school, and the board of shareholders filed a complaint against me. Now I’m required to show a clear infraction of a serious rule before I can formally file for a student’s expulsion. I called the head as soon as Jirou told me what happened, and my request was denied.”

“Clear infr- I’ve never seen Midoriya like that before! And don’t you expel kids for baby stuff?!” Flapping her arms furiously, Ashido only got a sad, tired look from their teacher.

“I have a reputation for that because most infractions are things like students knowingly putting others in danger. That happens frequently- one more strike, and I’m filing for another student in this classroom to be removed.” Nobody really needed to guess who the student in question was. “The first day was a logical ruse, nobody was getting expelled. According to the shareholders’ policy on our students, he has to touch you for it to be considered assault. I’m trying to get them to make an exception with Nedzu’s help, but the school’s board doesn’t give those out easily.”

Kyoka looked horrified. “But- all the stuff he said-!”

“I know, and I’m sorry.” Aizawa sighs. “This system was created by people double my age who needed to hold up our reputation. They didn’t consider the dangers that kind of behaviour brings to the students. Mineta’s going to finish the day, and then he’s serving a week’s suspension. That’s all I’m able to give him right now.”

“This isn’t fair.” Shouko speaks up, voice cold. How could he get away with what he did to Izumi- to all of them- with a slap on the wrist? But… Shouko remembers what Natsuo told her years ago, about their mother’s life being traded away for enough money, and she understands. There was no malfunction with this policy- it was written to allow monsters to get away with it.

Aizawa, at least, looks every bit as angry as they are over it. For some reason, he’s looking at Shouko when he speaks. “I wish there was more I could do for you right now. I’m switching Midoriya and Bakugou’s seating positions so there’s someone between her and Mineta. If anyone else wants their seats moved, let me know.”

Briefly, Shouko is saddened that Izumi will be further away before scolding herself- it’s a damn good thing she’s moving out of that seat. Beckoning the girls back in the classroom, Mineta gives them a smug look up, mouthing ‘worth it’ until Aizawa gives him a glare. “Alright, class is back in session. Everyone open their books to page forty.”
Opening her textbook, Shouko was more focused on Momo than the lesson. The girl was methodically pulling Mineta’s bag closer to her with her foot, inching it slowly as to ensure he wouldn’t notice. It was easy to see the other girls watching- Ashido had her head cranked as far back as she could without arousing suspicion, and Hagakure’s posture indicated she was doing the same despite her sub-optimal seating position. Finally, the bag was close enough for Momo to dump their ‘gift’ inside, Kyoka making a loud coughing noise to mask the rustling. The tension grew as she slid it back, each girl holding their breath as they waited for some reason for Mineta to grab his bag. It was like they were watching a thriller, waiting for the bomb to drop. Shouko wasn’t even sure what Aizawa was trying to teach them- something about vigilante laws? Been there, broke those, got chewed out by the chief of police, she was watching their revenge plan go into motion. Finally, finally, the boy reached into his bag for something, squinting as he made first contact, and pulling one of the tampons out.

To say the following scream had been satisfying wasn’t even close to describing how good watching Mineta’s freakout felt. The class erupted into chaos- half the boys yelped when they saw, almost all the girls were in complete hysterics as they laughed (Ashido fell out of her chair, rolling down part of the aisle), Bakugou was so startled he exploded part of his desk, Kaminari was somehow on the ceiling (Sero, presumably), and Aizawa stared blankly at the complete nonsense unfolding in his classroom. The poor man looked like he regretted ever leaving the womb.

Of course a detention was in their futures, even as Ochako, laughing so hard tears poured down her cheeks, explained it was Gatorade. But Shouko would happily take it if it meant she got to see the look of pure horror on Mineta’s face. Was this in any way equivalent to violating their privacy so deeply and personally? Of course not. Their revenge was far lesser than the original crime committed, and apparently their teacher was trapped behind so much red tape that he couldn’t even punish the offender beyond a suspension. But… It felt good. It was a funny schoolkid scheme, the type she’d never been allowed to partake in before, something Shouko knew she’d be talking about when she was an adult.

… Watching the chaos soldier on, Shouko realized she now thought of herself as making it to adulthood. She’d never really thought past tomorrow before.

For all the danger she’d faced, maybe this school was good for her.

Izumi hadn’t gotten detention for the prank, considering how she hadn’t been a part of it due to being stuck in Recovery Girl’s office (not for her bones this time, which the older woman was very relieved over). Instead, she’d fallen asleep due to her medication, waking up some time later to see a snoozing All Might on a chair across from her. A pang of guilt hit her- had she made the poor man wait for her? “… All Might?”

It was almost startling how quickly the skeletal man’s sunken eyes snapped open, rushing over to her bedside. “Young Midoriya, how are you feeling?”

“I-I’m okay!” She spoke a little too fast, and her mentor cocked an eyebrow. “I mean, um… I’m okay as I can be, anyways.”

“Well, that’s good to hear.” The man moved to pull his chair closer to her bedside, settling in with a satisfied grunt. “I was terribly worried when I heard you collapsed! I thought I’d pushed you too hard in training again.”

A pang of guilt hit Izumi- look at her, worrying All Might. “I’m sorry I scared you. It was just a stupid accident.”
The man gave her a soft look. “No need to apologize, Young Midoriya. And Recovery Girl gave me the gist of what happened— it was certainly no accident. That young man is being disciplined.”

“T-That’s good.” The realization that Mineta was being punished was a relief— she hadn’t liked him ever since the USJ when he’d thanked Tsu for rescuing him by pawing at her chest. And now this… She wrapped her arms around herself subconsciously, counting backwards from ten. All Might reached over to ruffle her hair, and she closed her eyes in relaxation. She’d come a long way from a Quirkless reject to having the Symbol of Peace petting her head, hadn’t she? So why did she feel like it still wasn’t enough?

“My girl, I can tell when you’re anxious.” Izumi’s eyes fluttered open to look at All Might in surprise. “You know you can tell me anything.”

“It’s just…” Izumi had never admitted it out loud before (when you say it happened, it becomes too real). How was she supposed to do this? How would her mentor, her idol, react to learning about his sworn protégée’s weakness before he saved her?

(Would he realize that before he saved her from the sludge villain, when she was grabbed from behind and restrained and had something forced down her throat, that her first thought was that it was happening again?)

“... I’m sorry. I’m not ready to talk about it.” Her shoulders slump, and she hugs herself tighter. “I can explain one day, just… Not right now.”

She wasn’t even sure she’d actually be able to keep that promise. The Unfortunate Incident From Second Year… Well, it ruined her life. Not like Izumi had much of one to start with, but even the tiny scraps she had were torn to pieces. She couldn’t hug her mother without feeling hands, couldn’t look in the mirror without revulsion rising in her throat, had developed a fun habit where she couldn’t stop eating until her body forced her to vomit. Her mother had realized something was wrong, tried to help her, but Izumi would insist she was fine, really mom, I’m just sleepy. Of course, she learned to choke the feelings back down, hide and ignore and pretend things were normal. Life continued on, and Izumi still swallows back shame over her possession of a physical body. She learned to cover the mirror when she showered, and things moved forwards as always.

Naturally, having that body seen mostly naked and without her consent? Not her favourite, specifically when people describe it like Futsuki and Yusa did. And now she was here, in the infirmary with the Symbol of Peace. Things moved forwards indeed. All Might nodded sympathetically. “That’s just fine, my girl. Just know that I’m here for you, alright? It’s my responsibility as your mentor to make sure your mind is in good shape, not just your body.”

This useless body, Izumi thinks, but just smiles. “Thank you, All Might! Oh, and thanks for coming down to stay with me.”

“It’s no problem at all, Young Midoriya. Now, Eraserhead gave me the worksheets for his class today. Shall I help you with them?”

Anything related to heroism was maybe the only subject Izumi trusts All Might to tutor her on. She adored him to death, but when he’d tried helping her with math or science… Well, he’d tried, and that’s what mattered. In any case, she nods enthusiastically, and All Might leans over her shoulder to help explain the legal procedures for handling juvenile villains.

Juvenile villain is what they called him once upon a time. Running drugs as a kid to keep yourself off the streets was one thing, but thirteen was the first time he used his Quirk to take a life— some junkie
held a knife to his throat and was promptly reduced to ash. He’d been ten since he found himself by himself, stolen money from his father in his pockets, a backpack with water, food, and his favourite book, and skin hastily stapled together after it sloughed off completely. He’s thankful his other siblings agreed to cover his littlest sister’s eyes as he gave her his final hug, telling her he loved her and that he always would. He can’t imagine what seeing that melted-off skin would have done to her, barely three and with her mismatched hair done up in those long pigtails.

In any case, he knows he still loves her. He’s not sure he likes her much.

She was rebelling, apparently. Only using their mother’s ice. Good girl. But when he’d gone to the Sports Festival to get a glimpse of her, it seems like that green-haired kid managed to weasel it out of her. And now she’s using it regularly? What a pity. If he had a choice, he’d sure be going with ice alone. Apparently she was going along with their dear old dad’s plan to make her the next top hero, surpass All Might. He's just disappointed in her - first his power, now his obedient little lapdog? Jesus christ. Well, it’s her decision in the end. If she wants to please the old bastard, so be it. The man will never be satisfied, but he’s not her big brother anymore. There’s very little he can do to adjust that attitude of hers.

That said, this news on a wedding… Now, that just went against his clearly shining-and-sparkling morals. Messing with kids like that was something even villains tended to turn their noses up at. Besides, the part of him that is still able to care roars in disgust and protective rage as he imagines adult hands on the little girl who once called him ‘Onii-san’. Now, he might just burn the bastard alive, but he’s some higher-up at a company with some damn good paychecks. He got Toga to stop by to check his security, and it’s top-notch. The League was currently too fragile to send a group out as a targeted assassination, and he imagines it would raise questions as to why he cared so much about killing some random guy. It’s not like he could exactly advertise his relationship to the would-be bride. So what’s a villain to do?

Get someone on the inside.

He has no connections to Klimat Support, but he knows someone with a… Unique relationship to the whole situation, but definitely wants to get the pervert out of the picture. There’s another option here, but he admittedly never knew him as well. He doesn’t know if this potential contact would be willing to work with him after everything he did, but he likes his odds here. So, checking workplace websites and doing a little bit of snooping has lead him to where he needs to be, in an alleyway with a burner phone and a number written on a napkin. He listens to the dial tone, whistling a little tune until he hears the ‘click’ followed by a beautifully familiar voice.

"Hello?" Oh, she sounds just like he remembers. Older, of course, but so shy and melodic. He smiles, and blood drips from one of his staples. He doesn’t care.

"Hey there, 'Yumi."

Touya Todoroki will do what he must to rid the world of those who abuse their position. If that means dragging his twin into it, then so be it.

Chapter End Notes

CONTENT WARNINGS

- Sexual abuse mentions (once of a minor by an adult, another of one minor by two
other minors)
- Past suicide attempt
- Canon sexual harassment (treated as serious and deeply upsetting, y'know, like it deserves to be?)
- Panic attack after being triggered
- Menstruation mention
- Victim Blaming (the victim blaming herself)

CONTENT WARNINGS END. SPOILERS BEGIN

So how about those content warnings, huh? Hopefully I covered everything. Despite calling this one a cool-down chapter, it was pretty emotionally charged and hard to write at points, but I hope you liked it regardless! (btw the tampon thing was very much inspired by a scene in sense8 because goddamn what a show)

But! In any case, I'd love to know your thoughts! Drop a comment if you can, check out this fic's Discord (https://discord.gg/bXjzUg5), or leave a kudos if you enjoyed! Thank you so much, and I'll see you soon!
so you feel entitled to a sense of control?

Chapter Notes

Hi again, everyone! Sorry for the longer-than-average wait and how I didn't get to responding to each comment last chapter, life really did have me in a headlock for a while there. I really do treasure the feedback you all gave me, and I promise I'll be able to respond this time around! But in any case, I'm back with an update!

By the way, before you read this update, did you know there's a non-canon supplementary story for TPOMM? It's a ‘what if’ one-shot, so why don't you check it out? You can find it right here! (https://archiveofourown.org/works/17864945)

Anyways, check out the content warnings in the end notes, and enjoy the update!

One day after the Mineta incident, Shouko comes home in a good mood. With the grape suspended, nobody was there to leer at Izumi’s thighs when she got up to answer a question, nobody to stare longingly at Kyoka to the point of the girl becoming visibly uncomfortable. It was like a sense of peace had fallen over the classroom’s female population (and a good chunk of the boys, too- for some reason, Tokoyami in particular seemed a lot calmer for reasons Shouko didn’t understand). Her father was needed in Iwate for a few days- that shapeshifter girl again, seriously, how hard was she to find?- which ensured it would be just her and Fuyumi for a bit. Maybe they could even have Natsuo over! It was the perfect setup, really.

That said, she got a text from Fuyumi about an hour after coming home. Apparently she was going out with a few coworkers, and would be back in the evening. That was fine- Shouko had some exercise plans and homework to deal with, anyways, and she was pretty sure there was leftover horumonyaki in the fridge. By the time her older sister got back, it was nearing ten PM, and Shouko wandered downstairs to meet her. “Onee-san, welcome h-”

She paused, looking at the Fuyumi in the doorway. A young woman stood, missing one shoe, makeup smeared, leaning on the wall for support.

Good god, she was wasted.

“Shhhhhoouko…” Fuyumi slurred, bumping into the doorframe. “’M gonna. Throw up. Toilet.”

“…Okay, come on.” Offering her sister a shoulder of support, Shouko gently lead the older woman to the bathroom. Fuyumi buried her face in her hair, mumbling something, and Shouko grimaced at the scent of whiskey on her breath. “Please don’t puke in my hair.”

“I won’ttttt.” Shouko wasn’t so sure about that, and hurried up the pace a bit until they were in the bathroom. Helping Fuyumi kneel, Shouko held back her hair and looked away as her sister emptied the contents of her stomach into the toilet. When it seemed like she was finally finished, the girl groaned, resting her head on the rim. “Ugh…”

Reaching over to grab some toilet paper, Shouko lifted Fuyumi’s head to dab at her lips. “How much did you have?”
“M’coworkers invited me out, and I had a couple…” The woman puts her head back down, sighing. “Then they went home, and I went next dooooooor.”

Well, that explained it. “So you went on a bar crawl alone?”

“Don’t fuckin’ judge me!” Fuyumi snaps suddenly, pushing Shouko back with one arm. She wasn’t nearly strong enough to move her, but the younger girl moved back in confusion nonetheless. “You’d be doin’ th’same if you we’re in my posi-posisho-position.”

“You got way too drunk. I’m taking you to your bed.” It was a damn good thing their dad wasn’t here- Shouko doesn’t want to think about how he’d react to this. As she tries to help Fuyumi to her feet, though, something unexpected occurs. Well, not quite. Unexpected was when a bird flies through the window, when a plot twist surprises you, when the item is fifty percent off. This was radically unprecedented- a meteor suddenly hitting your house, something spontaneously combusting, Fuyumi striking her in anger.

And that’s what she does.

It’s not that hard of a slap, Fuyumi’s never been physically strong, but the pure shock of it sends Shouko backwards into the bathroom wall. She hits the towel rack, sending them all clattering to the floor along with her. Sitting on the ground in stunned silence, Shouko stares at Fuyumi, leaning against the counter to steady her inebriated legs. “Every’ne thinks… You all think I’ll alwaaaaays be the good big sister, right? Alllllways there t’bend and break an’ twist over backwards so y’can do whatever you want? I’m not fuckin’ perfect!”

Shouko is still staring in shocked silence. Fuyumi hit her. Fuyumi hit her. “I… Why?”

“He called me, Shouko.” Fuyumi brings a hand up to her forehead. “Called me… After twelve fuckin’ years, and he’s alive, an’ he needs me… I gotta break innnn… Can’t do somethin’ so terrible, but it’s for you, for him, for… For… Don’t make me do this, Shouko.”

Her feet slide out on the tile floor, and it’s only Shouko’s lightning-fast reflexes that allow her to react fast enough to keep Fuyumi from hitting her head off the counter. “Onee-san, I don’t know what you’re talking about!”


Shouko, for once, has no clue what to do. Fuyumi groans and curls up on the floor next to the toilet, and the youngest Todoroki daughter slowly gets to her feet, backing out of the bathroom. She doesn’t have the slightest idea how to help her sister at this point, and she means that in more ways than one. Was she ungrateful…? Shouko certainly didn’t feel ungrateful. Fuyumi had been a mother to her for years, even if they’d been separated frequently, and… Ah. Right. Shouko had been emotionless for most of her life. Her ‘thank you’s were few and far between, and only recently had she relearned smiling.

… Peeking her head back into the bathroom to see Fuyumi weeping on the floor, Shouko’s stomach twisted. Was this her fault? Her older sister had defended her and fought her corner for years, and what had Shouko given her? The cold shoulder for a decade. The sting on her cheek was nothing. The selfish baby of the family going to help the long-suffering eldest now would just seem patronizing. Hands clenching, she turned to hurry down the hallway to her room. Childishly burying herself under her futon blankets, she pulled her phone out of her pockets and dialed a number before holding it up to her ear.
“Mm, hello?”

A feminine, sleepy voice answers, and Shouko blinks a few times before realizing this was definitely not Natsuo. “I… Do I have the right number?”

“Huh? Lemme just… Oh!” The voice sounds marginally more awake now. “Sorry, is this Shouko? This is Launi Nurekami- I’m not sure if you remember me?”

Oh. Natsuo’s girlfriend. Shouko nods as if Launi can see her. “No, I remember. Is… Is Natsuo there?”

“Yeah, he’s-” There’s the rustling noise of shifting blankets, and Shouko feels herself flush as she realizes the situation she just called during. “He’s here, he’s just asleep.”

“I see. My apologies for disturbing you. I’ll call another time.”

“Wait, if it’s an emergency, I can wake him! He won’t mind.”

“It’s not urgent.” Shouko says with a little too much force. “Sorry if I woke you. Goodnight, Nurekami.”

Without waiting for a response, Shouko hangs up, stuffing the phone under her blanket and groaning. She’d be as much of a burden on Natsuo as she currently was on Fuyumi if she asked to come over now. He was so kind, always willing to put her up on a moment’s notice, distract her from her shit excuse for a life with video games and treats- the least she could do was give the poor boy a normal Friday evening with his girlfriend.

No matter who she asked, she’d be nothing but a burden. But even if she stayed here, she knows she’ll be imposing on Fuyumi, forced to spend her weekend off tending to the selfish younger daughter. Shouko is tempted to just stay here, buried under the blankets like a child, but… No, Fuyumi had made it clear through the babbling that she didn’t want to see her. Weren’t drunk words supposed to be sober thoughts? There’s one person who might not be troubled by her, and Shouko bites her lip as she pulls her phone out, opening the text messenger.

Shouko : Izumi? Are you awake?

Izumi was bullied for years. She knows an awful lot on the subject of violence and how to recognize the little signs. Maybe it was what drew her to Shouko first, her subconscious anxiously trying to find a comrade in suffering. But in any case, the point is that she’s good at noticing tiny injuries, little marks on the skin that could easily be mistaken for rosacea or some other teenage skin problem.

So when Shouko opens the door to Inko Midoriya’s car, the first phrase out of Izumi’s mouth is “Who hit you?”

Shouko’s hand flies up to cover the reddened skin, eyes flicking to a very concerned looking Inko in the front seat. “… I’m sorry to bring you out here this late.”

“Ah, it isn’t a problem at all, dear! I’m a nurse, I’m used to being alert late into the night.” Inko coos, beckoning Shouko into the backseat. “I’m Inko Midoriya. Shouko Todoroki?”

“Yes.” She nods, bowing slightly as she lugs her damp backpack inside with her. It was a good thing Izumi managed to persuade the girl to allow herself to be picked up. The trains didn’t run this late,
god knows how expensive taxis were in this country, and it would have been an hour and a half of walking in the rain at night. Now it became a ten minute car ride, albeit a slightly awkward one.

Izumi shifts in her seat as her mother drives them through the rain, Shouko quietly staring out the window. She’s… not sure what to say. Inko isn’t either- Izumi had very specifically told her not to ask Shouko about any injuries or talk about calling the police- and is just letting them be, the car radio playing inoffensive pop music and filling the silence. She’d filled her mother in on the whole situation days after she’d been told, and though Inko’s protective nature naturally lead her to want to notify the police as soon as she could… Well, she understood why she couldn’t after Izumi explained the full situation. Inko had been mostly resigned to allowing Aizawa take the wheel, even if she often asked Izumi how her little friend was doing.

And so, the ride remains silent, Shouko still watching the rain from the window as they pull into the driveway. She looks almost surprised as Izumi gently taps her on the arm (she doesn’t touch anyone’s shoulders anymore). “Shouko? We’re here.”

“Oh. Thanks.” The girl bows gratefully to Inko as the woman opens her car door and beckons both teens inside the apartment building. And speaking of which, Izumi realized belatedly as the door was unlocked that they weren’t at all ready to host a guest- there was a half eaten plate of toast on the front table (courtesy of herself) as an All Might special was paused on the TV, the shoes in the hallway were a mess, and Izumi couldn’t remember the last time her room was cleaned. Crap, her crush might see her room and it was so covered in clothes that you could hardly see the carpet!

“I like your house.” Shouko breaks the silence with a surprising statement. Both Izumi and her mother share a look of surprise- it seems as if Inko realized it was a mess just as her daughter did- but the younger Midoriya feels like she might understand why after a minute. From Shouko’s descriptions of her home life, everything was… Neat. Clinical, almost. For better or worse, their apartment was well-lived in, feeling warm and cozy. Maybe that was why her friend liked it, or perhaps Izumi was just overthinking everything and Shouko was just being polite about their messy home.

In any case, though, basic hospitality was called for. Izumi took her jacket and hung it up, Inko asked if she was hungry (Shouko said she was not), and the two eventually settled in her bedroom. To describe watching Shouko carefully step over all Izumi’s discarded clothes as awkward was like describing a bullet wound as sore- why didn’t she clean the damn room up before begging her mom to go pick up her friend? - causing the green haired girl to chuckle a bit awkwardly. “Um, sorry it’s so gross. I’ve been really busy studying for exams, so I kinda let it all pile up…”

Shouko shrugs, sitting next to Izumi on her bed, criss crossing her legs and holding onto her feed absentmindedly. Her heart skips a beat when she realizes her crush is now sitting next to her on her bed before Izumi forces it down to listen to her friend’s response. “It’s fine. I don’t really care.”

“O-Oh, that’s good!” Izumi nods frantically, shifting into her mattress a bit. An awkward silence fills the room, and she coughs. “So, um-”

“If you’re going to ask who struck me, it wasn’t Endeavor. He’s out of town.” Shouko answers before Izumi can even ask, having apparently seen her question coming. “My sister came home drunk and slapped me during an argument. I’m sorry to burden you, but I couldn’t go to my brothers, and I didn’t want to stay there.”

It always worried Izumi to hear Shouko call herself some kind of burden- it happened enough that she felt she really should be concerned. But for now, this was just a bout of shocking news. Her sister had hit her? Fuyumi was so sweet when she’d met her in the hospital, full of concern and protective love. “O-Oh… Does, um, that happen a lot?”
Shouko gives her a mildly confused look, like she’s trying to figure out what the goal is here. “No, never. But she’s a bit of a problem drinker. She said… Well, it’s not important, actually. I just didn’t want to impose on her any longer.”

That was a strange way of putting it, but Izumi pushes back her own perplexed questions for the time being. “I see. Um… Do you want to talk about it?”

“No.” Shouko purses her lips, moving to brush a strand of hair out of her face. “It won’t help.”

Well, if nothing else, Izumi thinks she understands. The mere idea of discussing The Unfortunate Issue From Second Year makes her queasy. The air in the room was oppressive thanks to Shouko’s (understandable) mood, the girl staring quietly straight down into the bed sheets. Izumi had to do something to lighten her up! “So, er, I’ve never had a sleepover before! Maybe we can get your mind off stuff with something fun!”

“... What kind of things do normal people do at sleepovers?” Shouko cocks her head, hair falling over her shoulder, and it reminds Izumi that (albeit in very different ways) they are both very abnormal girls. One a formerly Quirkless, bullied reject, the other a caged bird who only recently found the way out. In any case, though, Izumi is confident that she has more knowledge on what happens at slumber parties. She’s at least grown up with movies and television.

“Well! We could put on a movie, or watch some Youtube, or play video games- anything, really! A-Also, since it’s the weekend, we don’t have to worry about being tired tomorrow.’” Well, Izumi might regret that when she forces herself to go for her morning jog, but she’s not thinking about that right now.

Shouko looks pensive, and then her brow furrows. “I… I’m not sure. Whatever you’re interested in.”

Looks like the choice is up to Izumi. This is a risky proposition, but honestly… After daydreaming of split-coloured hair and the girl it graced for so long, she can’t resist the chance. “Hm… Can I try doing your hair? N- Not for any particular reason, I just, um, heard people touching your hair can reduce stress? I’m actually really good at hairstyling, ‘cause mine’s so thick and high-maintenance.”

For a moment, Izumi is worried she’s crossed a line or accidentally revealed a little more than she intended to. Shouko was her friend, obviously, but it’s not like the girls had much in the way of skinship—nothing at all like Ochako’s bear hugs or how Tsuyu would reach out and fix Izumi’s tie sometimes. That’s just not how their friendship operated, both of them having their reasons to shy from touch. It turns out, though, the concern was unwarranted—blinking in surprise, Shouko’s lips curve into a tiny glimpse of a smile. “... That sounds nice.”

Shouko Todoroki is too gay for this.

She’s sitting criss-crossed with Izumi behind her, scarred yet gentle hands weaving through her hair, and she’s trying very hard not to catch on fire. In no way did she anticipate how intimate the simple act of hairstyling was going to be. Her mother had styled her hair when she was very young, of course, and there was the one time with Fuyumi, but they were her relatives. They were supposed to touch her gently (until they didn’t, the tenderness of her cheek and the itch of the scar remind her). It was very much a different story when it was Izumi gently working her hair into something called a crown braid, hands brushing against her scalp as she worked. “I’m still sorry about your hair, for the record.”

Izumi’s laugh is as sweet as always. “How many times do I have to tell you it’s okay? Besides, it’s less to deal with in the mornings now.”
Well, Shouko can understand as much. Ever since she’d decided to grow her hair out against her father’s wishes, she’d become annoyed with the hours it took to dry naturally after a bath or shower or how easily it could turn into a tangled rat’s nest. Izumi’s was both formerly longer and much thicker- it must have been a total nightmare. “Even so-”

“Shoosh. I like it short, anyways!” Izumi giggles again as she briefly removes a hand to grab for something out of Shouko’s reach. It makes the mismatched girl realize just how badly she missed the touch, even if one was still planted on her head. The last time someone had touched her hair, it was her third year of middle school as her father snatched her by it, dragging her kicking and screaming into the training room after a particularly rough patrol. But Izumi touched her with kid gloves, each finger gentle on her scalp- it felt so safe that even the peculiar heat suddenly radiating behind her didn’t cause her to flinch like it normally would have. “Did you know you have one little baby curl back here?”

Well, that was news to her. “I did not.”

“It’s just at the nape of your neck- it’s on the white side.” There’s a gentle poke to the back of her neck, and Shouko almost shivers. “I’m just gonna straighten it so we can- ouch!”

Shouko whirls around at Izumi’s yelp. There’s a flat iron tossed abruptly on her bed, the other girl cringing with a hiss as she clutched one digit. “Gah, clumsy… I closed it on my finger…”

She thinks back to her last year of elementary school. On one of the rare occasions all the Todoroki siblings were in the same place at the same time, Natsuo had come limping into the living room with a nasty burn from a frying pan on his arm. He, um, dropped it on himself! Fuyumi had hurriedly explained like she hadn’t pulled Shouko into the living room to keep her away from the increasingly aggressive argument between him and Endeavor inside the kitchen, like there hadn’t been a scream so loud it made her skin crawl, like Natsuo didn’t shoot her a betrayed look right afterwards. But what Shouko remembers aside from the tiny details making up the tragedy of their family was that Fuyumi had quickly used her Quirk to ice the burn, how there’d only been a light scar afterwards (and wasn’t he so lucky it wasn’t a scald, Shouko knows those stay hideous forever). Without thinking, Shouko takes Izumi’s hands between hers, summoning ice and gently pressing it to the burnt finger.

Izumi meeps, and Shouko’s mind takes a minute to attempt to process why. Then she stops being an idiot and realizes that it’s probably because they’re technically holding hands. This time, she can’t stop part of her head from poofing into flames, and she has to quickly extinguish it while her friend yelps. “S-Shouko! Are you okay?!”

“I’m fine, I just- nothing.” Stupid goddamn Quirk. All she can do is pray Izumi didn’t look too far into her accidental activation, didn’t see the feelings that would no doubt crush their friendship in one fell swoop. Even so, Shouko is reluctant to pull her hands away (and she knows she’s looking too far into how Izumi almost looked disappointed as well), fingers longing to stroke scarred knuckles and bitten cuticles. “I’m sorry for using my Quirk without asking. I didn’t want you to scar.”

“N-No, it’s okay! Um, thank you.” Izumi looks down at her hand. “It doesn’t hurt anymore, so I don’t mind.”

There’s a brief moment of silence, both girls looking at each other like they’re searching for something in the other’s expression. Shouko has no idea what Izumi could possibly be looking for, and simply swallows a bit awkwardly. “I- Should I turn back around?”

Izumi blushes, and Shouko knows her heart would make a booming noise if it could. She swore that that shade of pink over that flush of freckles would be the end of her one of these days. “O-Oh,
yeah! S-Sorry.”

“Don’t be.” Shouko says, turning back around and trying not to sigh like a contented cat when Izumi runs her hands through her hair again. It’s such a relaxing feeling that if she wasn’t so nervous, she thinks she might fall asleep. Gentle touch was hard to come by as a Todoroki, so having so much of it in one sitting (and from Izumi of all people!) was nearly overwhelming. Was this that ‘touch starvation’ thing she’d seen on Google the other day?

In any case, Shouko is happy to just sit back and enjoy the feeling of strong, soft hands manipulating her hair and gently pinning everything into place. It wouldn’t last forever, so she would enjoy it while she had it.

The rest of the night had passed peacefully, Izumi insisting on taking plenty of photos of the finished product (which Shouko had to admit looked surprisingly elegant, even on someone with a face some described as ‘too stern’ when they didn’t comment on the ugly scar). They’d spent the rest of the evening watching some old All Might specials, and although Shouko was enthralled by watching the shows she’d never been permitted past early childhood, watching Izumi’s excited reactions to each battle and hearty laugh from the hero caused her heart to pound. Despite her friend’s insistence that she take the bed, Shouko opted to curl up on the Midoriya’s couch with some blankets, falling asleep to the sound of rain outside the window and with the comforting thought that nobody would hurt her in this home.

Breakfast had been himono and miso soup made by Inko, who turned out to be an expert in the kitchen. Shouko idly thought that she and Fuyumi should exchange recipes sometime, which in turn made her stomach twist with anxiety. Fuyumi… Did she really mean everything she’d said the night before? Was it drunken ranting, or was Shouko as much of an ungrateful burden as she seemed to think? It had all made her realize that she couldn’t remember the last time she really sat down and listened to her sister, the girl forced to become a mother to the rest of the family after the real one broke down. Fuyumi had never had the privilege of lashing out like Shouko or Natsuo- without her, the family would have fractured even further. It was perhaps a sort of awful miracle that the worst habit she had was drinking herself stupid- things could have turned out a lot worse growing up like the eldest Todoroki daughter did.

“Shouko, are you gonna be okay?”

Izumi’s voice brings Shouko out of her haze, and she blinks, turning to the left to meet her friend’s concerned gaze from the backseat of Inko’s car. Right, she’d been dissociating for most of this morning, hadn’t she? Shaking it off, Shouko managed a nod. “I’ll be fine. I’ll talk to my sister.”

“Okay…” The Superpower user didn’t seem overly convinced, but it wasn’t like there was much she could do at the moment. “If you need anything, call me right away, okay?”

“We can have you over any time, dear!” Inko chimes in from the front seat. “You were a wonderfully polite guest.”

Shouko feels a pang of… Something in her stomach. Jealousy? Longing? Inko Midoriya was the perfect mother in her eyes, her soft and loving behaviour with her daughter obvious even if she mostly left the girls to their own devices last night. Izumi sometimes complained at school that her mom worried too much about her, but Shouko (aside from realizing she’d also be nervous if her hypothetical child broke their bones every other day) knew she’d give everything and then some if it meant she had a mother like Inko. She loved Rei with all her heart, of course, but… Well, the woman was still repenting for something, even if Shouko insisted she didn’t have to. She handled Shouko like pottery, like she was terrified of shattering her, and it made her daughter long for the
kind of casual closeness Izumi had with her own mother. Maybe one day they could have it—after all, Shouko once thought that she’d never see her mother again, and now she visited her at least once a week—but for now, all she had was her envy over what might have been. “Thank you. I’m sorry to have asked so late.”

Inko adjusts the rearview mirror to smile back at her, all soft cheeks and white teeth. “It’s not a problem at all, dearest. It’s been a pleasure to meet you! Izumi speaks about you all the time, you know.”

“M-Mom!” Izumi squeaks from beside her, and once again, Shouko almost catches on fire. “Don’t embarrass me!”

“But you do, sweetheart!” The older woman chides playfully. “You’re always telling me about your conversations from school, or whatever happened in class—”

Izumi makes a light wailing sound, kicking the back of the seat. “Mom, seriously! I’m gonna jump out of this car!”

“Wait til we’re at a stoplight to do that, dearie.”

“Mooooooom!”

Once again, Shouko finds herself simply in awe of the simple chemistry between mother and daughter as the playful teasing continues. The fact that Izumi talks about her is somehow very surprising—from the amount of time Shouko spends floating outside her own body, she sometimes tends to forget that she has a social presence and still exists in people’s minds even when she’s not around. She feels stupid for it, but it’s the truth.

The car rolls up to the Todoroki household too soon, and Izumi looks over at her worriedly. “Shouko, are you sure you don’t want to stay another night…? We can totally do that if you need to!”

“It’s not so bad. I’ll be fine.” Shouko truthfully does want to stay, wants to run back to Izumi and spend another night sleeping peacefully on her couch where nobody can lay a finger on her. But the truth of the matter was that she couldn’t just run away from her home life forever. “Thank you both for allowing me to come over.”

“If you’re sure…” Izumi pauses for a moment, and then a look of determination crosses her face. Before Shouko knows it, the other girl is leaning across the carseats, arms extended—and then instantly gets stuck as the seatbelt locks up. “A-Ah! Um, sorry, I just- lemme uh, unclip this and-crap, how can it get so tangled?!”

Shouko watches the other girl struggle to get herself untangled and unclipped from the seatbelt, face reddening rapidly as her mother gives a strangely knowing chuckle, and she realizes that Izumi Midoriya is not the cutest girl in the world. She’s the cutest girl in the universe. She unbucks her own seatbelt with much less drama. “Do you need help?”

“N-No, it’s okay! I just gotta- uh- there we go!” Izumi finally manages to free herself from the tangled web of seatbelt, face now the exact same colour as a fresh tomato. She looks like she might just curl up and die, but instead, she squeezes her eyes shut and hurriedly leans in to wrap her arms around Shouko in a hug. “T-Thank you for coming!”

There’s a moment of shock, but Shouko registers the feel of a warm body against hers and just about melts, returning the hug. Contact from anyone who wasn’t actively hurting her was nice to begin
with, but with Izumi? It seriously did feel like she was over the moon, firm arms comforting and gentle. “... Thank you for having me, Izumi.”

“Be safe, okay?” Pulling back (and Shouko almost has to restrain herself from leaping forth to continue the hug), Izumi offers a kind smile. “And good luck out there! We’re both in your corner, so never feel like you can’t rely on us!”

“Thank you.” Offering one last smile, Shouko steps out of the car, coding in past the security system of the outside fence and heading down the deceptively-homely cobblestone path leading to her front door. Unlocking it and taking a deep breath, Shouko stepped inside (noting that it was only at this point that the car pulled away, Inko waiting for her to safely enter the house). Instantly, the pungent smell of alcohol hit her, and she expected the worst- had Fuyumi turned to day-drinking now…?
Whatever she was talking about last night must have seriously gotten to her. Figuring she’d have to face the music eventually, Shouko sighed, dropping her bag by the door and walking into the kitchen. “Onee-san, are you-”

Shouko stopped, staring at the scene ahead of her. Fuyumi was standing over the sink, surrounded by empty bottles of just about every type of alcohol under the sun on the counters. Shouko’s first thought was ‘how drunk did she get after I left?!’ which was quickly pushed aside when she realized what her sister was doing. Fuyumi was pouring the remnants of a bottle of red wine into the sink, liquid splashing gracelessly into stainless steel. She was pouring all her alcohol. Shouko stood there, stunned, before speaking a bit louder. “... Onee-san?”

Fuyumi’s head swivelled up in surprise. She looked, to be completely frank, like total shit. Her eye bags were exceptionally prominent, bits of makeup were still smeared around her eyes, and her hair was a greasy mess. It also looked like she was in her pajamas, which was at least a plus from where Shouko had left her in her work clothes. Her eyes widened as she noticed her sister standing near the doorway. “S-Shouko! Um, I… Good morning?”

“Good morning.” Shouko is still staring at the bottle as it drains into the sink. “... What are you doing?”

Pursing her lips, Fuyumi looks down at the emptied bottle with determination, reaching for a can of beer next. “I’m pouring out all the alcohol in the house. I’ve decided to go cold turkey.”

Well, that was a surprise. “You’re- why?”

“I hit you.” Fuyumi brings her eyes back up, and there’s shame burning behind exhausted grey. Shouko knew it well, and it’s almost a bit disturbing to see the emotion her own face bore so often in private on her older sister. “It was so easy to lie to myself and pretend that the only person this was hurting was myself. I let it fester and get worse. My work performance was dropping, I wasn’t paying as much attention to you as I should have, and then… Something set me off on Friday.”

“You’d mentioned something about getting a phone call?” At least as far as Shouko could remember. She was already in the process of trying to push last evening into the back of her mind like she did with just about every other unpleasant experience. Hold onto the hairstyling and television shows, let go of getting slapped.

Fuyumi bites her lip, looking away. “... I can’t explain all of it, but an old friend of sorts got back in touch with me after a long time. He’s… Anyways. I need to do something risky to help him, and it stressed me out badly. One thing lead to another, and…” She puts the now emptied can down, crossing her arms over her chest to hug herself. “... There are so many things in your life that hurt you, Shouko-lat. I should never have let one of them be me. I’m so, so sorry. As long as we live together, I’m not touching another bottle.”
Shouko… Isn’t sure what to think. People changing their behaviour in the name of benefitting her was completely unheard of. Her friends at school were already the type of people Shouko was able to relax around, never causing her many issues (unless you counted Ochako’s repeated singing directly at her about hitting or missing? Which was more perplexing than anything). Her father, obviously, stuck firmly to his own ideals no matter what the cost was for those around him. So something like this… It was unprecedented. There was no stock reaction for Shouko to pull out in a mimicry of normal emotion. All she could do was stare before stumbling out a response. “I… Thank you?”

“Don’t thank me.” Fuyumi shakes her head. “Not until I can stay on the wagon. I need to face everything I’ve done- everything I’m going to do- head on. No more distracting myself with this.”

It’s unusual for her sister to be so cryptic, but if she has her reasons for keeping secrets, Shouko won’t press. She’s more or less just relieved to learn she hasn’t been day-drinking or something increasingly destructive. Would her sister actually be able to keep this up? Well, time would tell. But for now, as Fuyumi offers her a shaky smile from over the sink, Shouko feels like things might just turn out okay for once. “It’s a good start.”

“I hope so.” As Fuyumi moves to dump another bottle, Shouko can’t help but let a small smile creep onto her face. Maybe, just maybe, things will be alright.

The weekend comes and goes without much fanfare. Fuyumi, true to her word, does not drink (though Shouko sees her trembling in the mornings, hands shaking as she tries to prepare oyakodon and tea for Monday’s breakfast). They have their mock exams in the morning, something Shouko had studied enough for to feel confident on, and they get their results back near the end of the day- she’s fifth in the class, not a bad rank at all. She’s quite content with it, though judging by the wails of Kaminari and Ashido, not everyone in the class was quite so studious.

“So you’re kidding me?!” Ashido, rank nineteen, cries. “I was ranked third in middle school!”

“This is an elite school, ribbit.” Tsuyu, sitting pretty at six, offers. “We were probably all near the top of our classes last year, but you remember how hard the exams were. Only the best of the best make it here.”

Kaminari moans in agony, slamming his head on his desk. He’s the unlucky twentieth student. “I was freaking student council president last year! Are you telling me I’m the worst of the best here?!”

“If you’d like, I can help you study a bit?” Momo raises a hand helpfully. She was ranked first, the real cream of the crop. Shouko isn’t surprised at all when a small army of students run over to her, begging for her help.

“Wasn’t that tricky, Shouko?” A voice from beside her perks Shouko up instantly, and the mismatched girl turns to see a sheepish Izumi beside her. “I was ranked second in middle school, but I’m fourth now. I guess I couldn’t beat Kacchan at any point, hah…”

The last sentence is whispered, eyes flickering nervously to the blonde boy stewing at his desk. It doesn’t look like he heard- though considering that Bakugou’s hearing aids are currently sitting on his desk, that’s not actually too surprising. Because of that fact, Shouko speaks at a mostly-normal volume. “You don’t need to worry too much about beating him, you know. I’m sure you’ll surpass him as long as you keep progressing at your current pace.”

“Yeah, but… I dunno. I guess I feel like I’ve got something to prove when it comes to him, hah.” Izumi rubs the back of her head shyly. “Even so, thanks.”
“Why doesn’t he like you?” Shouko speaks bluntly, noticing Izumi’s face go pale instantly after she asks. She does feel a little bad about that, but it bugs her to notice the way her friend flinches every time Bakugou roars at her during class, which is often. She understands violence like an old friend, and it stirs an anger deep in her chest to see someone like Izumi cower away from someone bigger and physically tougher than her.

Before Izumi can respond, a zombie rises from his grave at the front of the room- and by that, she means Aizawa is emerging from his sleeping bag, causing everyone to run wildly across the room to get back to their seats. Someone yells ‘scatter!’. Shouko thinks it’s Kirishima. Aizawa groans, looking like he wants nothing more than to get back into the sleeping bag and have a nap for the next year. “Are we done blabbering?” Silence. “Good. Now all of you should have an idea of your weaknesses and where you need to improve in regards to your real exams. Remember, they’re Tuesday of next week.”

“Mr. Aizawa!” Tenya is standing up, waving a hand wildly. “We haven’t yet touched on the practical portion of the exam! The curriculum clearly states that it will make up half of our grade, and I feel it’s important that-”

“Iida.” The older man deadpans, Shouko marvelling at how Aizawa might be the only person on Earth who can stop a Tenya talking spree right in the middle. “I’m getting there. Cool your engines.” As the boy sits down with a slightly flushed face, Aizawa continues. “As your class representative just mentioned, your practicals are coming up as well. These will take place next Wednesday. We’re going to be hosting a summer training camp for both you all and 1-B. If you fail either one of your examinations, you’ll be spending your summer here in remedial courses instead of attending with the rest of the class.”

A nervous energy washes over the classroom as the news hits them. A summer camp… Training or not, wasn’t that the sort of thing ordinary high schoolers got excited about? But if anyone failed, they’d be left out. Shouko isn’t nervous in the slightest, but she sees Kaminari and Ashido’s faces stiffen. Aizawa continues. “We’re not telling you what the practical consists of until the day of, but what I can tell you upfront is that you’ll be taking the exams in pairs. The faculty and I went over your performances in class and general demeanours to decide the pairings. The partner you’ll be placed with was chosen specifically because of your Quirks and how your personalities compare or contrast with each other. You’ll be working together during the exam, so I recommend speaking to your partner over the course of this week. Here are the matchups.”

Pulling a small remote from his pocket, Aizawa pressed a button to bring down a small screen bearing a collection of names. Shouko’s eyes scan for hers- is she with Izumi? No, unfortunately. It looks like she was placed with Kaminari. That was an interesting choice, to say the least. A strategist and someone who runs in blind- she can see what Aizawa meant about ‘contrasting personalities’. Scanning over the whole list, Shouko squinted just as her eyes widened. Oh, for the love of god. Was this some cruel cosmic joke? She reread the entire list, hoping she was just going blind and had misread that last combination. Nope. The pairings were all there, loud and clear:

Jirou + Yaoyorozu
Kirishima + Mineta
Aoyama + Hagakure
Iida + Satou
Koda + Asui
Ashido + Tokoyami
Midoriya + Kaminari
Sero + Ojiro
Uraraka + Shoji
Bakugou + Todoroki

… Bakugou. Shouko was going to fail her exam.

One day before all this, Shouta sat in UA’s meeting hall with the rest of the staff. He couldn’t believe he had to take his Sunday off to be here, but they needed to decide the exam pairings before Monday. So here he was, carefully chosen list presented in front of the other faculty. It had taken him a long time to decide the pairings each student would be in as well as the teacher they would be fighting, but Shouta was satisfied with his list in the end. Even if one choice was raising Nemuri’s eyebrow from across the room. “Really, Eraserhead? Bakugou and Todoroki?”

“Those two are a bit… Volatile.” All Might attempted to remain slightly more polite. “Is that the best choice?”

“Not on the surface.” Shouta leant back in his chair. “But look at their personalities. Even if they’ve managed to make a friend or two, Bakugou and Todoroki are both exceptionally standoffish in class. They’re both confident in their abilities, and while that’s a good thing considering how strong they are, that borders on arrogance from time to time.”

“In that Bakugou kid’s case especially.” Hizashi nods.

Shouta returns the nod at his fiancee. “Right. It’s fine to enjoy working alone, but if they can’t work in a pair without either blindly running off on their own or dictating their partner’s every move, they won’t make very good heroes. You need to learn when to swallow your pride and work together, or you’ll fail more often than not. If they can’t grit their teeth and fight through it, they aren’t ready to try for provisional licenses. I’d have them sit out and wait until their second year if they fail.”

“I mean, it would teach them an important lesson, but…” Nemuri bites her lip, trying not to give away too much. Only she, Nedzu, Hizashi, Recovery Girl and Shouta were in the loop about Todoroki’s situation, and the woman was clearly attempting to speak up without notifying their other co-workers. “Given the strengths of their Quirks and the risks they carry by clashing, is it the best idea?”

“Again, not on the surface.” Shouta flips his pen between his fingers, shuffling through his papers with the other hand. “But what if we could get them in a controlled situation where they could be instantly stopped if they got too violent? They both rely on their Quirks heavily, so if worst comes to worst, what if we could shut them down right away?”

Hizashi blinked, tilting his glasses down in surprise. “You don’t mean-”

“Yep.” Shouta allows himself to grin, noticing the slight flinches his co-workers give at the smile of a man who has been awake for so long he no longer has boundaries. “Bakugou and Todoroki will be
fighting me.”

Chapter End Notes

CONTENT WARNINGS

- Irresponsible drinking
- Violence while drunk
- Mentions of past child abuse

CONTENT WARNINGS END. SPOILERS BEGIN

Talk about bad news for Shouko- I wonder how she’ll cope with that partner of hers? In any case, I hope you all find the upcoming exams interesting!

Thank you so much for reading! I recommend joining our Discord to meet other readers and enjoy some quality memes (https://discord.gg/pRruQ3C) if that interests you. Comments and kudos are my lifeblood, so I appreciate each and every one you give me! Thanks for reading, and I’ll see you soon!
things we lost in the fire

Chapter Notes

Guess whos' back! Back again!

I don't have very much to say this chapter except to thank everyone for their kudos and comments! They mean the world to me and then some- I'm so floored by the amount of people reading! Thank you!

Now, as a heads up, there's more content warnings than usual this chapter! PLEASE CHECK THE END NOTES IF YOU’RE WORRIED! With that out of the way, please enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Katsuki Bakugou is having a shit week, and it’s only Monday.

First, Four-Eyes and Ponytail beat him in the stupid mock exams. He’d been first back in middle school, so what the hell gave them the right to surpass him!? Fucking whatever. He’d just have to crush them on the real exams. But then, because whatever shit god was out there hated him, he got paired with Icyhot for the practicals. Seriously?! Aizawa needed to get his head out of his ass if he thought that would be a good pairing! And now, as he’s trying to go home and deal with his worthless parents, the half-and-half bastard herself is approaching him just outside the school gates. “Bakugou. Do you have plans tonight? We should train together to prepare for the exams.”

He, as a matter of fact, had none. But that didn’t mean this stupid asshole was allowed to monopolize his time! “Nope, and we sure as hell aren’t training together, Icyhot. I can take whatever Aizawa wants to chuck at us by my damn self.”

Icyhot’s expression tightens. “I don’t like this pairing either. I’m just trying to pass the exam. Or do you want to stay back while everyone else gets to train?”

Well, of course he didn’t! But that didn’t mean this bitch’s help for it! “I’m gonna pass without your stupid training, moron! Take whatever stupid olive branch you’re offering and shove it up your-”

“Kacchan!”

Oh, for fuck’s sake.

Katsuki growls, spinning on his heels to face Deku as she rushes up, weaving through students to get way too close for comfort. “Um, hi Shouko! K-Kacchan, I c-couldn’t help but overhear, and maybe you should l-listen to Shouko…? I really want to go to camp with you, too!”

This little shithead. Her voice alone is uncomfortably shrill and loud in his hearing aids. Katsuki puts on his best snarl, relishing in the way Deku seems to shrink into herself. “’Kacchan this, Kacchan that’! What makes me think I need advice from you, bitch?”

Abruptly, the air cools, and Icyhot steps out to get between him and Deku, angry grimace on her face. “Don’t you have a mother? Didn’t she teach you not to call a woman that?”
Ooooh, Katsuki sees how it is. All that obnoxious whispering and sitting together at lunch- Icyhot’s got it bad for the little shit. She thinks playing the white knight will win her any favours? He almost has to laugh. “Oh, you’re so right, Icyhot. Let me try a nicer word just for you.” After all, he knows all the damn words that set him off back when people knew about his situation. The words thrown like punches that made him throw actual punches in retaliation. Katsuki bets his bottom dollar he’ll get the perfect reaction out of the ice queen here. He steels her with the best sneer he has. “Get out of the fucking way, cunt. I’m going home.”

Bingo. Icyhot’s eyes widen before they burn up in rage, and she brings back an ice-coated fist. Katsuki raises his own arms, explosions at the ready, all before Deku grabs Icyhot by the arm and desperately reels her back in, stopping the fight before it can start. “S-Shouko, don’t! You’re gonna get in trouble!”

“Yes, Shouko, better not.” He’s never gotten this much of a reaction out of Icyhot before. All this does is confirm that she’s just as desperate to get into Deku’s pants as he’d originally picked up on. She’s letting her emotions get the better of her around the idiot. Weak.

(And Katsuki is always in control, always strong, always the best, he’s not weak like her. He’s not weak like a girl. He’s not a girl. He’s strong. He can’t be like them, or he’s a liar, like his mother told him.)

Icyhot takes a deep inhale, exhaling through her nose, before turning her back on him. “... I don’t have time for this. If you don’t want to pass, fine. I’ll handle it by myself.”

She doesn’t even wait for Deku as she storms off, clearly pissed off but not wanting to go against her precious little girlfriend or whatever. The green haired nuisance looks like she’s going to call after her, but decides against it, turning to Katsuki with an uncharacteristically angry look on her face. “Don’t… Don’t talk to Shouko like that, Kacchan.”

Almost growling at the girl, Katsuki looks away angrily. “Tell her to pull the stick out of her ass first. Just ‘cause she wants to jump your bones, doesn’t mean I owe the shithead anything.”

Deku’s blush rapidly grows to cover her entire face. Oh my god, don’t tell Katsuki these morons have some kind of obnoxious blind mutual love bullshit going on? “S-S-She doesn’t think of me like that! Don’t be so mean!”

“Oh my god, you’re giving me a fucking headache. Go plan how you’re gonna fail with Pikachu or whatever, I don’t have time for your shit.” He pops the hearing aids out of his ears before Deku can manage a response, relishing in the near silence as he storms away from her. If she wants to be obnoxious, she can do it in someone else’s direction. Katsuki doesn’t have to put up with her pathetic shit. He never has, never will.

(Even if she may as well be stabbing him with every ‘Kacchan’.)

Shouko would have assumed the worst part of her day would have been her encounter with Bakugou, but then again, she was still going home to Endeavor. So comparatively, Bakugou trying to start something in front of her crush wasn’t all that bad. At least they’d have been on relatively equal grounds if push came to shove- the Sports Festival had proved as much- as opposed to when it was her versus her father.

Endeavor sighed as he looked at his daughter, struggling to get up after failing to dodge a blast of fire that hit her right in the ribs. Pain blossomed in her chest like spring leaves, Shouko hissing in pain as she managed to get to her knees, the howling through her ribs too much to allow for much else.
“Pathetic, Shouko. You’ve been dodging blows like that since elementary school. Why are you so slow today?”

In truth, she’s been angrily thinking about Bakugou all day, wondering what kind of garbage luck she has to have to be paired up with him. Instead, though, Shouko keeps trying and failing to struggle to her feet. “... I was training for practicals with my exam partner today.”

“Hm.” Her father brings a hand up to scratch his chin. “Who’s your partner?”

“Katsuki Bakugou.” Shouko wheezes in between sentences, one hand pressed to her sternum. “From the final round of the Sports Festival.”

Endeavor looks pensive before his eyes harden. “I see. Powerful Quirk or not, I don’t want you spending time with boys from your class in private.”

Well, if that doesn’t make her want to call up Tenya to hang out this weekend, nothing else does. “He’s an uncultured idiot. Like I’d be fooling around with someone like that.”

“Whatever you say. I know how teenagers are. Part of the stipulations with Ondo’s family is that you’ve never romantically linked to another man, and this deal is too valuable to lose over teenage foolishness.” While Shouko sputters over the implications, Endeavor walks towards the towels to wipe his hands of sweat. “Go see Fuyumi if you’re burnt. You’re clearly too weak to withstand two rounds today.”

“I’ll spend time with whoever I want.” She snaps before she can stop herself. Her father turns to glare at her dangerously, but Shouko’s stupid mouth is already running, full of anger. “He’s just my exam partner. I don’t even like him as a person.”

“It’s not about whether or not you like him, it’s about the image you present.” Endeavor crosses his arms. “Do you know what people will be saying about you if you’re seen alone in the company of men often?”

Shouko knows damn well, and she makes sure to shoot back at her father as she stumbles to her feet, dizziness almost overtaking her. “If they think I’m some kind of whore, it’s bad for the sham marriage you’re trying to set up, isn’t it? You’re pretty much presenting me ways out of your stupid plan on a silver platter.

Endeavor all but growls at her. “Watch your mouth. The only reason you’re even in this situation is because you all but demanded I treat you like a daughter. If Ondo pulls out of the agreement because you couldn’t behave like a lady, there are worse options with equally compatible Quirks for you out there. Pairing you with an attractive twenty seven year old was a mercy I didn’t have to give you.”

She… She’s not sure she likes what that implies. Shouko’s stomach sinks, and it’s not because of the pain in her ribs. “… What the hell do you mean?”

“How does a thirty five year old sound? Forty three?” Endeavor snips at her. “You don’t even realize how many suitors with useful Quirks were tripping over themselves to win your hand when your form was submitted. I could have easily found you an old man with lower standards, but I didn’t. And all you’ve done is complain like I’m some monster.”

“Are-Are you saying this is your idea of a good match?!” Shouko asks incredulously. “He’s a perverted jackass!”

“And it could have been so much worse.” Endeavor snaps, swinging the door open with a bang. “Careful how you proceed, girl. Spending time alone with boys is the quickest way for you to lose
the best possible outcome. It’s not my choice; it’s Ondo’s. Any chance of me changing my mind on your marriage will vanish if you continue to act so petulant. It clearly shows you’re unprepared to become a hero. Anything that happens to you from here on out is your own fault. You have another omiai booked for Friday after school. Behave.”

He leaves her like that, half-standing in a rapidly cooling training room with a pooling dread in her heart. Shouko’s not sure she’s able to process that. He… He’d be willing to all but sell her off to a man a year younger than he was if she lost her chance with Ondo? Shouko thinks she’s going to be sick, and it’s not because of the pain in her chest. Gifts of food and money could be tossed aside in a heartbeat- this was the Endeavor she knew, the callous man who would do anything to see his flesh and blood in the top spot. In a way, it was almost comforting to see him firmly back in his own ways.

But in any case, it was a heavy sword dangled over her head. She needed to prove she could be a hero. Shouko needed to pass this exam, with or without Bakugou.

Shouko’s friends, at least, are understanding about her misfortune with her unlucky pairing. They take time out of their own training schedules to allow her to spar against them and their own partners- and while she’s more experienced in combat than everyone she finds herself up against, it’s nonetheless better than nothing (plus how it keeps her out of Endeavor’s training room as long as he understands that she’s training at school). It’s a good distraction from the incoming doom and gloom that will no doubt hit her on Friday.

The new information Shouko had learned about Ondo was, as most things related to the man, highly troubling. She was aware that her young age and some perceived ‘innocence’ was part of the draw for the older man, but the fact that her even spending time alone with a boy was potentially reason to call the arrangement off? It makes her skin crawl as she realizes how vital purity is to him. Shouko was far from pure (any childish innocence was beaten out of her years ago), but she’s admittedly without any kind of romantic experience. She’d received love letters from eager male classmates in middle school, yes, but she’d just disposed of them without searching for the sender or taking any action. At that time, her heart had been closed off to the possibility. How ironic- she finally opens herself up, and the first thing she faces is a possible arranged marriage.

Shouko hadn’t seen Ondo (aside from the brief and uncomfortable hospital encounter) since before the Sports Festival. With the addition of Izumi in her life… Well, she’s hopeful she’ll be able to keep her revulsion in check now that she knows what genuine attraction feels like. It’s set to take place right after school (and part of Shouko fears it’s because Ondo wants to see her in a school uniform), and as she’s making her way to the train station from UA, she receives a text.

**Fuyumi**: Hi Shouko! There’s some villain stirring up trouble downtown, so Dad asked me to escort you to the omiai. I’ll pick you up at the station, okay? Don’t get on the train, I’ll drive.

Huh. Well, Shouko would always rather spend time with Fuyumi than with Ondo. She’d stopped smelling like booze in the mornings, and even though her eyebags deepened and her hands shook, Fuyumi seemed a little happier than usual. She had this strange aura of… Resignation? Was that the proper description? Whatever. Shouko assumed it was probably just due to giving up on her addiction. They were both struggling through a lot right now, she notes as she makes her way to the train station. In a way, perhaps it would bring them closer.
Fuyumi is sitting in the waiting room of the matchmaking service and panicking.

Part of it was for Shouko’s sake- she’d just been hurried off to have her makeup done, no elegant kimono this time, that was just for the first meeting- and what kind of older sister would she be if she wasn’t terrified for the younger girl’s sake as she was subjected to a predator? ‘A terrible one’ was the answer (terrible like the kind that hits their kid sister, you fucking alcoholic, how could you?). Her stomach had twisted ever since she heard of their newest ‘date’ of sorts. But that wasn’t the only reason this time- she had a mission to enact, and no second chances.

She’d almost collapsed in the kitchen as Touya’s voice (older, but impossible to ever pull from her mind) came through the receiver via that unknown number. Part of her had known he was alive the entire time- they were twins, she had known somewhere deep in her heart that she hadn’t lost her second heartbeat- but Fuyumi had no idea where he was or what he was doing. He’d become a criminal, and as shocked and heartbroken as she was… She also wasn’t surprised. She’d seen what her treasured brother had gone through at their father’s hands, seen him mutilated and burnt beyond recognition when his Quirk (as unsuited for his body as hers was, if not more) was pushed too far that fateful day. Fuyumi would never forget the smell of melting flesh off her beloved twin, and after Endeavor forced Touya to that point, she’s not shocked that he turned to the wrong side of the law. But he still had standards- and somehow or another, he’d heard about Ondo and what he was doing to Shouko.

(Who cares about you, after all? Twelve years and the phone call isn’t even for your sake.)

He had his connections, but Touya wasn’t on the inside like Fuyumi was. If they were going to wrangle Shouko out of the man’s grasp, they needed to collect blackmail on him- Touya said all he needed was his files from the matchmaking company. They contained his address, some security info, and if she could nab those for him, he’d be able to break in and find something to incriminate the pervert. That was, of course, assuming the files themselves didn’t hold something juicy enough to knock Ondo so far down the social ladder than Endeavor would rescind their baby sister’s hand. It was illegal, god knows it was, but it was a bloodless way to get him out of the picture, Touya assured. All he needed was his twin’s help.

Fuyumi was fully confident in her own uselessness. At least like this she could help someone, anyone, her hands could reach a single soul.

“Excuse me, sir?” She stands, looking to the young man at the counter. “May I ask where the restroom is?”

“Down that hall, turn right at the end. It’s the white door.” One of the man’s four arms points her in the correct direction, and Fuyumi bows politely, heading down the hallway. Of course, she isn’t going to the bathroom. According to Touya’s information, the ladies’ room is just across the hallway from her real target- the filing room.

Fuyumi doesn’t know much about matchmaking companies. She knew some of her university friends had debated submitting their own profiles to various omiai organizations after their attempts to nab a boyfriend hadn’t worked out, but until learning her little sister was being forced to attend, the subject had never been of much interest to her. But what she did know was that each client had their own profile created to ensure they’d be matched with someone suitable- a profile full of personal information like hobbies, frequented locations, and health concerns to name just a few. And that was exactly what Touya needed.

She’s not an idiot. As good as Fuyumi was at lying to herself, she knows on some level that Touya is going to hurt Ondo. Criminal wasn’t the proper legal term for her twin- he was a villain, the type of person every child in Japan was raised to despise as they cheered on the flashy heroes. Hell, he’d
even been the one to set up the villain attack that ensured their father couldn’t take Shouko today- a fact that weighed heavily on Fuyumi’s mind as she realized her withholding knowledge of an upcoming attack made her a criminal already. And now she was slowly pushing open the door to the filing room, heels in her hands to avoid making even a single sound as she enters.

Touya wasn’t a good person, not anymore. But when she thinks of goodness, righteousness, all those lofty ideals… Fuyumi just can’t see Ondo as somehow upholding those values better than her brother. She’ll take a villain over some manipulative ephebophile every single time. Touya had loved Shouko when he lived with them, and even if he barely got to see her thanks to their father’s policies on his ‘special one’ interacting with the rest of his family- Fuyumi remembers their baby sister’s birth clearly, after all. They were both freshly eight, their birthday having taken place just a month before Shouko’s arrival into this world, and this was the first baby they were old enough to remember. The girl was a week premature (like they’d both been, except they were closer to a month early), not so much that she needed to be incubated, but small enough that she reminded Fuyumi of a little doll. Touya had held the newborn last, after Natsuo and Fuyumi, and the boy’s blue eyes had shone with wonder as her tiny hand wrapped around one of his fingers, their mother asking them what they thought a good name would be. I want to name her Shouko, he had said after a minute, or a name like that. She’s the baby, so shouldn’t she have the kanji for ‘child’?

She’s leafing through the filing cabinets now, searching for ‘O’. Determination has steeled her gentle features, an older sister on a mission. Fuyumi knows that whatever Touya does next will be for Shouko’s sake. She loves her family more than anything else in this broken life, will gladly sacrifice her own happiness and dirty her hands if it means they can live in peace. Finally pulling the correct file and stuffing it in her purse, Fuyumi inhales deeply before sliding the door back open, checking the hallways to ensure nobody was there to see her act of thievery. It struck her at that point- behind one of these other sliding doors sat her sister, trapped alone with some waste of a man, and Fuyumi couldn’t do a damn thing to help without making it worse.

Or maybe that was the way it used to be. Narrowing her eyes in determination at some random door on the off-chance her sister and her lecherous suitor sat inside, Fuyumi closed the filing room door behind her and marched back towards the waiting room. No, she couldn’t help now, but she was lying in wait with her beloved twin- no longer was she going to be useless. She would deliver this profile and let Touya do his work, no matter what that turned out to be. Shouko could be saved, and Fuyumi no longer cared if she had to dirty her hands to do so.

Shouko, meanwhile, is more bored out of her mind than anything else. She doesn’t care about business meetings or whatever new deal Ondo’s company landed, she just wants to get out of this makeup and go exercise at home.

“- And then the Hatsume girl from the Sports Festival rejected our offer! Strange, but if she wants to lose a head-start on her career, that’s her choice. Isn’t that peculiar?”

All right, now that almost made her snicker under her breath. Shouko was at least happy to know Hatsume heeded her warning back then. “It’s very bizarre.”

“Isn’t it? Ah, well. Win some, lose some.” Ondo takes a sip of his tea, smiling at her. “Anyways, enough about me. How have you been, Shouko?”

“As well as can be.” She shrugs, toying with a strand of hair. “Exams are coming up soon.”

The man smiles, a look of nostalgia crossing his face. It irks Shouko; why the hell are you courting someone so young that their life makes you nostalgic? “Oh, exams. You’re a smart girl, I’m sure you’ll do well. Want to know my advice?”
She didn’t, really, but saying so would probably cause problems. “Certainly.” Shouko hopes she doesn’t sound too sarcastic; speaking politely has never been her strong point despite her use of formal language, and she was written up more than once in middle school for mistakenly sassing the teacher.

It looks like she did okay this time, though, as Ondo just smiles. Shouko really should have been ready for what came next, though, and still she almost jumps out of her skin as a hand touches her knee under the table. “Make sure you have a way to relieve your stress.”

Last time, Shouko had on a thick kimono, layers of fabric between him and her like a shield of sorts. Now, she’s in her school uniform, pleated skirt and kneepads, and she wants to scream when the hand touches her bare thigh. For a moment, she debates ‘accidentally’ dropping her teacup in the hopes that it would scald his hand, but remembers his Quirk- all she’d be doing would be scalding herself. Once was more than enough for that. For now, she bites her tongue until she tastes blood and the sting becomes unbearable. It’s a distraction from the hand touching her body. “... Okay.”

Ondo looks as content as always, which is funny considering how he’s currently feeling her leg up until the table. “May I suggest one way I could help?”

It had to have been close to twenty minutes already, right? She’d been stuck in here listening to him talk for ages now. Where was the attendant?! Shouko knows what he’ll suggest, or at the very least she has an idea, and she thinks she’s going to be sick. “... Stop it.”

“How?”

“Just stop.” She hisses before she can stop herself. The words are out of her mouth before she’s able to remember her father’s warnings about her other suitors, and Shouko’s stomach plummets imagining a much older man across from her. “... T-That is, this... This should wait until a formal union is decided upon. It’s what my father would want.”

Shouko would cross her fingers if her fists weren’t tightly clenched in her lap, protecting herself in case the hand moved for her skirt. Luckily, Ondo seems to be amused enough by her excuse to withdraw his wandering arm. “Oh, of course! My apologies. I always forget that I’m dealing with such a well-bred young lady. So many girls your age don’t know restraint when it comes to men.”

How many other girls my age have you gone after to come to that conclusion? Shouko thinks in incredulous horror before she steels herself once more, nodding stiffly. “It’s expected of me as a Todoroki.”

“What a good girl.” The way he says that makes Shouko’s stomach lurch. “You know, since you brought it up, perhaps it is time to start talks of a formal union. You seem more than dignified enough to make a proper addition to the Ondo family tree.”

Oh. Oh no. “... But I’m not of age.”

“Of course not, but that doesn’t mean an engagement can’t be arranged.” He smiles sweetly, and Shouko wants to punch it off. “I’ll talk to your father about it.”

She should have let him feel her up. Should have left her body, let him do whatever he was going to say before she stopped him. Shouko swallows back vomit once again, and prays she’s not looking nearly as terrified as she feels. This can’t be happening, things weren’t supposed to take this turn, they’ve met all of three times! “I-I see.”

“Mister Ondo? Miss Todoroki?” The attendant raps at the door before opening it. Too little, too late.
“Time is up.”

“Is it? Well, it was a delight to see you anyways, Shouko.” Ondo stands, coming around the table to offer a hand, and Shouko numbly takes it. This is a hallucination. She’s imagining things. She fell during training and hit her head and now she’s in a coma and it’s just a nightmare, it’s a horrible nightmare. She needs to wake up, wake up, wake up.

There’s a hand on her shoulder, and Shouko almost screams as she’s pulled back into her body. How much time did she lose in her panic? Judging by the fact that Fuyumi is looking at her in concern outside of the building, just in front of their car, she lost a lot. Sometimes it seems like she spent more time outside of her body than in it these days. “Shouko? Are… Are you okay? You haven’t said a word…”

“I want to go home.” She says too quickly. “Just take me home.”

Fuyumi flinches slightly. “I- Shouko, what happened…?”

What the hell was she supposed to say to that? Not much, sister who is already stressed as she attempts to stay sober, just that my refusal to be molested has lead to an engagement threat! Shouko inhales deeply, exhaling once, trying to keep herself in her body. “Nothing happened. I just- I want to get out of here.”

The look on Fuyumi’s face is something between stricken and… Determined? Shouko can’t figure out why that’s the reading she’s getting off her, but she nods anyways, guiding her to the car. “…Okay. Let’s get you home. I promise things will be okay.”

Somehow, she doubts that.

Fuyumi had left her sister to her business, as much as she wanted to know what might have caused such an intense episode of what was clearly dissociation. Well, ‘wanted to know’ was maybe not the right way to put it- she really didn’t want to hear about whatever awful thing had clearly just happened to her sister, but she did need to know whether or not she needed to kill Ondo with her own two hands. But regardless, Shouko was starting her solo training with their father still downtown after that minor villain attack (where Touya apparently wasn’t involved, even if he’d helped coordinate it)- and it wasn’t like she didn’t have work to do in her own right.

That’s why she’s driven herself to the North end of Musutafu, feeling extremely out of place in the run-down streets. Ignoring the blank gazes of many of the loitering population (Touya had specifically told her to leave her cards at home and to not bring much cash if any- just in case), she searched the dented nameplates for the proper street until she finally found the location she’d been texted. Pulling herself into the alleyway- marked with a blue cross on one of the buildings, just like the message had stated, Fuyumi leant against the wall and waited, nervously looking around.

“It’s nice to see you in person, ‘Yumi.”

Even so, she almost jumped out of her skin as a nigh-unrecognizable man emerged from the darkness. If not for that familiar drawl, those stunning blue eyes, and the memory of melting skin… Well, no. That’s a lie. A twin can never really forget. “Oh my god…”

“Hi.” He smiles, and his scars stretch. Oh, god. There was no way he’d received proper medical treatment after the initial injury, skin stapled together hastily with gnarled purple scar tissue underneath. His hair is a deep black, clearly dyed, and Fuyumi cannot blame him for that. He’d lived up to his legacy as a preemie just like she had, probably not standing over five foot seven despite
having resembled their father so much otherwise, and his torn up clothes suggest his living situation can’t be the most hygienic. “Good to see y-”

Before he can even finish, Fuyumi is launching herself at him, burying her face in his chest as she yanks him into a hug. Before she can get a word out, she’s bawling, crying into his shirt as she holds him tightly. He cannot leave her again. “T-Touya-!”

He makes a noise of surprise like he isn’t sure what to do, then his body gradually relaxes, the boy chuckling as strong arms return his sister’s hug. “It’s okay, ‘Yumi. It’s okay. I’m here.”

They stay like that for a few minutes, Fuyumi weeping as twelve years of loss pour themselves out through her tears. She’d missed him, missed the other half of her heart, and she holds him tighter as she realizes just how god-awful it’s been growing up missing a piece of herself. It’s an embarrassingly long time until Fuyumi is able to pull herself together enough to move back a bit, wiping her tears off on her sleeve. “I-I-I missed you, Touya. I missed you.”

“I missed you too, ‘Yumi.” He reaches down to ruffle her hair, and even if he’s not that tall, she’s one to talk at five foot two. “How has it been at home?”

“N-Natsuo’s majoring in kinesiology, and he’s been dating this nice girl for a while. He’s taller than you now.” She sniffs out, chuckling through the tears at Touya’s mock-offended face.

“What? Bullshit. I’ll believe it when I see him.” Touya is still holding her, and even if he smells like antiseptic and ashes, it’s the most comfortable place Fuyumi could hope to be. “And Shouko?”

That’s a little harder for her to talk about, and she purses her lips. “Well… You know about the omiai and dad. But she actually made some friends at school, so that’s really good. I’m trying to help her.”

“Well, if you got the file, you did a good job.” Touya nudges her purse a bit. “Can I see it?”

“O-Oh! Right.” Fuyumi lets him go, fumbling through her purse a little before pulling out Ondo’s file and handing it off. “Here.”

Touya hums as he flips through it, nodding along at information only he can see- Fuyumi hadn’t really checked it after she grabbed it. “Good, good. Yeah, this is usable. Thanks, ‘Yumi. I couldn’t have gotten this without your help.”

Without thinking about it, Fuyumi puffs her chest out in pride. She’d done something to help Shouko! “I’m glad!”

“Hey, heeeeey! Aren’t you gonna ask her to grab the other thing?” An unknown voice calls out from further back in the alley, and Fuyumi nearly jumps out of her skin. Touya sighs, turning around.

“Himiko, I told you to just hang back.” Touya rolls his eyes before turning back to Fuyumi. “Don’t worry, she’s harmless when I tell her to be.”

“Am not! I can’t be tamed by anyone!” A girl emerges from the darkness, and Fuyumi has to blink a few times. It’s… A high schooler? An adorable one at that, cute little fangs and blonde hair pulled into messy twin buns. The only thing wrong with her is her eyes, which are just… Off. Bright yellow and sharp, they remind Fuyumi of a predator, and make her shiver a bit as the mysterious girl (Himiko?) looks at her and waves playfully.

Touya sighs again. “You’re a brat. Fuyumi, this is Himiko Toga. We’ve been watching out for each other since I left.”
“Hello, Toga! Fuyumi Todoroki.” Fuyumi bows politely, and Toga giggles.

“Aww, Touyaaaaaaaa, you don’t look like your sister at all! Weren’t you supposed to be twins?” Touya rolls his eyes and gives her a light bop on the head.

“How many times did I tell you we’re fraternal twins? Not identical, idiot.”

It’s comforting in a way, knowing her brother’s had a friend all these years. Even if his friend is a little… Unhinged. “How did you two meet?”

“My parents put me up for adoption when they thought I was Quirkless.” Toga rocks on her feet like it’s a nice, casual subject. “I found out what my Quirk was when I was five, though, aaaaand… Well, I kinda had to run away from the orphanage after that. That’s when I met Touya! We’ve been besties foreeeever!”

“I met her a little after I ran away.” Her brother motions at the grinning girl. “We stuck it out together. Big brother instinct didn’t let me leave her on the streets alone, even if she’s annoying.”

Toga sticks out her tongue, and Fuyumi finds herself mildly touched that Touya’s been caring for a child even at his darkest point. “Well, thank you for staying with my brother, Toga. He needs someone to keep him in line.” Giggling at the way Toga blows a raspberry at an annoyed looking Touya, Fuyumi remembers the first thing she’d heard the girl say. “Ah, wait- was there something else I needed to do?”

“Don’t worry about it.” Touya says before Toga can get a word in. “You can leave the last step of the plan up to us. Toga’s Quirk will help us with it. That Ondo dickhead won’t lay a finger on Shouko ever again.”

Even if Toga’s widening smile concerns her a lot as to what they mean by that… Well, Fuyumi is choosing to hope they’re going to rough him up or out him as a creep. Touya certainly had some connections to have even found out how their home life was going, after all- she trusts him to use that brain of us. “Well, that’s good.”

“It is.” Touya moves forwards, reaching to ruffle her hair again. “I just want you to know we’re leaving Musutafu for a bit. We shouldn’t hang around in this city for too long- you know how Endeavor is.” Noticing Fuyumi’s concerned look at Toga, the boy chuckles. “Yeah, she knows who our dad is. I’ve known her since I was ten, ‘Yumi, she knows just about everything.”

“Yeah!” Toga bounces excitedly. “Also, you did introduce yourself as Fuyumi Todoroki back there, and I know Touya’s related to you and that red and white girl from the Sports Festival. Proooooobably woulda made the connection eventually.”

As Fuyumi stumbles over her words in sudden embarrassment over the blunder, Touya snickers again. “Don’t worry about it. But anyways, we’re leaving for a while. Got a new job from one of our work buddies near Kanagawa. I’ll visit when I can, okay?”

“Can I tell Natsuo or Shouko about you…?” Fuyumi tries before receiving a head shake in response.

“I’d love to see them again, but it’s too risky right now. You know how we aren’t exactly living legally.” Touya says, and his twin cringes a bit at the reminder that her beloved brother (younger than her by precisely seven minutes, her younger brother in a way) was technically a villain. She’d never heard of a villain with blue fire killing anyone, though, so he couldn’t be that bad…?

In any case, she nods, biting her lip. Fuyumi knew this was how it had to be, even if it hurt a little to hide this secret from her siblings. “Right. Um, Touya?”
“Mm?” Her twin responds after checking his phone from his long coat pocket. “What’s up?”

“T-Thank you for coming to me. I’d do anything for you- you know that, right? I love you.” She casts her gaze to the ground instinctively before a shadow hides her view. Warm arms wrap around her, and Fuyumi finds her face pressed up against the white fabric of her brother’s shirt.

“I love you too, ’Yumi. Thank you for taking care of Natsuo and Shouko. I’m sorry I haven’t called.” He murmurs into her hair, and it’s enough to cause another round of tears to bubble up, Fuyumi breaking into muffled sobs as she holds her brother tightly again.

Villain he may be, but her twin was her twin. Fuyumi would do anything to make the other half of her soul happy.

“So, when are you gonna tell her?”

“Never, hopefully.” Touya sighed, lighting a cigarette with his Quirk as he crouched against the alley wall. He’d gotten Himiko to walk Fuyumi to the train station, knowing nobody would screw with her as long as the notorious murderer was by her side. Maybe the general public didn’t know the real face of the girl responsible for a series of bloodletting murders, but half the criminal population of Japan sure did.

Himiko was back now, seated atop a dumpster as she kicks her feet idly. “She probably knows we’re gonna kill him anyways. Why keep it a secret?”

“Cause if we somehow screw it up and get caught, she can have deniability.” He takes the first hit off his cigarette, sighing as nicotine fills his lungs. “There’s some detective in this precent with a lie-detector Quirk. Tsukauchi or whatever. If Fuyumi gets interrogated, she can at least say we never told her we were gonna kill Ondo. She deserves a mostly normal life.”

“And yet you got her to steal files anyways?” Himiko giggles, leaning in a bit, and Touya rolls his eyes.

“I’ll light you on fire.”

“If you haven’t done it by now, you’re never gonna do it, ehehe!”

He takes another hit. “Fair. Also, if you meet her again, don’t ask her about the other thing. Fuyumi’s a good girl. She couldn’t take Shouko’s blood.”

Himiko throws her arms up dramatically. “But it’d be so much easier! All she needs is a syringe and some quiet footsteps!”

“It’s not a matter of supplies, it’s a matter of morals. She couldn’t bring herself to even if she had the supplies.” Touya offers Himiko a cigarette, the girl gleefully accepting. “[Sides, it’ll be easy for you to grab some at the training camp thing.”

Though he sticks out a lit finger as an offer to light her dart, Himiko bats him away like a cat. Instead, she pulls her bright pink Sailor Moon lighter from her pocket, lighting up that way. “Yeah, provided your lil’ sis passes. How does Shigaraki even know about that?”

“I dunno. He’s got sources. I don’t really care how he gets it.” He doesn’t care about Shigaraki in general, really. He just likes being on the payroll and meeting other people who were in agreement with Stain.
Himiko shrugs, taking a hit. “If you say so. Oh, by the way! You didn’t tell me your sister was cuuuuuute!”

“She’s too old for you.”

“I’m eighteen!”

“Still too old for you. Also, you stab everyone you date.”

“Meanieeeee!”

The days passed, training continues, and Shouko manages to make it to her exams without any injuries courtesy of her father. Weekend training was as brutal as always, of course, but her father looked like he was pushing her strength rather than her endurance this time- it would be no good to have her bruised and battered during exams, after all.

The written exam was, as far as UA exams go, a breeze. Not really difficult, but a bit tedious with all the written sections. Shouko was sure she’d done well enough to please her father. It was the practicals the next day she knew she had to be worried about, and as the day itself came and they were told to change into their hero costumes, the worry only rose. Shouko shoved it down, but it only amplified when Bakugou refused to stand beside her as everyone prepared to take the test.

Aizawa stood in front of the first testing ground in front of multiple other teachers, which was a bit confusing. Were they there to help grade? “Now, I’m sure all of you have been wondering what your exams will consist of-”

“Fighting robots!” Ashido squealed happily. “Right!?"

“No interrupting, Ashido.” Aizawa flashed his Quirk as a warning. “But I’m sure that’s what you heard from some of the second years, isn’t it? However, we decided we were going to alter it after realizing how illogical it is for some Quirks to go up against robots.”

Much to everyone’s collective confusion and mild distress, Aizawa’s scarf rustled, Principal Nedzu popping out after a moment. Was he just… Allowed to use his employees as jungle gyms? Alright. “As Mr. Aizawa said, we’ve decided to make a change. Instead of fighting robots, you’ll be going up against one of the members of our staff!”

Oh, crap.

Aizawa and Nedzu went over a few more details surrounding the exams- the teachers would be wearing weighted bracelets to reduce their speed, each group was paired up with a teacher who would require them to think outside the box and utilize their Quirks to their limits, among others- but Shouko was too busy internally panicking. Bakugou wasn’t even looking at her- how the hell were they supposed to go up against a pro when they couldn’t even have a conversation?! All she could do was hope they wouldn’t be going up against someone too difficult…?

“And finally, let’s get onto the matchups.” Aizawa brings her back to the matter at hand, and Shouko watches the man pull a list from his scarf and begin to read. “First off: Kyoka Jirou and Momo Yaoyorozu will be fighting All Might.”

A sympathetic hiss runs over the entire class. Both girls called look like they might seriously faint, Momo in particular growing dangerously pale. Well, that was a bad start. Aizawa just looks tired as he continues to go over the pairings. Shouko makes a mental list as they go along:
Fair enough. Except… Wait one damn minute. As she hears Aizawa start to call her name and runs her eyes over the pros standing in front of them, she realizes there’s only one person left for her group to fight. And sure enough…

“Katsuki Bakugou and Shouko Todoroki, you’re up against me.”

Well. Her hopes for attending training camp were good while they lasted, Shouko supposes.

Chapter End Notes

CONTENT WARNINGS:

- Gendered slurs directed at female character
- Internalized transphobia
- Child abuse
- Mentions of pedophilia
- Non-consensual touching of a minor (not in a sexual location, but it is sexually charged)
- Forced marriage threats
- Semi-graphic burn scars

CONTENT WARNINGS END. CHAPTER SPOILERS BEGIN.

I'm sorry to have cut off before the fight- I know a lot of people were looking forwards to that- but I really needed to get some additional plot out of the way first! I promise I'll work extra hard on the fights to make up for it <3
Please let me know what you think in the comments if you have the time! Like I said beforehand, they really mean the world to me. Thank you so much for reading, and I hope to see you soon!
somebody as charred and burnt as me

Chapter Notes

Hi again! It's my birthday- somehow I made it to 20 despite being a total trash mammal? Yay!

But anyways, I don't have much to say past that! Except that this chapter contains a LOT of content warnings, so please make sure you're reading those if you're worried at all!

Anyways, it's time for those final exams, so let's get ready to rumble!

Was it strange that Izumi was more concerned over her friend’s exam than her own?

Don’t get her wrong- the upcoming exam was going to be nothing short of brutal for her and Kaminari. Snipe’s mobility wasn’t great, but with a honing Quirk like his, he didn’t have to be. The teacher had kindly let them know in advance that he’d be firing special extra-soft rubber bullets made by support in order to bruise and slow them down rather than his usual live rounds (was it bad that Izumi hadn’t even put it past UA to use real bullets?), but that didn’t calm her nerves once. She’d been static shocked at least three times now by a nervous Kaminari as his Quirk acted up, so it’s not like he was better off. Even so, they’d been training together this whole week, and she had a good idea of what he was capable of. They could win this if they worked together and found a weak spot.

Yeah, teamwork would be vital. Which was why Izumi was so worried about Shouko.

Kacchan was… Volatile at the best of times. He still had a grudge against the mismatched girl ever since the Sports Festival, which only aggravated the already messy situation they were in. Shouko had very little time for him in general (Izumi had had to break up a fistfight before it happened just last week!), making things even worse. They were a powder keg set to explode- possibly literally if Kacchan was too liberal with his Quirk. How could she not worry about her friend’s chances in this kind of situation?

“Uh, Midoriya? You’ve been muttering for, like, five minutes.”

Kaminari’s voice pops her back to reality where she and the boy are crouched down to avoid the teacher’s sights, and Izumi meeps, scrambling to get herself together. “S-S-Sorry, Kaminari! I just-uh, anyways, it’s not important. We should try and strategize together.”

“Yeah.” The boy nods, tapping his foot nervously. “So, Snipe. I don’t think I can do much against him… I don’t have enough mobility. He’d have me on the ground in half a second even if I tried to get into range. And the arena we were assigned…” Kaminari looks around at the trees and bushes that surround them. “The forest zone… I know you mentioned during training last week that I should find some sort of pole to work as a conductor, but wood doesn’t conduct electricity. I can’t even use the trees. I’m pretty much useless.”

“D-Don’t say that!” Izumi shakes her head rapidly. “We just need to think outside the box. Hm… You probably know more about electricity than me, ehehe. Can you use the ground?”
“I mean, yeah? But I have a range limit.” Kaminari pokes the dirt beneath them. “Even if we rush on in… Feels like maybe he’d get us first. Or at least me- I’m not fast like you are.”

Before Izumi can respond, there’s a whizzing sound behind her ear. She and Kaminari screamed in unison as a rubber bullet embedded itself in the tree behind them. Snipe’s Quirk allowed him to hone targets perfectly- that was a warning shot. “K-Kaminari, hold on!”

Ignoring the boy’s surprised squawks, Izumi picked him up in a bridal carry, activating One For All and allowing the power to flow through her entire body as she zooms off, feeling the whizz of bullets from side to side even as she frantically dodged, bouncing from tree to tree. Snipe was clearly toning down his attacks- not surprising. For as much as Aizawa had said the teachers would be going all out, they clearly weren’t actually going to do that. Pros with years of experience would have them down in seconds if they really wanted to. They were operating at a level that was fair for a group of first years. That said, Snipe wasn’t going all that easy- something Izumi learned as a rubber bullet struck her calf. Yelping, her power sputtered out, and she did her best to wrap her body around Kaminari and provide support for his head as they rolled down a small natural embankment and finally stopped in a ditch.

“Ow… Are you alright, Kaminari?” Izumi’s left calf aches- definitely bruised. She releases Kaminari, the boy curiously red as he scrambles out of her hold.

“Y-Yeah! Uh, totally fine.” Mimicking her as she crouches, he grimaced, pulling a leaf out of his hair. “Jeez… I’m pretty sure I swallowed a leaf or something! My face is all wet.”

Izumi sighed, nodding. “Mine too. I don’t- Wait a minute.” Wet faces from the trees… Ding went the lightbulb. Looking down at herself, there was mud on one side of her costume from where she’d landed in the damp ditch. Mud… Water! “K-Kaminari! It rained last night!”

He blinks at her, raising an eyebrow. “... Okay?”

“Water!” Izumi excitedly raises a muddy glove. Kaminari continued to blink in confusion.

“Are… Are you okay? If you hit your head, we should probably tell Snipe…”

Izumi feels her cheeks redden, and she shakes her head. “N-No, I’m fine! I mean that if there’s water in the ground, there’s water in the trees! That’s why your face got wet- damp leaves! So even if wood normally doesn’t conduct electricity…”

The boy was slowly starting to get it, face lighting up. “... Wet wood does!”

Izumi beamed in excitement. Never before had she been so happy to be half covered in mud! “Okay, we can work with this! Kaminari, how good are you at acting?”

——

Denki was more nervous than he’d ever been. Well, that wasn’t true. The USJ thing was probably scarier than an exam, but only by a little! UA’s academics were terrifying! He didn’t know how well he’d done on his written portion even after Yaoyorozu had helped him out, meaning he seriously needed to ace this part if he even had a chance of going to the training camp.

Training camp… Ever since he’d returned from suspension, Mineta had been excitedly talking about the possibility of hot springs and the girls using them, and… Well, it didn’t really sit right with Denki anymore. Did he like the girls? Sure! They were nice and pretty (and he’d be lying if he said his heart didn’t pound a little faster around Jirou than it really should), but something about the way Mineta talked about them was starting to irk Denki. If it wasn’t for Jirou and Yaoyorozu’s quick thinking, he’d have been dead at the USJ. He and Ashido spammed each other with deep-fried
memes during class, he and Uraraka would imitate Tik Toks back and forth- they were his friends, and his friends didn’t deserve to be treated like meat or some foreign species they could never understand. Plus, it wasn’t like Kirishima’s hero costume or Sero’s bright smiles didn’t also result in him turning into a stuttering mess from time to time. Denki had felt shitty after the cheerleader incident where what he’d thought to be a fun prank had turned out to upset most of the girls. Meanwhile, Mineta had waved off their anger. Maybe that was when Denki had first stepped back and seriously thought about their friendship.

He’d never had many friends before- too weird, too loud, and before UA? Too smart. He was the student council president, offering tutoring for first-years and eagerly handling the club funding without any issue before. But here at UA… Turns out his middle school just wasn’t very good. Now he was the dumbest of the smart kids, the one teased and elbowed as he barely scraped by the university-level coursework. But Denki had friends now- albeit friends that seemed to like him because he was the loveable dunce, the loud idiot who acted up to get laughs from the rest. It was great, really, but… Well, maybe constantly being called stupid wasn’t too easy on the self-esteem. Mineta, though, never called him dumb. They were bros, super tight friends! Being around him was easy- Denki didn’t have to put on an act. He could just be him. But… Well, the other boy wasn’t at all repentant after the changeroom thing, not even after they could all hear Midoriya weeping through the walls. And then their conversation after...

“Hey, Kami! Bad news about your crush.”

Mineta had caught up with him in the hallway walking back to their classroom. Denki wasn’t sure if he really wanted to wait for Mineta while Aizawa yelled at him, and decided to just set off on his own. But now he jolted slightly as his feelings for a certain girl were brought up. “I dunno what you’re talking about.”

“Sure, sure. We all know you’re into Jirou.” While Denki had sputtered over that, Mineta had continued. “Anyways, I saw her in her underwear just now, and-”

“Dude, I don’t wanna hear about this.” Wasn’t this some invasion of privacy?! Denki wanted nothing to do with that unless Jirou was okay with it, which she very clearly wasn’t.

“No, but it’s important! Sorry, but I think she’s a he.” Mineta sighed ruefully, shaking his head. “He wears chokers all the time, so maybe I should’ve picked up on it earlier, but I figured you oughta know before you get in too deep with a trap.”

Denki felt himself bristling before he could help it, static running over his arms before he reeled his Quirk back in. He obviously didn’t care about whether or not Jirou was trans, but that was empathetically none of his business, and he felt like he’d just unintentionally partaken in invading the girl’s privacy. “Dude, knock it off. Jirou’s a girl. I don’t care about anything else.”

“What, are you gay or something?” Denki tightened his grip around his backpack straps. He was bi, thanks, but it’s not like he felt safe telling Mineta that. “If you’re into crossdressers, why not Tokoyami? She’s cute when she’s not pretending to be all boyish.”

Anger flared in his chest, something that the generally happy-go-lucky boy rarely felt. “Tokoyami’s a guy. How many times has he had to tell you that? You shouldn’t even be talking about this. It’s literally none of our business.” He’d snapped before he could stop himself. “Look, I need to finish my homework before class. I’m leaving.”

With that, Denki had stormed off, a sick feeling pooling in his stomach. He’d just been given information that should have been shared by Jirou herself, if anyone. It made no difference to Denki, but it sure as hell wasn’t his business, and Mineta had outed her without seeing any issue.
whatsoever. Had he made friends with the wrong type of person…?

Denki shook himself out of his thoughts, trudging towards the location Midoriya had suggested. Maybe there was something wrong with him if he could only make friends with people who either treated him like a walking clown show or who turned out to be a lot scummier than they originally seemed. Ugh, he needed to focus on the stupid exam! Why was he even thinking about this again?

Right, ’cause of Midoriya. She was… Well, Denki hadn’t had high hopes when he learned she was his partner. Not because he didn’t like her or anything! She was always really nice, and her Quirk was super useful! In fact, she was maybe the only classmate aside from Mineta who treated him like an intellectual equal, even if he kept visibly screwing up in class. It wasn’t anything on her end- He was more afraid that she wouldn’t want to work with him after the whole changeroom thing. It was pretty well-known that he was friends with Mineta, and they’d all heard that scream followed by the sounds of someone clearly having a panic attack. Denki had been scared she wouldn’t even talk to him after, even if he wouldn’t blame her for it.

And yet, she’d arrived at his desk after school that first day as eager as always, excitedly asking him about his Quirk and any ideas he had for how they could combine their powers. Midoriya had either forgiven him for his involvement with the boy who had violated her privacy, or was putting her feelings aside in order to pass the exam. Not to mention, Aizawa had explained that all you had to do to pass was escape the arena. Midoriya could have easily taken off on him, used that speedy Quirk to instantly get herself out, but Denki knows that sort of escape couldn’t possibly count as a victory for both of them- he would have failed, no mobility and no solid counter to their opponent. But she hadn’t even entertained the idea. Whether they passed or failed, they would do it together.

Denki steeled his expression before finding the tree near their original hiding space, easy to identify thanks to the rubber bullet mark in the trunk. Midoriya was trusting him, putting her faith in his intelligence- he needed to prove his reliability. Carefully shimmying up the tree, keeping three points in contact with the large maple just like they’d learned in class, Denki buried himself within the foliage, snapping off a large chunk of a branch just like he’d been instructed to and holding tight to his new weapon. Now, he would lie in wait.

It was a few minutes until Midoriya stumbled out of the foliage, a look of distress on her face. Just like she had said she would, the girl had done a pretty damn good job of making herself look like a mess- she’d stuck some twigs in her mop of hair, rubbed her eyes to make them look red as if there’d been tears earlier, and limped dramatically as she favoured the leg that hadn’t taken a rubber bullet. A wavering voice called out. “K-K-Kaminari…? P-Please come back…!”

Something whizzed by her head, and the shriek of surprise she let out was probably genuine. Denki had to bite his lip to keep himself from gasping. Snipe stepped into view, the first time they’d actually seen him this whole exam. Gas mask, gun drawn, the way his cape billowed in the breeze… Damn. Denki thinks he understands why Snipe only seems to get called in during the direst of attacks. Dude looked freaking terrifying! “You get left behind, little lady?”

“S-Stay back!” Midoriya cries out, backing up with her hands up as she gets closer to the tree he was in. Tears prick in the corners of her eyes, and Denki wonders if crying on command was as easy as she made it look. “My partner, he’ll… He’ll definitely come back for me! And he hasn’t been shot yet…!”

“Leavin’ the arena’s one way to ensure he passes, with or without you.” Snipe takes a moment to reload his gun, moving a little closer. “If you trained together, that shouldn’t have happened, but how much time did you really spend with your partner?”

Midoriya’s eyes widen in faux-shock as she backs right into the tree Denki is hiding in. Any minute
now… “We… I-I didn’t want to talk to him after one incident, but… No, h-he wouldn’t leave me behind…! Right…?”

“Y’know, Eraserhead really did seem to think you could put any hurt feelings behind you if it meant you would pass. Wonder if he put too much stock in you?” Snipe raised his gun. “Surrender now, kid. If you didn’t plan, there’s no point in me toyin’ with you.”

“And what if I did plan?”

There was his cue. Putting his fear behind him, Denki clutched his branch-turned-conductor and leapt down.

The next few moments were a blur, and not just because he wound up frying his brain in the end. He shouted something as he rammed the damp branch into the wet earth, and his hair and jacket were blown about as Midoriya just about shot herself out of the danger zone. Water was one of the best conductors for his Quirk- it was why he wasn’t allowed to learn how to swim until he was ten and had nigh-perfect control of his more dangerous currents. Even if wood wouldn’t normally work, as he jammed the branch into the ground, Denki squeezed his eyes shut and focused on the water running under bark and through leaves. His body heat rose, he saw lightning behind his eyes, and Denki grinned as he released the electricity that had begged to be let free. This time, he remembered what he shouted:

“INDISCRIMINATE DISCHARGE: ONE POINT THREE MILLION VOLTS!”

And like that, it was over. His mind slowly slipped into a daze, buzzed with so much electricity that even walking became a nigh impossible task, and Denki felt his face relax as his higher thought processes gave out on him. There was the clink of the handcuffs as Midoriya captured their dazed teacher, the feeling of warmth as she wrapped her arms around him in an ecstatic hug, and then he was checked out with a simple “Wheeey…”.

But, his last thought had been before he slipped away for some time, they had passed.

Ten minutes earlier…

“We have to just run and get out of here.”

Momo might have been embarrassed at the fear in her tone if Kyoka didn’t seem every bit as frightened, the other girl nodding in agreement as they listened to the gate close behind them. The city zone- huge and sprawling, it was designed like any proper major metropolis. Normally, she’d be thinking of any way she could use the well-stocked buildings, checking all possible hiding spots and possible ambush points, but that was foolish this time around. They were fighting All Might! Nothing they could do would possibly help them except for finding an escape route.

Kyoka nods, and Momo knows her friend well enough to see the terror hidden behind a poker face. “Yeah. Uh, I can use my Quirk to listen for him coming so we can avoid him. Can you make something to help us escape easier?”

Oh. Momo hadn’t thought of that, too full of thoughts of blindly running until they were out of danger. She flushes as she nods, unzipping her costume from her belly button to under her chest and holding open the fabric. “Y-Yes, I can make us a motorbike.” She’d purposely eaten as many hearty meals and gotten as much protein into her this week as she could- Momo was certain she could make at least a few items that big before Quirk overexertion started to kick in.
Overexertion… For as much as people praised her power, they didn’t understand the true cost of Creation. Momo had always been on the curvier side, pudgy thighs and soft arms, so it’s not like she didn’t have the body fat needed to go around for many items, but it was always a guessing game as to exactly how much of herself she’d be giving up each time. Sure, she could memorize each molecular structure well enough, but her own body was a fickle thing. There was that ache whenever she used her Quirk, her form crying out at the loss of a part of itself. She remembers once in fourth grade when she’d been practicing at home, and decided to try and make herself her first car. She wasn’t going to drive it, of course, but even then she’d known she wanted to be a hero, and she needed to practice making detailed items! There’d been a sharp burst of suffering in her gut, and-

The next thing she’d known, she’d woken up in the hospital in the worst pain of her life.

According to the doctors, she’d used up most of her liver and both kidneys as her small body struggled to make a huge item. She still had the scars on her stomach from the transplants that saved her life. Ever since then, Momo knows she hesitates with her Quirk. It had been years, and she was much bigger and smarter (hell, she probably could make that car if she had the tools to put the individual pieces she created together), but she couldn’t forget the agony she’d been in as her body laid in the hospital bed as it prepared to die. Even as she tolerates the pain as she adjusts her costume to make room for the back of the motorcycle, there’s that fear in her heart. She could kill herself with her Quirk, her body could digest itself if she didn’t eat enough to sustain the hunger of Creation—so much could happen. If she got too confident—

“‘Momocycle’ brand? I see! I’m more of a Harley-Davidson fan myself. Maybe it was from my time in the States.”

Both Momo and Kyoka screamed as All Might, perched on the gate behind them, waved. When did he get there?! Creation halted in the middle of the front wheel, leaving scrapped motorbike pieces on the concrete as Momo froze in terror. Kyoka grabbed her by the hand, bolting for the nearest side alley as she practically dragged Momo. “RUN!”

All Might let out a hearty chuckle, one that would have been comforting had he not been playing the role of villain. He was letting them go… Obviously, it was to even the stakes a bit, but in this context? Momo felt like a mouse toyed with by a cat, freeing her just to catch her again. Kyoka smashed a window with one of her jacks, yanking Momo inside and crouching against a wall. “Oh my god, oh my god—!”

“S-Stay calm! We just need to figure out an escape route!” Momo, despite her own panic, tried her best to calm her partner down. What could they even do here?!

“Easy for you to say! Your Quirk is actually useful!” Kyoka bemoaned, burying her head in her hands. “All I can do is kind of track his movements!”

“That isn’t true at all, Kyoka!” Momo grabbed her friends’ arm, looking at her seriously. “You fought those villains with your heartbeat at the USJ! Please don’t say that!”

Momo knew she was a hypocrite of the worst kind, but it was a whole lot easier to tell others not to hesitate than it was to do it herself. Kyoka made a groaning sound, crouching deeper into herself. “I just… Okay. Okay. Where are we right now?”

Raising her own head, Momo examined the area. A table, some chairs, a fridge… “It looks like we’re in a tiny apartment. Let’s try and navigate through the building to avoid All Might. Can you use your jacks to check for any vibrations?”

“Sure.” Rising and taking a deep breath, Kyoka nodded at Momo as they soldiered on. The girl
seemed to stop by the kitchen counter for a moment, but Momo didn’t question it at the time.

On they went through the apartments, wandering down hallway after hallway. It honestly reminded Momo of that one ancient American movie they’d studied for its cultural impact in history class. She didn’t remember the name, but she remembered the little boy on the tricycle who turned in the hotel hallway to find those scary looking twins. It felt like that, but instead of ghost girls, she and Kyoka might stumble upon the Symbol of Peace ready to knock their heads together.

“I’m picking up movement outside.” Kyoka whispered, unplugging her jack from a wall. “He’s probably going to start looking for us.”

Momo gulped, hoping she didn’t look as frightened as she felt. “Alright. I’m going- no, no, that might not work.” What if the communicators she was considering broke? Then they’d be shouting into dead air, giving off their positions. “Maybe- no, shields are useless against All Might. Safety goggles for the dust? Perhaps I could-”

“Yaomomo?”

“Argh, but if those break under a hit, we’re toast. Knee pads?”

“Uh, Yaomomo?”

“I’m such an idiot, it’s All Might! What good will bike safety gear do us? If I try to-”

“YAOMOMO!”

Momo suddenly found herself shoved out of the way as a great force blew away half the wall. It was only Kyoka’s quick thinking that kept both of them from being blown out with all the debris. It took the ponytailed girl a moment to adjust to the sudden shift in lighting, but there he was- standing right in front of the sun, rays bending around him, was All Might.

“Oh, who cares about the city, heroes? Remember, I’m a villain.” The man sounded menacing in a way Momo couldn’t begin to describe with how fast her heart was beating. “I’ll destroy everything in my path if I must. That includes you.”

“Yaomomo, run! Get out of here!” Kyoka shrieked, jumping to her feet and jamming her plugs into her boots. It seemed like she wasn’t the only one who was terrified- Kyoka’s heart was pounding like a freight train, resulting in the strongest blast Momo had ever seen from the girl. In her panic, Momo stumbled to her feet, rushing in the opposite direction and clambering over debris to rush into the street while Kyoka fought to keep All Might back.

“Damn it, damn it! What are you doing?! Momo’s mind screamed at her. So many ideas were racing, none of them any good. Perfection. She needed perfection to beat the Symbol of Peace, and it didn’t matter what everyone thought as they praised her grades, her looks, the Quirk they didn’t know hurt every single time, it didn’t matter because she was nothing without perfection. Why didn’t she listen to her mother when she asked her to join the family business, forget heroism? Why couldn’t she be cool under pressure like Shouko, Asui, Kyoka, all these amazingly strong young women who she couldn’t hold a candle to? Useless, useless, useless!

Momo dove into the nearest alleyway, curled into the fetal position behind some garbage cans. Finally, she was with her people. She’d scraped up her knees on the landing, but couldn’t bring herself to care. How could she leave Kyoka like that!? What was wrong with her?! Even from here, she could hear the fight going on, even if she wasn’t looking. Back and forth, Kyoka’s voice rapidly becoming hoarse as she ran out of energy, Momo could hardly focus in her misery until one line
burst from her best friend’s mouth.

“Because even if I’m weak… Even if I hate myself for it… A hero has to push past her fear and be ready to make sacrifices for everyone else!”

Sacrifice… What is a sacrifice? Her classmates were all pushing themselves to the limits, struggling against forces they couldn’t possibly hope to beat. Kyoka couldn’t win by herself, but there she was, battling the Symbol of Peace all alone. She was sacrificing her own chances so that Momo could run, could win for herself. Everyone else was no doubt struggling in their own battles, being thrown down and getting back up again regardless. And what was Momo doing? Hiding with a bunch of trash in an alley.

… No. Enough of this. If she was going to save a single soul-if she was going to become the hero her heart longed to be- then Momo would have to put herself at risk. That was sacrifice.

Unzipping her costume again, she barely felt the ache as Creation took from her body.

Kyoka was on her last leg- literally. She was sure her tibia was broken judging by the pain radiating through it after a blast of air had sent her flying over the debris. As All Might approached, she gave her best scowl. Momo was wrong- she really did have a useless Quirk, especially compared to her. The best she could do was sacrifice herself to give her friend a fighting chance at escape.

All Might stood, and Kyoka had to squint as the sun around him blinded her. “Ready to yield yet, hero?”

“No until my partner is safe.” Kyoka grimaced. They’d heard mere moments ago that Kaminari and Midoriya had both passed, followed almost right away by Shoji and Uraraka’s victory- where was the announcement that Momo had passed?

“Well, you may not be around to hear it.” It amazed Kyoka how frightening the Symbol of Peace she grew up idolizing could be. Was this what villains saw daily? “I’m afraid you’re at your end.”

Kyoka grit her teeth, prepared for the KO no doubt coming, when a cry from behind caused her eyes to widen like saucers.

“KYOKA! COVER YOUR EYES!”

Ignoring the scream in her leg, Kyoka held her hands up over her eyes. There was a great crashing sound, and even through her fingers, the white light was almost blinding. As it subsided slightly, Kyoka cranked her head around to see what the hell that had been before her jaw dropped. Momo said atop a motorbike, panting, with a freaking bazooka over her shoulders! “Flashbang gun! Get on the bike!”

Ignoring the scream in her leg, Kyoka stumbled over herself while All Might attempted to shake off the flashbang’s effects to get on the back of the bike. Wrapping her arms around Momo’s waist, she stared at the back of the girl’s head in wonder as she revved the engine. “Yaomomo, you came back…??!”

“I couldn’t just leave you.” Momo accelerated, the front wheel of the bike briefly popping off the ground as she zoomed towards the other end of the city. “After all, shouldn’t a hero be ready to make sacrifices for everyone else?”

It took Kyoka a minute, but her face broke into a grin as she tightened her hold on Momo’s waist. “You’re amazing, you know that?”
“You’re one to talk.” Taking a hand off the wheel for a moment, a small speaker materialized in Momo’s palm as she handed it back. Was it just Kyoka, or was she looking a little exhausted? “This will fit your jacks. I don’t know exactly how your boot speakers are made, but your heartbeat should convert into blasts of air instead of sonic blasts. Keep him at bay if he follows!”

Sure enough, All Might recovered quickly enough to follow, but seemed to hang back as Kyoka aimed her newly-made weapon. He had been going easy on them the entire time, hadn’t he? Even so, he certainly wasn’t giving her much of a break now- aiming the weapon to keep up with him took all her precision, especially with how one hand was still wrapped around Momo’s waist to keep herself from falling off the motorcycle.

Despite the pain in her leg, it was… Almost fun. Wind in her hair, roar of the engine- Kyoka could get used to this. As the duo finally shot through the exit gate, announcement of their passing echoing through the arena, she leant forth in a burst of adrenaline, whispering to Momo. “Wanna make us some fake licenses so we can do that again?”

Momo’s laughter is melodic as she reaches back to bop her best friend on the head. “Don’t push your luck. How about I drive you to Recovery Girl’s tent for now?”

_That would be just fine_, Kyoka thought as she scooted closer, engine revving.

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Five minutes earlier…

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The residential zone was nice, Shouko thought. It kind of reminded her of the suburbs around her own house. Well, maybe she’d be able to enjoy it more if she wasn’t focused on trying to get Bakugou to plan with her. “Why aren’t you talking to me?”

Dead air. He didn’t even react. Shouko grit her teeth. “So I guess you don’t need any input from someone who’s grown up studying under the number two hero? You know you can’t beat Aizawa by yourself.”

“Yes I can.” He growled back. Bakugou wasn’t so much as looking at her, but he was talking, which was as good a start as any. “Stay out of my fucking way.”

“I promise you that you can’t.” Shouko’s gaze hardened on the boy, following him as he stormed further into the zone. “At least not without my help. I’m at the same level as you, and you know it.”

Bakugou’s lips curved into a sneer. “Nope. Not even fucking close.”

God, this wasn’t going anywhere. Shouko needed a different approach to at least try and get into this guy’s head and figure out how to work with him. Speedwalking a bit to catch up with him, she put her hand on his shoulder. “Why do you hate Izumi so much? What did she do to you?”

Her hand was shoved off within seconds. “None of your fucking business.”

“It is my business! Izumi is my best friend!”

Bakugou snorted, rolling his eyes. “Yeah, ‘best friend’. Just because you want to get her in bed doesn’t mean you gotta white knight on the useless moron’s behalf.”

Shouko came very close to bursting into flames- partially due to the anger, partially due to the sudden embarrassment. Her cool tone slipped into one of shock for a moment. “I- excuse me?!?”
“You heard me.” Bakugou kept marching forth. “Look, I’m not like the shitty nerd. I’m not gonna suddenly wanna paint your nails and scissor with you just ‘cause you dumped your garbage family story on me in some hallway. Fuck off and let me beat Aizawa by myself.”

Well, that brought her back to the beginning of the Sports Festival battle. Shouko’s eyes widened as she remembered what Bakugou had said to them before their fight. *Or was all that shit you dumped on Deku just to get her to go easy on you? “You don’t know shit about my family.”*

“I know that you’re goddamn loud, and those hallways *echo*, Icyhot.” Bakugou’s glare over his shoulder is chilling. “I didn’t fucking tell anyone because it’s none of my fucking business, but I heard everything.”

For some reason, that knowledge prompts a burning anger in her stomach. What right did he have to know…?! She lacks the composure to stay focused, thoughts of her home life overriding her sensibilities. Shouko’s mind searches for the cruelty she’s learnt over years and years of beatings, pulls it out and takes aim. “I’m not shocked you used it against me the first time we fought. You’re basically a villain already.”

And she hits her mark perfectly. Bakugou freezes, not moving an inch or turning his head before he speaks, voice icy. “*What* did you just say to me?”

“You beat down people that are smaller than you, scared of you already, and why?” Shouko hisses, fists clenching. She knows she’s losing her own cool at the worst time, but she cannot *stand* this boy, especially not as she sees the way Izumi flinches around him already. Shouko may not always speak up, but she sees more than she lets on. The truth is in her face, and it doesn’t look good. “All that talk of being number one, of winning every time- and who cares who burns for you to get there, right? Why should it matter who you ruin as long as you can fool people into thinking you’re a real hero?”

Bakugou turns, facing her with an incredulous rage etched into his features. “Don’t you fucking dare, Icyhot, I see where you’re going with this. You don’t know jack about me or my life.”

“I know exactly who you’re going to become if you don’t get yourself together.” Shouko snarls. “I’ve seen the kind of person who treats others like stepping stones so he can rise higher- how many lives are you willing to ruin to do it your way? Because you’ve already dragged an innocent girl down in your idiotic methods.”

“You think you know shit about me and Deku?” Bakugou growls, marching forwards and getting in her face. Shouko doesn’t flinch, even when a furious finger is jabbed into her chest. “Deku’s nothing but a fucking liar. About her Quirk, about respecting me- she’s just fooled you like she’s fooled every other goddamn idiot in this class.”

Shouko squints, snarl growing. “Izumi idolizes you- can’t you see that? Whenever she talks about your techniques or Quirk progress, it’s clear you’re someone she looks up to. God knows why she does, unless you somehow managed to Stockholm her, but there’s no lying there.”

Snorting in a humourless laugh, Bakugou shakes his head. “Yep, she’s pulled the wool over your goddamn eyes too. ‘Kacchan this, Kacchan that’- I’m not explaining shit to you, but she knows goddamn well what that nickname represents, and she won’t shut the fuck up with it. But I’m the villain ‘cause I don’t bend over backwards to lick her boots like the rest of you idiots, huh?”

He leans in for intimidation factor, and Shouko moves forwards too, face hard with anger and mere inches from his. “I trust your claims as far as I can throw you. Everyone knows you’re a violent narcissist more obsessed with winning than saving. How long until you realize you can’t do it without someone else’s help?”
“I can and will do it alone!”

“No you won’t.” Shouko thinks of years of bruises covered up by Fuyumi, her older sister too young for such a heavy burden and who had to carry it anyways. She thinks of a decade spent living in terror of her father’s angry fits, each yearly Hero Ranking being followed by a training session so brutal that her pride would be pushed aside as she begged for him to stop hitting me, I’ll work harder, please don’t. She thinks of an inflexible man with a burning need to win- the same fire she sees in Bakugou’s eyes, and years of fury fill her next hissed out words. “How long, Bakugou? How long until you realize? How long until you find some destitute family with a daughter with a strong Quirk? How long until you’re-”

“No.” Bakugou’s face is… Inexpressive. Frighteningly blank. “Don’t you dare. You have no fucking right to-”

“How long until you’re beating your own kids to see if they can win when you were too weak?”

There’s a fast movement of the arm, and Shouko sees stars as one of Bakugou’s gauntlets slams into the side of her head. She stumbles almost half a foot, falling onto the pavement face first. Her nose cracks, red pouring down her face as Bakugou flips her over, grabs her by the collar and screams. “HOW FUCKING DARE YOU?!” He roars, and Shouko suddenly thinks of Stain, thinks of the blind rage in this boy’s eyes, pupils like pinpricks. It’s enough to chill her blood. “YOU THINK YOU’RE THE ONLY ONE GETTING BEAT?! YOU THINK YOU’RE THE ONLY ONE WITH SHIT PARENTS?! TRY LIVING ONE DAY IN MY WORLD, YOU GODDAMN BRAIN DEAD PIECE OF GARBAGE!”

Shouko scrambles, bringing an iced fist up to try and get a punch in, only for an explosion and a strength only incandescent adrenaline could bring to shove the limb back to the ground with too much force. She gags as blood from her nose drips into her mouth, choking her, sputtering, her mind is going so fast and she’s thinking of Endeavor already, this is it, she’s going to drown in her own blood right here on the pavement and-

The force is off her body, and her worsening vision can barely make out Bakugou being pulled back and restrained by some kind of long rope. There’s someone beside her dressed in black and stone-faced as he tries to ask her something, but Shouko’s ears are buzzing, her vision is going, and she’s still choking as she hyperventilates through the blood. She’s gently rolled to her side, which helps a little, but her breathing won’t slow down at all, mind racing too fast. What was that, it hurts, it hurts, what did she do wrong, help! –

It’s so fast, a blur of awful light and sound and colour and hands lifting and moving where are you taking me, lashing out with a breathless shriek and ice that suddenly won’t come, where is her Quirk, her only defense? Shouko gives up, laying limp like a ragdoll and breaking into humiliating whimpers as her throat finds itself too hoarse to properly cry. She can’t even do that right.

She can’t do anything.

Ochako, without thinking, reaches out to grab Izumi’s hand. Her friend is wide-eyed, mouth hanging open in horror, as they watch multiple medics and Aizawa work to keep Shouko from making her injuries worse as she flails on the stretcher. They’d both only made it to the viewing room for the second half thanks to their own exams, enough time to see Shouko and Bakugou get in each others’ faces, inaudible words exchanged before Bakugou suddenly slammed a gauntlet into the side of the girl’s head. Everyone in the room had gasped, Izumi making a miserable wailing noise as she rushed towards the screens, begging Recovery Girl to stop the match, stop it, please he’s hurting her!
The doctor, obviously, had instantly spoken some code into her speakers before hurrying out of the room, instructing everyone to stay put while she went to the medical bay and to notify the nearest staff member if something happened while she was gone. They’d all seen Aizawa leap into action, restraining Bakugou (who himself looked like he was on the verge of tears, whatever having happened clearly having vast effects on him too) and running to help Shouko as the girl trembled on the ground. As the scene unfolded, Kaminari spoke up first, Ochako remembering it wasn’t just her and Izumi in the room. “What… What the hell, man?”

“Shouko…” Izumi still looks horrified, possibly not even realizing she’s clutching Ochako’s hand so tightly. “Why would… I-I really thought Kacchan might work with her if it meant he won, but…”

“It looks like there was some kind of argument.” Shoji sounds mostly ordinary, but Ochako recognizes a shred of discomfort in his tone- it had been there after Present Mic blew out one of the eardrums on his created ears during their match. “It may have turned violent by accident.”

Izumi swallows, releasing Ochako’s hand as she hurries for the door. The brunette briefly wonders why she suddenly feels disappointed. “I-I need to go help Shouko!” As she rushes, she almost knocks over the entering Yaoyorozu and Jirou, the latter stumbling on her crutches.

“Woah, Midoriya, what’s the rush?” Jirou cocks an eyebrow once she’s righted.

Ochako, still stunned from witnessing such an act of violence against someone she considered a friend, is shaken out of her daze to call out. “Ah, Izumi, wait! They’re not gonna let you in yet if Recovery Girl has to use her Quirk!”

“Recovery Girl is using- did someone get hurt?” Yaoyorozu cocks her head, eating a granola bar. Not surprising seeing how much of her body fat she used up just now.

“It’s Shouko, she- Kacchan and her were fighting, and-” Izumi looks like she still wants to rush in before her shoulders slump and she wraps her arms around herself. “She got hurt…”

Yaoyorozu’s eyes widen. “Shouko? What happened?”

“Bakugou clocked her for, like, no freaking reason!” Kaminari calls out. “It was awful!”

Jirou hobbles in, looking just as shocked as her companion does at the revelation. “Bakugou hit her? What the hell?”

Izumi follows them back into the center of the room, eyes downcast. “We don’t know why either.” An announcement blares that **Team Sero and Ojiro have passed their exam!**, which wasn’t shocking seeing how well they’d worked together to swing above the city and evade Cementoss, but nobody seemed like they were in much of a mood to celebrate.

Ochako approaches her friend, arms open, and Izumi all but falls into the hug. “Hey, it’ll be okay, alright Deku? Recovery Girl will help and we can figure out what happened.”

“Right…” Izumi doesn’t sound confident as she hugs her friend back, and Ochako holds her a little tighter. It’s all she can do for now.

If he wasn’t actively working on an abuse case within the school, Shouta Aizawa thinks he might have just about lost his job today.

It had seemed fine on paper- two standoffish students against him, forced not to rely on their Quirks and instead focus on the teamwork they usually struggled with to beat him. In his mind, if they really
had the willpower to become heroes, Bakugou and Todoroki could really overcome it and embody the school’s motto.

Of course, he hadn’t been banking on Todoroki’s likely-abuse-induced temper flaring up at the worst possible time, nor did he even suspect that Bakugou came from a similar background.

God, he’s such a fucking idiot.

He’s waiting outside Recovery Girl’s office as she and her team perform surgery on Todoroki. The injury was worse than they’d thought- the initial impact from Bakugou’s gauntlet had left her with a zygomatic arch fracture, and the fall had not only broken multiple bones in her nose, but the concrete had hit her so hard that it fractured her orbital bone. Bakugou’s slamming of her arm into the concrete had also fractured her elbow and almost dislocated the arm entirely. Even after the surgery, she’d be walking around with an eyepatch and nose cast for a few days.

Bakugou had a hair trigger temper, yes, but he had never brutalized someone quite like this before. Even during the second day’s training exercise, the worst he’d done to Midoriya were some first degree burns and some nasty bruising (the rest of the girls’ many injuries that day were self inflicted with her mess of a Quirk). The students weren’t told this, but there were multiple microphones set up around their exam centers to record their conversations so the teachers could grade them on how well they communicated under pressure after the fact, no matter the outcome. Shouta had went for the audio files as soon as Todoroki was brought in to try and understand why Bakugou had acted with the force he had, and it wasn’t pretty.

Todoroki had been egging him on, which while unacceptable, wasn’t surprising considering that she seemed to perceive Bakugou as her father (and once again, Shouta wants to strangle whoever decided that non-consensual recordings could not be used in court- the evidence was being dangled right in front of him, taunting him with how unusable it was!). Yeah, Shouta made a mental note that would ensure Todoroki would be undergoing school-mandated anger management therapy just as Bakugou would be. She was a victim, and while acting out like this given her history wasn’t at all surprising, it didn’t make acting so callous towards a classmate okay. He wasn’t sure what he wanted to do in regards to her remedial course at the summer camp, but right now, he was considering having her attend half of them instead of all, considering that she wasn’t really the one he was most worried about from this incident, not counting her injuries.

No, that honour went to Katsuki Bakugou.

There was apparently another child being hurt in his classroom, and he’d been so focused on the stress of the Todoroki case that he hadn’t even put two and two together. The outbursts should have been an obvious sign, the way he would jerk away from touch and couldn’t seem to handle even mild criticism without bristling equally as concerning. God dammit, how useless was he as a teacher when he couldn’t protect the students right in front of him? He was calling his boss at the social work agency tonight to report suspected abuse and attempt to open a case within the Bakugou family, get another social worker on the job. He was apparently so incompetent that Shouta didn’t even know if he should be involved here.

“Hey, Shou?”

A familiar voice causes his head to raise. Hizashi stands there, glasses pushed up to reveal the caring eyes of his fiancee, the man smiling gently- not at all like his flashy heroic persona’s grin. “How are you feeling?”

“Like absolute shit.” Shouta sighs as his fiancee comes to sit next to him on the bench. “I’m such an idiot.”
“Hey, no you’re not.” Hizashi wrapped an arm around his shoulders, pulling the other man close. “The kids chose to fight, that wasn’t on you.”

Shouta shakes his head before leaning against his fiancee. “Bakugou’s being abused.”

“What?”

“Bakugou’s a child abuse victim, and I didn’t even notice.”

Shouta goes over the story of the tapes, of the conversation he’d heard that lead up until the hit, and feels Hizashi hold him just a little bit tighter as he finishes. “Christ, that’s awful. That poor kid…”

“I should have noticed and acted sooner. Now I’m just another adult who failed those kids.” Shouta laughs without an ounce of humour. “I’m not surprised that they both disrespect authority. What the hell have we ever done for them?”

“You’re helping as much as you can, and you would never have put them together if you knew Todoroki was going to trigger him like that. You can talk to Bakugou now and let him know you’re here for him, but that this can’t happen again.” Hizashi presses a kiss into Shouta’s hair. “You can’t blame yourself for what you didn’t know.”

“I should have known. I should have noticed.” He hears Hizashi sigh, knows he sounds just like he did back in their first year when they were waiting to be let in to Nemuri’s hospital room, but he can’t help it. Now he has training, and what did he do? Not a damn thing.

“What happened happened. You just have to move forwards and see what you can do now.” Now it’s Shouta’s turn to sigh- he probably heard that phrase word for word during the aforementioned recovery from the Nemuri incident. “Maybe you should start seeing your therapist again?”

Shouta shakes his head. “No damn time. I need to crack the Todoroki case before I can be concerned about myself.”

“Activist burnout, Shou. You know you can’t help anyone if you’re breaking yourself.” Hizashi pulls back a little to regard him with a small smile. “Isn’t that what you tell Midoriya every other day?”

It takes a moment, but Shouta sighs, nuzzling back into his fiancee’s shoulder. “I hate when you’re right.”

“Love you too, baby.”

And so they sit there, a pair of adults with the weight of the world on their shoulders raising children who will be expected to carry that same weight, just trying to get the next generation of heroes ready for the harsh reality of their world.

*It’s not fair, Shouta thinks, that some of them are carrying that weight already.*

Chapter End Notes

**CONTENT WARNINGS**

- Transphobia (outing two characters, misgendering, use of slurs)
Ah, poor Aizawa ;w; The guy just wants to help, and couldn't have predicted such an outcome, but still. I feel bad putting him and everyone through the wringer like this, hah.

Anyways, looks like there was a big failure- wonder how that's gonna affect the upcoming training camp arc, or if Bakugou is going to remedials too? That's a joke, I know what's going to happen, but I'll leave it to you to speculate.

Thank you so much for reading, and maybe leave a comment or hop into this fic's Discord (https://discord.gg/pRruQ3C) if you enjoyed! Thanks again, and I'll see you soon!
Hi guys! Sorry for the longer than usual break, my health's been acting up again and keeping me from having much leftover energy to write much. Even now, I'm not super satisfied with this chapter- it's basically just winding down and some exposition + fluff, but I promise we'll get back to the action if that's what you're more interested in!

I'm also sorry for not getting to everyone's comments- the aforementioned health thing basically tanked my ability to properly express how grateful I was. I read each and every one, and really do treasure your feedback! Hopefully I can actually respond this time, aha.

Anyways, without further ado, please check those content warnings in the end notes if you need to and let's get going!

When Shouko comes to, she almost throws up within a few moments. Not because of the pain- though god knows her face and arm burn with the familiar sensation of being broken- but because of the sudden realization that she almost certainly failed her exam has just hit her like a freight train.

She was a dead woman walking.

Every emotion- the fear, the rage, the pain- she had felt back when she was trying and failing to push Bakugou off her came back with a vengeance. What was her father going to say? Shit, what was he going to do? If Shouko fell behind, didn’t prove herself, what would happen? Would she be pulled from the hero course, from high school, shoved down the route of a wife and mother? Her whole body tenses, she feels her breathing increase, no, no, what’s going to happen, please god no, she screwed it all up and-

“Sh-Shouko…?”

There’s a hand on hers, gentle against the hospital sheets, and Shouko twists her neck to see Izumi, muddied and in her hero costume as she holds her hand. “Sorry, I didn’t see you wake up. How are you feeling…?”

Like the worst type of trash, Shouko thinks but doesn’t say. She swallows down her fear, counts backwards from ten, can’t show this terror in front of Izumi, and she hastily nods. “I’m okay.”

“Are you?” Her best friend purses her lips, and Shouko has to bite her tongue as she realizes how those green eyes can see right through her defences like nobody else.

“... Not really.” She whispers before she realizes she’s speaking, and Izumi’s hand tightens over hers. “I failed, didn’t I?”

Her friend bites her lip, nodding slowly. “... Yeah. You and Bakugou didn’t pass. But Aizawa said he’s not going to tell anyone’s parents, and you’re still going to camp because you passed your written tests.”
Well, that’s better than Endeavor being informed about his failure of a child, Shouko supposes. She inhales roughly, a shaky breath, and nods. “... Okay.”

“... I’m really sorry, Shouko.” Izumi’s breath hitches, and Shouko’s eyes widen. Her best friend is tearing up, hand shaking, biting at her lip. “I-I-I saw what Kacchan did, and he shouldn’t have hit you. Nobody should hit you.”

Endeavor, her mother, Fuyumi, who hasn’t struck out at her by now? Shouko thinks bitterly before biting her own lip and forcing that bitter anger back into the depths of her still-racing brain. Izumi hasn’t hit her, since Shouko’s not counting the Sports Festival as actual violence. She can trust her. “... Thank you. It’s fine. No need to cry.”

“I-I know there isn’t, I just…” Izumi tries to laugh, wheezing and without any sort of real happiness. “I got so scared when you went down, and I was... I was so mad. I get so mad at people when they hurt you.”

Does this girl know what she does to Shouko? The mismatched student casts her eyes to the bed. “I think Bakugou... is struggling with a lot right now. I said some things I shouldn’t have.”

“But that doesn’t make it your fault!”

“It doesn’t, but he sounded like he was…” Shouko lets her voice trail off. How much is she allowed to say on the boy’s behalf? “... You grew up together, didn’t you? What are his parents like?”

Izumi wipes her tears away with her costume sleeve, looking pensive. “Um, it’s been a while since I saw them, but they always were kinda... Boisterous? Well, his mom at least. Like Kacchan.”

“He yells all the time and strikes out at people, Izumi. If she’s like him...”

It takes her a minute, but Izumi blanches a bit. “Y-You don’t think he’s...”

“Bakugou said some strange things out there.” Shouko fiddles with her hands, not wanting to outright admit to what she’d heard. How much of it was her business? “Maybe it’s because of how I was raised, but he sounds like maybe his parents aren’t the best.”

Izumi bites her lips, wringing her hands. “... I can try and talk to him?”

“Has that worked before, though?” Shouko casts a look at her nervous friend. “Forgive me if I overstep, but it doesn’t seem like you two have much mutual communication. Like with the ‘Kacchan’ name.”

The green haired girl blinks. “What about it?”

“It sounded like he hated it out there.” Shouko shifts a little, cringing as her arm is jostled slightly. “But I’m guessing he’s never sat you down to express that, has he?”

Her friend is a mixture of perplexed and concerned. “N-Not really, no... It’s just what I always called him. It’s just the ‘Ka’ in his name, and-” Izumi stops dead in her tracks, mouth slightly parted. “... Oh my god. I’m an idiot.”

Now it’s Shouko’s turn to be confused. “What?”

“The ‘Ka’! Of course, where it came from first- Oh my god.” Izumi buries her face in her hands. “His old name... Has he thought I wasn’t taking him seriously this whole time?”
“You lost me somewhere.”

Izumi doesn’t raise her head at all, just shaking it slowly in her hands. “I can’t explain. That’s for him to tell if he wants to. But- oh my god. What exactly did he say about it?”

Shouko pushes past the foul memory of choking on her blood to a little earlier in their ill-fated matchup. “He said you knew it represented something. He said you were pretending to respect him, or something like that.”

There’s a mortified groan out of Izumi’s mouth, and she leans even further into herself. “Oh my god. I’m so stupid. I’m a complete idiot. It’s been my fault all these years.”

That strikes an angry twinge in Shouko’s heart, and she shakes her head vehemently despite Izumi not being able to see. Her nose aches. “No it isn’t. If he’s been hurting you or not talking to you about whatever you’re worried over, that’s Bakugou’s choice. You didn’t mind-control him to hurt you.”

“You don’t understand, he… I’ve been accidentally doing something really bad. It is my fault.” Izumi’s shoulders slump as she removes her head from her hands. Something stirs in Shouko’s chest, and it’s not something good.

“Izumi, please stop.” This conversation was getting way too close to home. “It isn’t your fault. I’m not going to debate this.”

Although she gnaws at her lip in frustration, Izumi seems to be willing to drop the subject for the time being. “... Okay. A-Ah, do you want me to get Recovery Girl or Aizawa? Since you’re awake now.”

As if on cue, the door opens, a tired-looking (even more so than usual) Aizawa walking in with a clipboard in hand. He pauses in the doorway, looking a bit surprised. “Huh. You’re up earlier than expected.”

Shouko flicks her eyes to the clock on the office wall—her exam had started two hours ago. She didn’t really know how long she was supposed to be asleep, so she just shrugs. “I see.”

Flipping through his clipboard, the man goes over something with a pen before bringing his eyes back up to the duo. “Midoriya, I’m going to have to ask you to leave for about ten minutes. I need to discuss something with Todoroki.”

“O-Oh.” Was that disappointment in her voice, or was Shouko just projecting? In any case, Izumi stood up, offering Shouko a shaky smile. “Um, I’ll see you later. If that’s okay! I don’t want to crowd you or anything.”

“It’s fine.” Shouko holds in a grunt as she adjusts her arm slightly, feeling the newly-healed wounds tingle. Izumi bites her lip anxiously, nodding at both Aizawa and her friend before vacating the room. With her gone, it was Shouko and her teacher in the silence of the infirmary.

Aizawa took Izumi’s seat next to Shouko’s bed, tired eyes examining her face for… Something? The mismatched girl didn’t know, but it looked like the man was trying to find some kind of answer in her expression. “How are you feeling?”

She shrugs. “Okay. Sore.”

“That’s to be expected. Tell me if it gets more serious, and I’ll have Recovery Girl come in and administer more painkillers.” Lifting up a page on the clipboard, Aizawa flicked his gaze from it to
her. “So we’re going to talk about what happened out there with Bakugou today.”

Well, that was to be expected, but it didn’t stop Shouko from shifting in discomfort as the events leading up to her sitting in the medical bay replayed in her mind. “There’s nothing to talk about. We said some things we shouldn’t have, and we fought.”

Aizawa sighs, rubbing between his eyebrows. “He broke several of your facial bones, your elbow, and almost dislocated your arm. I can hardly call it a fight so much as an assault, Todoroki. What concerns me is what was said out there leading up to the attack.”

That might actually be worse to talk about than the part where Shouko choked on her own blood. Her stomach churned with memories of anger and guilt as she recalls the words thrown back and forth like knives, both of them aiming for the heart. “... I was rude.”

The teacher cocks an eyebrow before turning down to his clipboard, reading in a monotonous voice. “‘You’re basically a villain already’. I wouldn’t consider that being ‘rude’ so much as I would consider it being very cruel. I’ve already given Bakugou a lecture over this for his part, but you need to understand that your actions were unacceptable.”

Shouko hadn’t felt shame when being scolded since she was a small child and it was her mother reprimanding her for squabbling with Fuyumi, or perhaps for stealing Natsuo’s toys. Why would she feel bad over her father’s anger when she underperformed in training? His thoughts meant nothing to her as the years went by and her heart grew bitter. But now as Aizawa sternly, guilt bubbles in her chest, heat rising to her cheeks. Shouko doesn’t have time to wonder why she feels bad over disappointing an adult for the first time (well, since she upset one so bad they scarred her, that is), just dips her head slightly. “I’m sorry.”

Luckily, some of that shame leaves her gut as Aizawa nods, seemingly accepting her words. “I’m letting it slide because it’s the first time it’s happened in your case. Use more respectful language from here on out. You and Bakugou will also be apologizing to each other tomorrow. He’s receiving a week’s worth of detention and taking on the class cleaning duties for the next month, just so you know. Violence on that level, even if provoked, is extremely unheroic, as Midoriya probably went off about to you just now.”

Shouko blinks in moderate confusion. “Not really.”

“Hm.” The pro seems almost amused. “Midoriya wasn’t happy with the punishment— she was marching up and demanding Bakugou’s suspension earlier. The problem child must have a soft spot for you to try and go against him.” As Shouko almost lit herself on fire thanks to that thought, Aizawa continued on. “That brings me to the next point of our discussion. It’s what Bakugou said while harming you.”

Well, that tempered fluffy thoughts of her crush pretty well, and Shouko’s eyes widen as she realizes something she should have noticed a while ago. “... How do you know what we said?”

“We didn’t tell you this to get all your natural reactions, but each exam center was fitted with hidden microphones to see how well you communicated.” Aizawa explains. “I would normally refuse to break confidentiality in a matter like this, but given what you heard and some... Unique circumstances, I think you deserve to know one of my colleagues from social work is opening an investigation on the Bakugou family. He’s not being suspended due to our fears of his parents’ reaction to finding out he failed and acted out.”

Investigation… Oh. Back then when Bakugou mentioned being beat. Back then when Bakugou implied she was being beat. *Oh.* Minutes ago when Izumi told her that Endeavor wouldn’t be told
Shouko’s arm frosts the handle on the bed before she realizes it. “I’m not being harmed at home. Bakugou overheard something a long time ago and confused the context.”

The look Aizawa gives her… Shouko is good at seeing tiny hints of emotion when she’s on edge like this, a skill honed from living under Endeavor, and she’s further unsettled to see what looks like some kind of sadness behind Aizawa’s eyes. “Todoroki, if you’re in danger, please tell me. I will do everything in my power to help you. I’m your teacher- it’s part of my job to ensure you’re safe.”

And oh, doesn’t that make her want to break down, confess years of abuse, have an adult outside of her family willing to fight on her behalf. But… Yeah, maybe Aizawa would do everything in his power to help. And what the hell can an underground pro do against Endeavor? Aizawa’s career would be in pieces by the time her father’s legal team, the media, his fans were done with him. All Shouko would be doing would be ruining an innocent man’s life by telling. So she stills her lip, fixes him with a stare that indicates he needs to drop it.

“I’m not in any sort of danger. Bakugou is the one to be worried about.”

She doesn’t like the way that her teacher sighs, even if he does nod. Shouko knows she’s going to have to be extremely careful with her home life from now on, moreso than she already was. “Alright. I believe you. That only leaves me with a few more things to discuss, and then I’ll be out of your hair.”

Aizawa goes through the clipboard over the next few minutes, Shouko being told about how this incident would affect the foreseeable future. School-mandated anger management once a week (the man looks at her with a frustrated sadness when she says she thought he said she wouldn’t be punished?) was the biggest one, but there were others. Some Izumi had already told her, some new. She and Bakugou were still going on the trip with the class, and because of their otherwise extremely high grades and class performances plus the need to separate them for a while, they’d only be attending half of the remedial lessons there, alternating nights. Apparently they were one of two failed groups, so they wouldn’t be alone- Aoyama and Hagakure would be joining them. And finally…

“Finishing it off…” Aizawa pauses, looking Shouko in the eye. “Confidentiality is key given Bakugou’s situation. We’re sending someone in to investigate his home life while we’re all away on the trip. The only people privy to his case are you, me, and Bakugou himself. Under no circumstances are you to share anything related to this with anyone.”

Ohhhh dear. Shouko almost gulps. “… I told Izumi I think his parents might not be very good to him.”

Aizawa stares for a long time, inhaling and exhaling tiredly. “… That’s vague enough. Tell her not to talk to anyone about it when she comes back in.” Standing up, the man fixes Shouko with another look, this one full of… She can’t identify this emotion. That’s unusual to say the least. “I’m sorry today turned out the way it did. I would have never put you with Bakugou if I had known it would go this poorly.”

An apology? That was… Weird. When was the last time an unrelated adult had ever apologized to her for anything? Aizawa was such a strange person, different from every other person with authority she’d ever encountered. In good ways, definitely, but it stirred a feeling in her chest she didn’t think she’d felt before. It was like how it was with her mother as a child, their current relationship still being mended, but… Different. Just different. “Thank you, Mr. Aizawa.”

“Thank me once all of this is figured out. I’ll do my best to help you, Todoroki.” With that somewhat
confusing statement and another look Shouko couldn’t identify, Aizawa gathers his papers together before leaving the room. As a conversation seems to unfold outside with Izumi (had her friend really been waiting the whole time for her?), Shouko sighs, settling back in her bed.

Even before this, she’s been… Tired. Running out of energy much faster than usual, running out of motivation, and Shouko wonders if she would have been able to pass even if Bakugou kept his hands to himself. So much had happened that filled her with a deep frustration- arranged marriages, fathers who don’t care that a pervert gropes at his daughter, training that left her limping and wheezing, all of these things a normal fifteen year old girl should never have to deal with. None of this was fair. It was cruel, without reason, and Shouko knew there was very little she could do. Recently, there’s been so much stress building up that it felt like she may as well just… Well, when you’re in deep enough, maybe it’s easier to just swim down. The dread over her earlier failure hadn’t subsided even with the knowledge Endeavor wouldn’t be notified, and… Shouko had thought of something cowardly. Before she realizes what she’s doing, her unbroken arm reaches for Recovery Girl’s desk, cringing as her injured body has to lean far to the side to reach her target- a dangerously sharp scalpel balanced just on the edge of her desk. She grunts as she settles back into position, tucking it under her blankets just in the nick of time as a strangely-flustered looking Izumi scuttled back into the room.

Shouko has been this low before. She’s done her research and explored her house- the knives in the kitchen were too dull for any real results. They obviously didn’t own a gun. The only ropes in the place were jump ropes for training, and where the hell was she to tie the end? The pills were kept in the healer’s private quarters, she and Fuyumi shaved with plastic razors, and their father’s own shaving kit was locked away in his bathroom. As much as Izumi’s presence warms her heart, her life… Shouko couldn’t rely so selfishly on just one person. She needed a way out in case things got worse. And now, she realized as she felt the outline of her stolen item through the blankets, she had an emergency exit of sorts.

Never say Shouko wasn’t a strategist.

Shouta Aizawa has had a long day. He finds himself having said that quite a bit recently. Maybe he really did need to start seeing his therapist again.

He had his work cut out for him, and even if Recovery Girl and Nedzu were helping him bear the load of handling these complicated abuse cases (while Hizashi and Nemuri provided more emotional support), he was on the end of his damn rope emotionally and physically. His fiancee has had to carry him from his desk to their bed at the end of the day from all the paperwork and carefully acquired records he’s been pouring over more than once. That hurts in particular- he knows Hizashi wants to start planning their wedding, knows they’re going on two years of engagement, and yet Shouta’s too exhausted to even imagine adding that to their load. Other heroes put off marriage due to villains, and he’s not really that different- his villains are just a bit more insidious, and much harder to prosecute.

Even so, Shouta knows that doesn’t excuse him neglecting other duties. He’s got work to do whether he likes it or not, responsibilities he cannot afford to shirk, and the concerned face of Midoriya outside the infirmary is a staunch reminder of that. “Mister Aizawa? Shouko will be okay, won’t she?”

It’s sweet in a way, watching their little song-and-dance play out from the perspective of someone who’s been there years ago. As an adult, it’s instantly obvious that Midoriya’s head over heels for Todoroki, and he has his suspicions (as someone who was equally aloof while being in love) that the bicoloured girl reciprocates. He won’t interfere, but Shouta will admit the overdramatic love lives of
teenagers are amusing to observe from the perspective of an adult. “She’ll be just fine. You can go see her again if you want.”

Midoriya’s face relaxes in relief, tension leaving her shoulders. “O-Okay! Thank you. Um. For everything? I know you’re working really hard to help her, and… Even if it’s slow going, I know you can do it!”

Shouta blinks for a moment before realizing that was Midoriya’s way of both encouraging him while pleading for him to speed it up a bit. *Don’t I wish I could, kid.* Still, it’s a nice sentiment, and he reaches out to pat the girl on top of her messy mop of hair. “Don’t thank me until we see her father facing justice. You’re a good kid, so worried about her. But take care of yourself too.”

Yeah, that makes him one hell of a hypocrite. So sue him for trying to keep his students in good health after failing to do so time after time this year. Midoriya smiles shakily, seemingly unaware that she’s leaning into the touch even as he removes his hand. “I-I will! Thank you, dad.”

… Wait a minute. There’s a pause as both Shouta and Midoriya figure out the anomaly that just left her mouth. The girl instantly turns the exact colour of a ripe tomato, leaping into the air and frantically waving her arms in front of her body. “I-I-I’m so sorry, that s-snuck out! Oh my gosh, I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean it, I just- That was- Sorry!”

Shouta quickly shoves his conflicting emotions back to hold up a hand to silence the frantic student. “It’s alright, Midoriya. You’re hardly the first student to slip up. Why don’t you go see Todoroki?”

She still looks completely mortified, bright red, but Midoriya hurriedly bows and mumbles another apology before nearly tripping over her sneakers as she rushes into Todoroki’s room, closing the door behind her. It gives Shouta the privacy to groan, burying his face in his hands and dropping into a crouch. Why was he resisting the urge to blush? Despite what he’d said, this absolutely was the first time a student had called him any form of ‘dad’, and there were multiple emotions that came with that realization. The second-hand embarrassment on Midoriya’s behalf, of course, the muted irritation with the thought of *Do I look old enough for a fifteen year old to call me their father? I’m only thirty, dammit,* and the sudden unidentifiable feeling that comes as his brain reminds him that Izumi Midoriya’s student file clearly stated that her father left the family as a young girl.

… It was a slip-up. The dumb kind of slip-up that made Nemuri giggle as she recalls getting called ‘mom’ by at least three students a year at the faculty Christmas party. But if nothing else, it steels Shouta’s determination to do right by these kids. Like it or not, he’s an authority figure in their lives. He calls the shots when it comes to getting them ready for the cutthroat world of heroism, and carries all the burdens that comes with that responsibility. He signed up for this to help kids, and if they can’t look up to him, what the hell is he even here for?

Shouta will have to fight to earn Bakugou and Todoroki’s trust after he failed them once. It won’t happen again.

Exams meant that the school day was cut in half, and thanks to Recovery Girl and her team, Shouko is well enough to leave only about an hour after the rest of the class. Of course, her scarred eye is covered by a bandage, her nose is in a partial cast, and her arm is still in a sling- it looks like she lost a fight with a goddamn truck rather than a fellow teenager- due to the older woman’s need for her to preserve her energy before the second round of healing. Shouko suspects her father will make her go to the family healer tonight anyways so training can continue, and although the hired woman’s Quirk isn’t quite like Recovery Girl’s- Shouko didn’t ever care enough about their resident amoral medic to learn the details, but was fairly sure it had something to do with all those drained batteries in her office- she knows she’ll be fighting exhausted tonight. Whatever.
However, she has enough energy for now, which means she’s able to glare back at all the stares her wounds win her on the walk home. She’s halfway to the train station when her phone lights up.

**Natsuo**: heeeey shouko-lat! how’d the exam go?

Shouko can practically hear her brother’s cheerful tone through the text, and cringes. She’s in no mood to share news of her failure with anyone, even her family, so she does what she’s best at- she lies.

**Shouko**: I’m a bit roughed up, but I did well.

**Natsuo**: congrats kid!!!!!!! i knew you could do it

**Natsuo**: now u got the rest of the day off right?

**Shouko**: Yes.

**Natsuo**: id have u over to celebrate but ive got class + the dentist tonight BUT as a present, i come bearing important news

**Natsuo**: the old man still doesnt let u have social media yeah?

**Shouko**: I’m still banned.

**Natsuo**: ughhhh what a bastard

**Natsuo**: well it at least justifies the creeping i just did for u

**Shouko**: ?

**Natsuo**: its not that bad dw

**Natsuo**: BUT as your loving big brother i went and found your crushes twitter to find any helpful info and in case u didnt know, midoriyas bday is next week. july 15th!

Shouko quickly switches from mildly annoyed that her brother somehow tracked down Izumi’s social media to outright surprise. It was that soon? Shouko had always just sort of assumed Izumi would be younger than her, but apparently she was older than Shouko by almost six full months.

**Shouko**: I didn’t know.

**Natsuo**: hey, and if u dont know, now u know, mr president

**Shouko**: I’m not the president.

**Natsuo**: im not sure why i reference stuff you absolutely have never seen
Natsuo: anyways im telling u this bc u should get her a present or something!!! itll let her know u thought about her. maybe u can head to the mall before endeavor gets home?

Pausing, Shouko stops to think. She’d never bought anyone a present before. It sort of came with the territory of being both the youngest and the isolated prodigy. When she was extremely little, she’d present her mother and siblings with drawings come their birthdays, but Shouko didn’t think a crayon drawing would fly this time around. She wasn’t sure how to shop for someone, but… Maybe she knew someone who did.

Thanking Natsuo for the information and advice, Shouko pops open another chat window. She hadn’t texted this person yet, but if anyone knew what Izumi would like, it’d be her.

Shouko: Ochako, are you at home right now?

“Oh, and thanks for texting me, Shouko!” Ochako grins cheerfully as the two girls enter the mall, still in their uniforms after walking from Ochako's rented apartment to the mall. “We never get to hang out just the two of us.”

Shouko nods, accepting the door held open for her- understandable considering her visible injuries. “I figured you would be a good companion for the task.”

“Right!” Ochako playfully swings a fist out in front of herself. “Operation Perfect Present Pals is officially underway! Objective: Get Deku a good birthday gift!”

Although she wasn’t in much of a mood to play along, Shouko nodded once again as Ochako made some ‘pow’ noises with each thrown punch. “Where should we look first?”

The brunette smiles, pointing at a brightly coloured store next to the food court. “Well, considering it’s Izumi we’re talking about here, isn’t the hero merch store basically our only option?”

Huh. Well, Shouko saw nothing wrong with that plan. Nodding for the third time, she followed her cheerful friend down the hall, ignoring concerned stares at her injured state. “How did your exam go, by the way?”

“Pretty good! It was kind of a tight squeeze at the end, but Shouji and I managed to find a way around Present Mic.” Ochako smiles as they approach the entrance of the hero merch store, once again holding the door open for her injured friend. “We were in the industrial zone, right? And I think Aizawa paired us up because our Quirks aren’t exactly combat-oriented, or at least not directly. Shouji couldn’t make ears because of the way the screaming echoed around the place, right? And I couldn’t just float us out ‘cause of the ceiling. So instead-”

“Oh my gosh, UA students!” A squealing voice interrupts their conversation. “You girls made it onto the battle round, right? Awesome!”

Both heads turn to see who made such a noise. A girl maybe a year or two older than them stands inside the store with a black flu mask over her face, a smiling shark-toothed mouth drawn over the black mask. Her pink hair, fluffy and wavy, fell down around her ribs, and her red hoodie and black jeans were a far less noticeable trait than her four eyes. For some reason, they made Shouko uncomfortable, like she was being stared straight through. “... Yes, that’s us.”
“Amazing!” She coos enthusiastically, bouncing up to the two of them with a pep in her step. “You’re, like, celebrities! Can I take a selfie with yooooou?”

Ochako makes a noise of surprise before looking at Shouko, somewhat confused smile on her face. “I, uh- sure?”

“Great!” Squeezing in between the two of them, the enthusiastic girl sticks out a hand with a bright pink cellphone and wraps her arm around Shouko, much to the bicoloured girl’s simultaneous surprise and discomfort. She makes a small noise of discomfort as there’s a light pinch against her arm.

“I’m too inju-”

“Say cheeeese!” The girl, despite wearing a flu mask, can almost be heard smiling. Shouko knows she’s cringing in discomfort as something (which she’s assuming to be the stranger’s sharp red manicure, going off the hand holding the phone) digs in to her shoulder slightly, and Ochako looks more confused than happy with her smile. The girl pulls back the phone, though her arm around Shouko’s shoulder holds just a little longer than it needs to before letting go. “Wow, what a cute pic! Thank you guys so much!”

“Um, you’re welcome?” Ochako tries to smile in a welcoming manner as the girl skips off just a little too quick, while Shouko just raises an eyebrow. The brunette turns back, confusion in her eyes. “... Is it just me, or was she super weird?”

The bicoloured student shakes her head. “It wasn’t just you. That was bizarre.” She rubs her shoulder- seriously, who wraps an arm around a girl with a sling?- before opting not to tell Ochako about the strange pinch. It was probably nothing. “I suppose strange fans are just something we’ll have to deal with as heroes.”

“I guess.” Ochako sighs before shaking it off, pointing towards the store interior. “Anyways, let’s just put it behind us and try to get back to shopping, okay?”

Well, it was sort of their only option. Shouko shrugs, nodding. “Alright. Let’s look.”

And so, the two got down to the business of finding a gift. Shouko hadn’t actually ever been in a hero merchandise store before- exactly one hero was allowed in the Todoroki household, after all. She has memories of Fuyumi covering Natsuo’s black eye after the boy came home after middle school in an All Might sweater just to spite their father. It’s fascinating how much merch there is for just about every hero out there, even if All Might is obviously the dominant force in the industry. If she ignores the pieces of Endeavor merch, it’s just about any hero student’s dream. She and Ochako wander through, the latter earning a small smile from the former when she grabs a poorly-stitched Miss Joke doll and does her best impression through it. Sheet masks, socks, canned bread- what kind of hero merch didn’t exist might be a better question? Hell, she’s pretty sure she remembers hearing about Midnight themed-condoms on the news once. It’s almost overwhelming when she realizes she has to find something their resident hero fanatic didn’t already own, but then her eyes fall on a glass case in the back of the store.

As Shouko wanders over, she realizes she knows exactly what she should get Izumi- in the case, a row of hero-themed jewelry sits in wait to be admired. Her eyes are drawn to the earrings directly in the center, a shining pair with some kind of jewel that Shouko’s not nearly trained enough to recognize. As she moves around the box, she realizes that the gem changes colour depending on the angle and lighting. Yellow, red, white, blue- they’re an All Might themed pair, Shouko realizes, and she knows right away what Izumi deserves for her birthday. “Ochako, come see this.”
“What is it, Sho-oooooh!” Ochako breaks into ‘ooh’s and ‘ah’s as her eyes fall on the earrings the bicoloured girl is pointing at. “Those are perfect, oh my gosh! So pretty, she’d love them! You wanna get Deku those?”

Shouko nods. “Her ears are pierced, aren’t they?”

“Yeah, they are. Let’s just check the-” Ochako makes an ugly wheezing sound as she bends down to look at the price tag. “Oh my goood, Shouko, they’re nine thousand yen!”

Well, as far as earrings go, Shouko was certain that wasn’t too high-end. But as far as a high schooler without a job’s budget goes? Yikes. She could try and lift her father’s credit card, but not only would she need to go home for that, she’s certain she’ll be beaten within an inch of her life for it once he checks his bill. Shouko is ready to move on to cheaper fare when she remembers something shifting in her purse.

The ten thousand from when she was hospitalized.

Hmm.

“No, it’s okay. I can afford them.” Ignoring Ochako’s squawks of surprise, Shouko motions for one of the employees to come over and open the case. There was a certain smug satisfaction in it all- Endeavor’s money was both going towards All Might merchandise and a gift for the crush of the daughter the Flame Hero was trying to force into an arranged marriage- but even more than that, there was… A contentedness. Izumi had saved her life by freeing her from the hatred holding her down. The least she could do was give her friend a proper birthday present.

“Let me in! Let me innnnnnn!”

“Could you be any more obnoxious?” Touya Todoroki sighs, unlocking the car door as Himiko slides into the passenger seat. They’d ‘borrowed’ one of the League’s cars for their little excursion back to Musutafu. With any luck they’d have it back before anyone noticed it was gone, and even if Shigaraki bitched him out for it, Touya genuinely did not give enough of a shit to repent for briefly taking the car. This was important.

Himiko pulls down her flu mask, sharp grin matching the printed one on the mask. Slowly, she melts out of the stolen form of that high school girl she’d killed back in Yamanashi, blonde hair and familiar sailor uniform returning as her disguise drips off. “I’m allowed to be! I got it!” She rolls down her sleeve to reveal the small syringe taped to her wrist, a tiny amount of blood inside- no more than a teaspoon. His sister’s blood.

This had been a very spur-of-the-moment plan. Originally, they’d been back in Musutafu after one of the dealers Touya occasionally did runs for conned him out of a payment. In turn, he was coming back in town to turn the other man into a pile of ashes and melted flesh. But then the League had received news that Shouko Todoroki and Katsuki Bakugou (amongst two others) had failed from whatever mole they had planted at the school. In turn, Fuyumi (who he’d been texting back and forth with, much to his twin’s delight) innocently mentioned that Shouko was going to the mall with a friend for the first time to ‘celebrate passing’. So either little sis was a liar, or the mole was unreliable. Well, Touya didn’t care. The point was that he was in Musutafu, his sister was unsupervised in a public place, and he had their friendly local vampire in tow. It was almost too perfect.

“That’s not that much blood. How long will that get you? Five minutes?” Touya reached down to start the car, and Himiko pouted, rolling her sleeve back up and crossing her arms.
“Any more and she would have known I was stabbing her! Jeez, you wanna blow my cover before the summer camp raid or something?” Himiko adjusted the mirror to preen in it, only to get her hand swatted away by Touya. “Let me fix my eyeliner or I’ll cut off a finger while you sleep.”

Touya shrugged. “I’d like to see you try.”

Sighing dramatically, Himiko flopped back in her seat as the car pulled out of the mall parking lot. “You think the League’ll be mad at us?”

“Nope.” Well, maybe, but Touya had a plan. “Shouko’s a high-priority target for blood siphoning during the attack. All we have to do is say that, now that we knew she failed, you took the chance to grab some while you saw her at the local mall. Who knows if she’ll be in those remedials during it?”

Ah, the targets. Touya wasn’t surprised his baby sister was on the list. He’d already memorized it from top to bottom on who Himiko was really supposed to try and get blood from when they attacked the camp: Momo Yaoyorozu, Shouko Todoroki, Tenya Iida, Tooru Hagakure, Izumi Midoriya. Their top five, based on either their vast connections to money or the world of heroics, or the simple suspicion that imitating them could be vastly useful when it came to infiltrating certain locations. It wasn’t surprising, then, that the wealthy daughter of the Number Two Hero popped up on the list.

“I’m still gonna go for her if I see her, y’know.” Himiko whistled a tune Touya vaguely recognized as the theme song of some moe anime. “The more blood we can get, the better!”

Before he knows it, Touya’s hands tighten over the wheel a bit. “Yeah, I know. Don’t go overboard with her. Kill any of the other little brats, but make sure you don’t go past roughing her up. She can handle that much.”

As much as he cares for her, Shouko is a hero. Touya is a villain, and not a stupid one- he knows he’s putting her in danger but joining in this attack, but the least he can do is try and minimize the damage she’s at risk of undergoing. Himiko hums a bit more. “Okay, okay. She’s so pretty, y’know! Nothing like you. I even got a selfie with her!”

That piqued Toya’s interest enough for him to overlook that insult. “Show me when we’re at a red light.”

Soon enough, the car was halted at a red, and Touya looked over to see the photo on the phone in Himiko’s hand. His eyes widen enough that his scars stretch in discomfort. There’s that brunette girl from the Sports Festival, Himiko’s disguised self, and his sister looking disturbingly beat up. Her scarred eye was covered up by an eyepatch, nose set in a cast like Himiko’s had been last month when that junkie they were robbing sucker punched her, and an arm apparently in a sling. Did she get hit by a fucking truck? “What the hell happened to her?”

“I have no idea! Probably exams, but coulda been your shitty pops, too.” Himiko closes the image and goes back to playing Candy Crush, the girl not noticing the enraged way Touya squeezes the wheel so hard he scorches it as he imagines their father beating his baby sister so badly. “Beat up girls are the beeceest! So helpless and cute!”

“You’ve officially called all my sisters some variation of attractive. Nobody would blame me if I burned you alive.” Touya grinds his teeth a bit, trying to act like he doesn’t care about his sister’s state. “It had better have been the fucking exam, or else Endeavor’s dying a lot sooner than expected.”

He got out of that hell house with less than forty percent of his skin intact. It was only a matter of
time until that bastard pushed Shouko to her limit, drove Fuyumi to madness— their home may as well have been cursed, driving you out like Natsuo or leaving you a shell of who you were before like everyone else. God, Touya needed a cigarette. “Himiko, light me a dart.”

“I’m playing Candy Crush.”

“Light me a goddamn dart or I’m throwing you out of this car while we’re going eighty kilometers. You ever seen road rash?”

Sighing overdramatically, Himiko fumbled through her bag, pulling out a cigarette. Lighting up and handing it off to Touya, the man removed one hand from the wheel to take it, inhaling deeply. Much better. Rolling down the window a bit to allow the smoke to clear out, Touya sighed. If only Shouko was a year younger. Then she wouldn’t be a part of the class he was attacking with the League, relatively safe at home and tucked in bed with her pretty little ice Quirk and the fire she never showed. She should have stayed without it, he thinks. God knows it’s what he’d have done if the universe gave him a choice. But, he reminds himself, nobody chooses what hand life deals them.

Even so, Touya will flip this awful hand back in the dealer’s face if it kills him (and oh, he dreams it will).

Toga and Dabi had taken off on their own again for whatever foolish side quest they wanted to run off on. Brats. Didn’t they see what the League had given them? Tomura Shigaraki scratched at his neck instinctively.

Whatever. He had no time to focus on those two NPCs or their idiotic antics. He needed to settle down and focus on planning the attack for the newly put together Vanguard Action Squad. Tomura wouldn’t be on it himself, oh no— he was merely the strategist, putting all his party members together for action. And as the strategist, it was vital he notice little hitches in their plan that shook up oh-so-much.

In this case, it was the failure of Katsuki Bakugou.

Goddammit. The idiot was going to be in remedials. How would they get at him in a building protected by so many pros? Even Kurogiri didn’t know the coordinates well enough to allow for warping directly to the boy’s location. Dammit. There goes that plan.

Normally, he’d throw a tantrum, disintegrate some of Kurogiri’s better wines. But he couldn’t afford such childish things, Sensei had reminded him. He’d leveled up, and his behaviour had to match such a rank from now on. Even if it was difficult, Tomura would never go against his prized Sensei’s wishes. It was just unthinkable. So instead, he improvises.

Sensei is beyond powerful, a god in human form, game-breakingly destructive and intelligent. He’s the only man on earth who could hope to bring down All Might, and if all goes well during their raid, that’s exactly what’s going to happen. But why not hit the mighty hero with a rage ailment? Why not make him act out, act foolish, make mistakes in his anger? Such a thing wouldn’t be possible without their mole’s cooperation. Word in the school was that All Might had a soft spot for a particular student— some even rumoured a blood relation. And she had passed her exam with flying colours. If they couldn’t have Katsuki Bakugou recruited, they could at least make sure the Symbol of Peace was at his emotional lowest point when Sensei finally ended the man’s life once and for all, sparking a new age for villainy.

Tomura picks up the image gently, having already disintegrated one corner when five fingers closed down. What a pathetic looking girl this was. They were practically smurfing when it came to beating
someone like this to the punch.

Yes, of course. They’d just have to take Izumi Midoriya.

Chapter End Notes

CONTENT WARNINGS BEGIN

- Abuse mention
- Suicidal ideation
- (very subtle) Syringe use
- Smoking

CONTENT WARNINGS END. SPOILERS BEGIN.

Dun dun dunnnn! Looks like the League's plans are shifting along with UA's. Time can only tell how that's going to affect things...

In any case, thank you so much for reading! Please leave a comment and kudos if you enjoyed, and don't forget to join our Discord (https://discord.gg/pRruQ3C)! I hope to see you soon!
Ochako feels awful for feeling happy that Shouko wasn’t coming to the mall with the class.

It’s not that she doesn’t like Shouko- she really, truly does! The mall with her a few days ago was super fun, even if her stomach had twisted in envy at how much economic freedom the other girl had compared to her. The bicoloured student was kind-hearted and an attentive friend when you actually got to know her past the ice queen exterior. Not to mention, Ochako was still 99% sure she was the one Izumi had mentioned when her best friend had brought up that someone was being hurt by a person in power- how could Ochako dislike Shouko for any tiny negative traits when they were almost certainly brought on by Endeavor? No, it’s not that at all. She knows exactly why she felt relieved when Shouko said she had to go home, and she’s mad at herself for it.

It’s pure jealousy, and she thinks back on the end of the exam.

They’d barely captured Present Mic at the end, the man congratulating them on their passed exam once he was done rubbing his sore arm where Ochako had grabbed and pinned him after Shouji played decoy. The brunette girl was beaming as the two students waited to get checked out by Recovery Girl after the conclusion- they weren’t hurt past some nausea and some slightly muffled hearing, but they’d be examined just in case. “You did really good, Shouji!”

“Thank you. I was impressed by the move you managed at the end.” The multi-armed boy nods, speaking through a mouth created by his lower right limb.

The move he was referring to was Ochako taking advantage of both her Quirk training and her environment- she found that, while floating herself with some momentum, she could easily leap from pole to pole with speed, allowing her to avoid Mic’s attacks and grab him before he could retaliate. It felt freeing, bounding through the air like that, and Ochako beamed with pride. “Thanks, Shouji!”

The boy nodded, leaning back in his seat a little. “It reminded me of the way Midoriya moves with her Quirk. Did you train with her?”

“A little! I was trying to emulate Izumi a bit, even though our powers aren’t similar.” They’d trained together a few times- well, together along with Shouko. Apparently she and Bakugou weren’t on speaking terms, so the bicoloured girl had been invited along.

Shouji’s masked mouth shifts slightly. Ochako has suspicions his actual lips go up to his ears judging by the faint outline of a smile. “I see. You get along with her well, don’t you?”

“Of course! She’s my best friend.” Ochako smiles fondly as she remembers sleepovers at the
Midoriya apartment, buying matching bracelets, squeezing into photobooths together and pinning the resulting images on her corkboard.

“Is that so?” Though his tone is as straight as always, Shouji almost sounds a bit surprised. “To be honest, I thought you two were dating.”

… What?! Ochako’s face instantly turns the exact colour of a tomato. “D-D-D-Dating?!” She squeaks, almost floating herself instinctively. “N-No, it’s nothing like that! I, um, I’m straight! We’re just really good friends is all!”

Because everything Ochako felt about the other girl, of course, was friendly! She was very friendly with Izumi, like how she would hold her hand when they walked to lunch! Or how she once woke up after a sleepover to find that she was spooning Izumi! Or how her heartbeat picked up when she was bridal carried during that rescue training exercise, or how she was stumbling over words when Izumi bent over in her hero costume in front of her, or-

Oh no.

Ohhhhh no.

“Hm.” Shouji said, seemingly unaware of the minor mental breakdown happening half a foot to his right. Either that, or he politely didn’t point it out. A nurse popped his head out of the room, calling for Shouji, and the multi-armed boy stood up. “Well, I’ll see you in a bit, Uraraka. Thank you for your hard work today.”

“Y-Y-You too, Shouji!” And so Ochako was left there, holding her knees with a white knuckled grip as the realization washed over her. No way. Absolutely not. She couldn’t be a les… No, she couldn’t even think of the world without feeling her stomach churn in fear. She needed to be a successful hero, the one idolized by all so that they’d buy Uravity merch and have her on their shows! How else would she make the money needed to send home to her parents? Times had changed, yes, people were more accepting, and there were openly LGBT heroes in the top ten like Hawks and Ryukyu. But… Ochako wasn’t foolish. She’d seen people post videos of burning Ryukyu merchandise after she came out. She’d seen the comments people online made about Hawks. Hell, the rumours about Miruko were vicious, and the woman had never said anything on the matter- only committed the crime of being a tough and unfeminine hero. If people knew…

Ochako shook her head viciously despite being the only person in the hall. No, nobody could know. This had to be her secret. She had to keep this close to her chest if she wanted to be successful enough to give her parents the life they deserved.

Blinking, Ochako pulls herself back to the present, where she’s entering the mall with the big group of students who agreed to come on the little excursion. Izumi is beside her, looking around happily at everything the complex has to offer. Despite realizing her need to keep this secret, a fifteen year old’s first crush could not be so easily tempered. Ochako finds her face melting into a soft smile as she sees Izumi again- she wanted so badly to take her hand again, and under the pretense of a couple gal pals having a fun day at the mall, she does. “Izumi, what are you looking for today?”

Izumi squeezes her hand with a smile, and it’s enough to make Ochako want to cry. “Oh! Well, I was going to look for some luggage? Since we’re all splitting up, anyways.” She casts a quick glance as the rest of her classmates spread out, as was agreed on the train ride here. “I don’t have much in the way of suitcases. I think I’m the only one without any, aha…”

It strikes Ochako that Izumi was a Musutafu local, not like the vast majority of their classmates who were out-of-towners living in apartments by themselves. “I’ll come with you! We haven’t gone
shopping together in a while, have we?”

“Oh, are you sure?” Big green eyes blink in concern. “I don’t wanna drag you somewhere you don’t need to go…”

“Aw, you worry too much!” Ochako relishes in each glance, each touch, and she can’t help but feel guilt for it. This isn’t taking advantage of her friend, right…? “We can go where I want after.”

Izumi seems happier with that, and nods. “Okay, as long as we get to your stores, too!” And with that, two friends set off hand in hand, and Ochako nearly feels free for just a moment before the green haired girl chimes in with, “It’s too bad Shouko couldn’t come.”

Ochako keeps her face content and steady instead of letting any jealousy peek out. “Yeah… She had something with her dad, right?” She knew exactly why she found herself so envious of the two girls- once she started looking at their behaviour, the little touches and glances that were quickly redirected when the other noticed, the stares with helpless eyes… They were completely head over heels for each other. This wasn’t even a love triangle- Ochako knew she’d lost already. It wasn’t like she could have ever actually dated Izumi either unless she was ready to damage her heroics career, but… Ochako didn’t know. It hurt just the same. Stupid feelings. Stupid jealousy, making her happy one of her dear friends wasn’t here just so she could selfishly have Izumi to herself for a while.

Ugh, stop thinking about this! Just… Date a boy and get over it! Shaking it off, Ochako shifted her gaze to Izumi, who looked suspiciously downcast. “Y-Yeah, her dad. I hope she’s got everything she needs for the trip…”

“OH, UA students!” An excited male voice approached from behind, and Ochako groaned instinctively. Seriously? Were people just going to approach her at random every time she came to this dumb mall? Before she could even turn around, though, there was suddenly a cold hand on the back of her neck, sending a shiver down her spine. “You guys were pretty amazing!”

A quick glance at Izumi shows the girl looking highly uncomfortable- right, she didn’t like being approached from behind, did she? - as she tries to move forwards. “Um, yeah-”

The hand darts forwards again, grabbing her by the back of her All Might tee and yanking her back. Ochako and Izumi gasp in sync, the man’s voice growing dark. “I’ll kill the other one if either of you move even an inch on your own. Come on. We’re three old pals catching up, and we’re going to go sit on that bench over there.”

What…? Almost frozen in shock, both girls almost stumbled over their feet as the man pulled them forwards, eyes darting to each other with matching looks of terror. What was going on…?! Ochako didn’t dare look at their sudden captor’s face until they were sitting down, four fingers pressed threateningly against her neck, and her heart almost stopped when she saw the face under the hood. Even without the covering hand, the blue hair, the poor skin quality, the menacing look in his eyes as he regarded them with disgust… Izumi said it first, whispered like she couldn’t believe it. “S-Shigaraki…?”

“Oh, good. Sparing me the trouble of introducing myself.” The hooded villain spoke with a mocking disgust in his tone. “Do you remember my Quirk? It’s called Disintegration. See, I can reduce anything all five of my fingers touch completely to ash in less than a second.” The hand tightened around Ochako’s throat, and she whimpered despite her best efforts. “So no funny business. Like I said- try and run, and I’ll disintegrate your friend’s throat. Understood?”

“P-Please don’t hurt Ochako.” Izumi whispered, uncharacteristic fear in her voice. It did very little to comfort the brunette, who was shaking against her best efforts. Come on, keep it together…!
Shigaraki made a snorting noise. “Be a good little hero, and you’ll both be leaving unharmed.” The hand shifted against Ochako’s neck, and she made a choking noise in terror. Izumi gasped as her own throat was adjusted in the villain’s palm. “I was only here for you, Izumi Midoriya, but your friend here didn’t seem like she was leaving your side. Ochako Uraraka, just stay quiet and still for me while Midoriya and I catch up. I want to talk about All Might…”

It was almost nine at night when Shouko got the call.

Training hadn’t been too bad that day. Endeavor had little to say, Shouko kept her mouth shut, and so she was left with some improved dodging techniques and a couple tiny burns that didn’t even require Fuyumi’s attention. In some way, these training sessions were almost the worst- Shouko couldn’t even be angry about anything. At least when she left the room limping, she felt like her hatred of her father was justified. Now, the creeping voice that called her a liar liked to return. It was quiet for now, but it had a nasty habit of popping up at terrible moments sometimes. As she settled into bed in preparation for tomorrow’s early morning run, the cutey ringtone she’d set for Izumi burst from her phone. Why would she be calling her now…? It wasn’t like it was all that late, but still. After a moment of confusion, Shouko picked up, holding it to her ear. “Hello?”

“H-Hi, Shouko.” Izumi’s voice was strained and rough, and it instantly set off Shouko’s internal alarm. Something was wrong. “Um, did you see the news?”

“No.” Shouko knelt in seiza on her futon, both hands going to hold her phone as if it needed some extra security. “What happened? Are you alright?”

The voice became distant for a moment as Izumi pulled away to cough before it came back. “Y-Yeah, I’m fine now. Um, Ochako and I were kind of… Held hostage by Shigaraki at the mall.”

What?! Shouko almost frosted over her phone in her shock. “Hostage?!”

“What?! Shouko almost frosted over her phone in her shock. “Hostage?!”

“Ah, d-don’t worry, we’re okay!” Izumi attempted to reassure her. “We were checked out by the paramedics and we each gave a statement at the police station. But… Um, I guess I just wanted to tell you before you found out on the news or from the group chat.”

Shouko never checked the class chat, so there was little risk of that happening. Even so, her stomach churned at the thought of her friends held hostage by the notorious villain that had terrorized their class. “What happened?”

She could hear Izumi shift over the phone. “Um, he just kind of… Caught us apart from the rest of the class? And he held us on a bench and threatened to, uh, use his Quirk if we tried to run. He asked me all these questions about All Might, and… I’m worried maybe I made things worse?”

“... Did nobody help you?” Shouko holds her phone tighter than necessary as the distressing picture Izumi is painting slowly comes together.

“I think they just thought we were three friends on a bench…” Izumi sighs. “Um, Shouko, c-can I tell you something? But you can’t tell anyone!”

“Of course.”

She hears her friend gulp nervously over the phone. “See, well, I… I do kind of have a tie to All Might. W-We aren’t related, for the record! I can’t explain anything past that, but we have a connection to each other, and I think Shigaraki knows that somehow. And now Ochako knows too, and that’s not good.”
In any other situation, Shouko might feel somewhat smug about how her theory was... Well, it wasn’t right, but Izumi was connected to All Might! Now, though, she’s too full of concern for her friend to feel much past that. “... Can you explain why you can’t tell us?”

“Not really, no. Maybe one day, but it’s a really huge secret for now. A lot of people could get hurt if I let it slip.” Once again, Izumi pulls away to cough. “A-Anyways, um, sorry to bother you this late. Police processing took a really long time, hah... I just wanted to let you know what had happened.”

“Thank you for telling me. I’m relieved you’re alright. Both of you.” Shouko can’t even entertain the idea of Izumi getting hurt without her stomach churning. Seeing her push herself so dangerously past her own limits in training tugged at her heartstrings enough, but the concept of her getting injured by a villain? It was enough to make her press the phone closer to her ear, as if that would somehow bring Izumi to her side. “Is there anything I can do to help?”

Izumi chuckles lightly, the shifting noise seemingly indicating that she was playing with her hair. “No, it’s okay. I guess just calling you helped calm me down a little. Tsu and Tenya came with us to the police station- They wouldn’t let us out of their sight, hah.”

That sounded a lot like them. Shouko is hit with a pang of guilt as she realizes that makes her the only person in their friend group who wasn’t there to comfort two of their friends after what sounded like a horrible hostage situation. “I’m sorry I couldn’t be there.”

“I-Oh, please don’t apologize!” Izumi’s response is a bit too loud, and she quickly retracts it with an embarrassed tint in her voice. “You had something to do, right? It’s not your fault.”

She trails off a bit- they both know tonight’s earlier obligation had been training, even if Shouko had never said it. It’s a strange bit of knowledge they share, the uncomfortable truth sometimes hanging over their heads at moments like this. She’s thankful that Izumi has kept her promise of keeping it to herself- it’s rare that anyone ever listens to Shouko, at least up until coming to UA, so it’s been a breath of fresh air to really be able to trust someone with the tragedy of her family. “Even so, I’m so relieved you’re alright. Thank you for letting me know.”

There’s a couple muffled noises in the background, and Izumi takes a moment to speak again. “No problem! Like I said, I just didn’t want you to see the news and panic. I know I would. I’m sorry to run off, but I promised my mom I’d come to the living room and watch a show with her. She’s really wound up over this whole thing, so she’s hardly giving me a moment to myself.”

“That sounds like your mother.” Inko was dearly devoted as far as Shouko understood, and more than a little protective if their lunchtime chats were anything to go off. “I’ll leave you to it, then.”

“Okay! I’ll talk to you on Monday when we leave for the trip! Have a good night, Shouko.”

“You too, Izumi.” Shouko bites her tongue to avoid following up with ‘I love you’ like all the couples in the TV shows she was starting to stream at her classmates’ suggestion did. The mere idea of Izumi being in danger made her blood curdle, but Shouko chose to banish it with the thought of her friend curled up in those cute matching All Might PJs she’d worn at their sleepover, kicking her feet off the end of her bed as she called her.

Argh, this was too much! Shouko flopped onto her futon, rolling over and groaning. She was completely and totally useless when thoughts of the other girl filled her mind. Most troublesome, though, the call right before bedtime would no doubt keep her up with romantic dreams of date nights, holding hands, maybe even kissing...! Had Izumi kissed someone before? Shouko was completely inexperienced. Should she google it? Did she have to use tongue like the TV people? That always looked a little nasty. But, if it was Izumi’s tongue...
Poof. There went one side of her head again. Frantically patting the fire out, Shouko scolded herself. 
*There’s no reason to lose your composure over this! Even if you bet Izumi’s lips would be smooth, and her face would be warm, and you could touch her hair…*

Yeah, there was no banishing this. Burying her face in her pillow, Shouko sighed, completely resigned to the night of dreamy pining. She was helpless.

The weekend came and went, and Monday arrived. This was the first time Shouko has ever really been excited for a class trip.

She’s been on them before, sure, but they were either one-day affairs she tuned out in disinterest or annoying events where she gave her hotel roommates the cold shoulder for days. Now, though? The prospect of packing into a room with her classmates and enjoying typical sleepover shenanigans… Well, it actually *excites* her a bit. She was still of the belief she didn’t deserve happiness when she went on middle school trips, that it was permanently out of her reach, but ever since Izumi saved her, she knows she was being foolish. She wonders what will happen as she packs onto the bus in accordance to their seating numbers. Shouko’s a bit disappointed that this means she can’t sit next to Izumi (and more than a little afraid for the volume level of the trip as she realizes Kirishima and Kaminari are seated side-by-side), but she likes Hagakure just fine, so it’s not any huge tragedy. She also can’t help but notice the way the order is slightly broken as Aizawa pulls Mineta forwards to sit with Bakugou, which made sense- if he’d left it as is, not only would Momo be stuck with their purple classmate, Bakugou and Izumi would be seated together. Neither combination sounded pleasant. Izumi and Momo are seated directly in front of them, and as soon as the bus starts moving, the green-haired girl pops her head over the back of her seat with a smile. “Are you two excited?”

“Soooko excited!” Hagakure waves her arms (probably?) in the air. “It’ll be like a huge slumber party! I packed games and snacks!”

Shouko nods. She didn’t pack anything past the essentials (and Izumi’s present, carefully wrapped and hidden in her bag), but hopes that’s still alright. “I’m excited too.” Obviously there would be hard training, too, but that was nothing Shouko wasn’t used to. Instead, she was choosing to look forwards to the pleasant atmosphere with her classmates.

“I’ve never had a sleepover before, so I’m looking forwards to this.” From Izumi’s side, Momo pops her head over the back of the seat as well. For such a proper young lady, she seemed just as excited as everyone else. “What kind of things happen at slumber parties?”

Hagakure made a giggling noise, and (if Shouko was interpreting the movement of her sleeves correctly) likely went to rest her chin in her palms, elbows on her knees. “We can do lots of fun stuff! We can play Truth or Dare, and Never Have I Ever, and tell scary stories!”

Izumi made a meeping noise from next to Momo. “I-I’m bad with scary stuff!”

Giggling ferociously, Hagakure’s collar moved forwards a bit. “Oooh, are you, Midoriya? How about I tell you about Hachishaku-sama?!”

“N-Noooo!”

As Hagakure giggled as Izumi went to hide her face, Momo gave a ladylike chuckle, covering her mouth with her hand. “Perhaps we can watch a movie together? I brought a portable DVD player with a few of my favourites. Some romantic films, and I bought Titanic!”

That seems to perk Izumi right back up, hands parting and revealing a bright smiling face. “Oh, I
love Titanic. Is it the remake?”

Momo’s chest puffs out happily. “No, the original! I know it’s been a hundred years, but I think you just can’t beat DiCaprio’s performance. The special effects held up quite well.”

“I’ve never seen it.”

Shouko’s declaration sends three heads swivelling in her direction. “Eh, really?” Hagakure sounds stunned. “Not even the remake?”

“I guess I never had much time for movies growing up.” She shrugs. “I’ve never heard the original story aside from a reference here and there.”

“Guys, this is great!” Izumi actually sounds excited. “Shouko will get to see it for the first time, and we’ll get to see her reaction. Oh, you’ll love it!”

Hagakure makes an excited squealing noise. “It’s such a great movie, Todoroki! The whole thing is so soft and romantic, and the ship is so elegant! It’s the kind of lovey dovey trip I’d want to go on! Um, until the end, anyways. I’m not that good at swimming.”

Shouko blinks a bit as the other two girls break into giggles. She doesn’t get it, but at least everyone else seems to be having fun. Momo, breaking from her proper assistant rep persona for a moment out of happiness over the moment, leans further up in her seat. “Everyone! Tomorrow night, I declare we’ll watch Titanic in the girl’s room!”

There’s a chorus of cheers amidst the bus, even as Iida frantically tries to get everyone to sit down. Ashido whoops in excitement, standing up in her seat dramatically and striking a pose. “Paint me like one of your French girls!”

“Sit down, Ashido.” Aizawa groans from the front as the pink girl sheepishly hops back down. “There’s a rule against boys entering the girls’ room and vice versa. If you want to watch your movie, watch it in the common room. Our hosts might let you.”

Tsu speaks up next. “That reminds me, Mr. Aizawa. Who’s hosting the trip?”

They weren’t allowed to know the first thing about where they were going or what they’d be doing, Shouko remembers. After the USJ incident, UA was getting very tight-lipped about the location of their next activity, particularly when the notorious Class 1-A was involved. Aizawa sighs. “I can’t tell you that until we arrive, Asui. Speaking of, looks like we’re approaching our stop…”

Fuyumi is just happy Shouko isn’t home when it all happens.

Not drinking was easier said than done. Her body shook, she came closer and closer to snapping at her students, and she just felt… Tired all the time. And of course there was that little demon on her shoulder whispering that she didn’t have to go through this, no, she could be relieved of it for a little and feel normal, just have a little drink. Just one or two. Nobody needs to know. Shouko isn’t even here! Just drive to the liquor store, pick up some sake, find yourself again- But no. She hadn’t broken yet. Fuyumi had to be strong for her sister.

That said, when she snaps, she snaps sober. It destroys everything in one solid swoop.

It was ten at night, and she’d gotten home from yet another nomikai where she had to put up with those goddamn comments again. Ehh, you’re not drinking, Todoroki? C’mon! It’ll be fun! You used to be the life of the party! Just have a beer or two! It took everything and then some not to break, and
even then, she knew her coworkers were silently judging her for her refusal to engage. Taking off
her shoes and padding into the kitchen, she noticed a few plates left in the sink. As annoying as
doing the dishes this late was, at least it meant Shouko was eating. It concerned her sometimes,
seeing the way the baby of the family neglected her own nutrition so often. As she rolled up her
sleeves and got to washing, though, the door opened yet again. Instinctively, Fuyumi tenses as
Endeavor marches in, dropping his briefcase by the door and grumbling as he goes for the fridge
without so much as an acknowledgement of her. She almost meeps, pushing herself as close to the
sink as she can. “Um, hi dad. How was work?”

“It was work.” Comes Endeavor’s gruff reply as he pulls one of his own cans of beer from the
fridge, closing it behind him. Fuyumi genuinely doesn’t think she can handle the scent of liquor any
longer, and breathes through her mouth as he opens the cap. “How is Shouko?”

It always came back to his prized child, didn’t it? Fuyumi purses her lips. “Uh, she’s okay, I think? I
didn’t get to talk to her today, but it looks like she made herself breakfast before she set off on her
trip, so that’s good.”

Her father grunts in disinterest. “So she did. That girl had better be sticking to her diet plan. The last
thing I need is her losing what little muscle she has to fat.”

Something angry tickles Fuyumi’s throat. She swallows it back, but it refuses to leave her
completely. Has he not seen how Shouko’s thin muscle is covered by too-tight skin? Has he not
noticed the way you could wrap your hand around her wrist and touch your index to your thumb? Is
it just Fuyumi watching out for her sister’s well-being? She speaks before she thinks for the first time
in ages. “Couldn’t she stand to put on a few pounds?”

Endeavor turns an angry gaze in her direction, but Fuyumi doesn’t shirk away as much as she would
normally. Maybe it’s the irritation of being sober on a Friday, surrounded by other drinkers and
knowing she couldn’t give into the pressure, seeing him open a beer so casually (because some
people can control their drinking, don’t spiral wildly when they find something that brings them a
moment of peace) , but she’s not feeling like backing down on the topic of her sister’s health as her
father scowls. “Which one of us is the parent here?”

“…” She is silent, because the answer he wants out of her would be a lie. She cleans the dishes a little
more aggressively than she needs to.

Endeavor rolls his eyes, going to sit at the island counter as he sips his beer. “Don’t make her
anything with too much fat or sodium, either. On top of heroics training, Ondo specified that she
remain under a certain weight until they wed.”

That’s enough. Fuyumi is spitting in anger before she realizes it, shoulders hunched and teeth
clenched as she leans over the sink, staring in the bubbly water and away from her father. “Why
can’t we be normal, dad?”

“What?”

“I want to be normal!” She cries, spinning around and slamming her hand on the island counter,
freezing part of it before she realizes she’s done it. “I want a normal family with a mom and brothers
who are around! I want a dad that cares about his family! I want a baby sister who’s allowed to be
happy, dammit! Why can’t you see you’re ruining Shouko’s life?! You’re ruining everyone’s lives!
Just let us be normal!”

Her father is up and has his hand around her wrist in a heartbeat, heating it up and melting her ice.
Fuyumi hisses- her body is suited to fire, it doesn’t hurt as much as it would normally, but even she
has her limits against Hellfire. His face is blazing, hurting much more than the vice grip around her wrist. “How dare you speak to your father in that tone?! You were a failed product who I graciously allowed to stay in my home, and you have the nerve to talk to me like I’m some monster?!”

Fuyumi is yanking back, other arm fumbling for something, anything, behind her on the other counter. “I want to believe in you! I want to say I love you and mean it, dad! I wish you’d just take it out on me instead of everyone else! But you beat my twin, my mother, my sister, you neglect my baby brother! How can I say it when you’re hurting all the people I love?!”

“Then don’t say it!” Endeavor snarls. “You’re an adult, so why can’t you accept that you weren’t born into such a life and learn to live with it? Instead you go on and on, play the victim—”

“WE ARE ALL VICTIMS!” Fuyumi screams, years of delicately suppressed anger bubbling up at once, other hand wrapping around something behind her, and she swings forwards without thinking.

Years of being one of the top pros in the nation has honed her father’s reflexes to an almost unearthly level. Meanwhile, Fuyumi has no training whatsoever- with her ice, she was never even considered. It’s why Endeavor bats the object, the sharp metal fork, out of her hand before she can jam it into his. It flies so fast it almost gets stuck in the wall.

There’s a poignant moment of silence, icy horror filling Fuyumi as she realizes what she nearly did in her moment of anger. “I- I’m so sorry, I—”

“You have until seven in the morning.” Surprisingly, her father speaks evenly as he releases her hand, Fuyumi hissing at the bruises already becoming visible. “Pack everything up and leave before then, or I call the police.”

She blinks, fearful confusion filling her expression. “I- What?”

“You have until seven in the morning.” Surprisingly, her father speaks evenly as he releases her hand, Fuyumi hissing at the bruises already becoming visible. “Pack everything up and leave before then, or I call the police.”

She blinks, fearful confusion filling her expression. “I- What?”

“Is it not obvious?” Her father’s quiet anger is so much more terrifying than his outbursts, Fuyumi realizes as her knees tremble. “You’re being kicked out permanently. How can I trust you around Shouko with that temper? Will you break just like your mother and hurt the girl you claim to want to protect?”

Oh. Oh. Fuyumi falls to her knees, looking up in horror at her father. “I- No, dad, please, Shouko needs me-!”

“She needs a strong figure in her life to emulate. And you?” Endeavor casts his gaze at his oldest daughter, fallen to the floor with tears bubbling behind her glasses. “... Your image speaks for itself. Don’t speak to Shouko again. Get the hell out.”

The man storms from the room, heat leaving alongside him. Fuyumi remains on the floor, tears silently pouring down her cheeks as the reality of the situation hits her. She screwed up, she screwed up, kicked out, kicked away from Shouko, the one she promised her mother she’d protect, she screwed up, failure failure failure-

Her eyes drift to the counter. The beer is still there.

Wordlessly, Fuyumi gets to her feet, trembling hands grasping the can. She’s already failed once. What’s another fuck-up in her worthless life?

“Cheers.” She whispers to the empty room as she tips it back into her mouth, letting the liquid run down her throat.
Natsuo Hikawa knows unfairness.

He knows sitting in a doctor’s office, pressed tightly to his mother’s side as the doctor shatters his dreams with one X-ray showing one little bone in the pinky toe. He knows crying into Touya and Fuyumi’s arms as they hear their father roaring that *this is your weak genes* at their sobbing mother from downstairs. He knows bullying, knows his rituals, knows the smell of bleach as he held the bottle so close to his lips with his shaking hands and heard the voice whisper *may as well do it, useless reject.*

And now he knows Fuyumi has been pulled away from the one person she wanted to protect more than anything. That, he thinks, is the worst type of unfairness.

She’d start applying to sharehouses and searching for apartments tomorrow (despite Natsuo’s insistence that she could stay as long as she needed to), but for now, she was asleep on his bed after crying herself to exhaustion. Pulling his eyes from Fuyumi, Natsuo went back to his laptop where his essay stood in wait. Family crisis or not, the paper on treating patients with body-altering Quirks wasn’t gonna write itself. Taking a sip of his coffee, the boy threw himself back into his research. It would be a long night.

Ten minutes into his writing, though, Fuyumi’s phone rang from where she’d all but thrown it ok the table. Initially, Natsuo just silenced it and went back to his work. It was a private number, anyways. Probably just some telemarketer. Less than two minutes later, though, it vibrated as the private number tried again. And again. And again. After the fifth time, Natsuo sighed, grabbing the phone and stepping into the dorm hallways. He’d just have to tell whoever it was that Fuyumi was busy.

Hitting the answer button, Natsuo sighed as he waited for it to properly connect him. “Whoever this is, my sister can’t come to the phone. Leave her a message.”

He would have hung up like that if not for the voice on the other side nearly bringing him to his knees. “... Nii-san?”

“Guess I’ve got some explaining to do.” Comes the response. There’s some kind of commotion in the background, but Natsuo could care less about that when it’s *fucking Touya* on the other end of the line. “Guess I’ve got some explaining to do.”

“Now you fucked up! Now you fucked up! You have fucked up now!”
“Himiko, for once in your life, shut the hell up.” Touya groaned, crouching on the floor of the filthy storage unit and pinching the bridge of his nose. He should have figured that Fuyumi wasn’t going to answer after his first few calls went straight to voicemail. But of course, he kept pushing, and who picked up but Natsuo? The little brother who he knew idolized him, who he’d been purposely keeping in the dark about this operation?

God dammit.

He’d spun a web of partial truths he knew he’d have to remember now- he’d been living on the wrong side of the law and just found Fuyumi’s phone number, he instructed her not to tell any of the others until he found a good, legal job, and so on. Touya sure hoped Natsuo actually bought it. The boy had almost cried asking where he’d been, why he never called, and boy does lying to your siblings never get any easier. The chucklefuck in the corner didn’t make it any easier with all his writhing and muffled yelping.

Capturing Hideomi Ondo had been a simple task. The file Fuyumi provided had been full of information on his favourite haunts in the city- namely, a specific cafe popular amongst businessmen and students alike. All it took was Himiko ingesting Shouko’s blood and approaching him as he left, all batted eyelashes and a coy little request to follow her to her ‘secret hideaway’ just past an alley with plenty of great hiding spots for Touya to grab the fucker from. She didn’t act anything like his sister apparently did now, going from an ice queen to a flirty little schoolgirl, but Ondo evidently thought with his dick and not his brain. He’d had no qualms following his almost-fiancée with that lecherous look in his eyes, gaze trailed on the way Himiko swung her hips guiding him into their trap. It made Touya sick- the pervert really thought he was gonna score with an underage girl, huh? Well, he certainly didn’t expect the pissed off older brother hopping out with some sedatives, which brought them to their current ridiculous state of affairs. He’d just been calling to tell Fuyumi he’d dealt with Ondo, albeit with the whole ‘kidnapping and murder’ bit cut out.

Speaking of…

“Anyways, Mister Screwed-It-Up, do I get to do the deed? Do I?” Himiko hopped around the blindfolded and bound man, excitedly swinging a box cutter around. “I wanna!”

“You can have his blood if you want, but that’s it. Don’t forget who’s little sister this fucker was preying on.” Ignoring the man’s shocked yell as Himiko sighed and jammed a syringe into his arm, Touya stood up straight, approaching Ondo as his surrogate sister finished her extraction, pulling the man’s blindfold down. “Hideomi Ondo. Great to meet you in person. Touya Todoroki here. I’d shake your hand, but you seem a bit tied up.”

As Himiko lost her mind laughing at the stupid joke, Touya gazed into the man’s frightened eyes, blue meeting blue. “Where do you get off screwing with underage girls, huh? Can’t find one your own age? Gotta go for kids who can’t fight back?” He grabbed the man by his hair, snarl growing on his face. His scars stretched- Touya knew it added to the intimidation factor. “Did you like it, knowing you could do anything to her and she couldn’t do a thing? You get off thinking about my baby sister helpless at your feet? Let me tell you one thing about my family, you piece of garbage.”

Lighting a flame in his hand, Touya- no, Dabi - stared Ondo right in the face. “You fuck with one Todoroki sibling, you fuck with all of us. And I’m a lot scarier than they are.”

He thinks of Fuyumi tending to his wounds after each training session. He thinks of Natsuo carefully memorizing each floorboard in the house so he never made a noise to disturb Endeavor. He thinks of Shouko’s face in that photo, beat and broken. The flame grows into an inferno.
In Dabi’s opinion, he dies too fast. He could have gone for some more screaming.

Chapter End Notes

CONTENT WARNINGS BEGIN

- Homophobia mentions
- Transphobia mentions
- Domestic violence/abuse
- Alcohol
- Suicide attempt mention
- On-screen murder (not graphic)

CONTENT WARNINGS END. SPOILERS BEGIN.

[Me, singing] Ding, dong, the witch is dead!

Man, it says a lot about someone when I don’t feel bad about burning them alive, huh? But I know I wasn't the only one looking forward to some sweet justice, haha.

Anyways, thank you so much for reading! Don't forget we have a Discord server (https://discord.gg/bXjzUg5), and please leave a kudos or comment if you enjoyed! See you soon!
hand in unlovable hand

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone! Once again, I need to apologize for not getting to all your comments. I kind of have a reason this time: my new computer's screen was damaged, and it's been in for repairs for a while, and I was trapped writing on my phone (I'm borrowing my sister's computer to post this). I am sorry about that!

Anyways, this chapter is pretty light and fluffy fare compared to everything else, but there's a content warning or two anyways at the bottom. Happy reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was probably for the best that movie night was planned for tomorrow and not tonight. After the gruelling fight through the Pussycats’ forest (which was followed by Izumi getting a solid punch to the boob from a temperamental little boy), all anyone seemed ready to do was eat and rest. And after a delicious dinner, the hot springs sounded like exactly what everyone needed.

Izumi was one of the first in, sighing as aching muscles met the warmth of the water. Just what she needed after a long day! Ochako slid in beside her, making a contented noise as she settled in. “Ahh, it’s been forever since I was at a real hot spring! I totally forgot how relaxing they are.”

“Apparently they’re great for the quality of your skin, too!” Both girls almost jumped out of her skin as Hagakure spoke up, the water parting around the invisible girl as she slipped in gently. Given her lack of a towel, that water was the only indication of where she sat. “I’ve been having terrible acne lately, so hopefully this helps.”

“If it’s any consolation, Hagakure, none of us noticed it.” Shouko was as calm as always as she slid in on Izumi’s other side. “In any case, we have a bathhouse on my property, but it’s not the same as a natural spring like these ones.”

Ochako and Izumi sputtered in synch. “B-Bathhouse?!?”

“In a class with Yaoyorozu, it’s easy to forget you’re totally loaded too, Todoroki!” Came a call from across the spring. Ashido was taking up a running stance. “Who wants to see my best cannonball?!”

An earphone jack came from behind the changeroom door and whacked Ashido on the back of the head. “If you do that, I’m telling Aizawa. You’ll be running laps around camp all night.” The final three emerged, Jirou, Yaoyorozu and Tsu making their way towards the rest of the girl, a pouting Ashido in tow.

Ochako waved them over with a smile, the four girls settling in the water. “Haha, that’s the last thing you want after today! Save them for the pool later.”

Tsu made an excited ribbiting noise. “There’s a pool, Ochako?”

Nodding, her brunette friend beamed. “Yep! I saw it when I went to the washroom during dinner. I bet we’ll do some training in there later.”

“A pool on a summer trip, huh?” Hagakure sounded like she was grinning. “Sounds like the kind of
place to have a secret romantic rendezvous!”

That caught Izumi’s attention. Romantic...? Jirou waggled an earphone jack threateningly, and the indent in the water backed up with a meep. “Come on, who’s got time for that at training camp? We’ll be too tired each night. Especially you, little miss remedial course.”

“No such thing as too tired for romance, Jirou!” Hagakure snickered. “And you say that now, but I bet if Kaminari invited you-“

Jirou made an embarrassed squeaking noise, pushing Hagakure under the water. As the other girl flailed about (judging by the water’s shifting) amidst laughter, a similar situation sounded like it was breaking out on the boy’s side, albeit with a lot less cheer. Jirou paused as everyone else did, releasing Hagakure as the curious invisible girl popped back up to the surface. A concerned Yaoyorozu spoke up. “Boys? Is everything okay?”

“Code purple!” Came a frantic voice that sounded a lot like Kirishima. “Mineta’s climbing the wall!”

Oh. Izumi’s stomach dropped, not stopping even as the other girls’ faces grew hard and they pushed in front of her, blocking her from sight. While the gesture was touching considering what happened last time Mineta was involved, it didn’t stop the shame from rushing up. Did she seem like someone who needed to be protected...? Like she was helpless...? Shouko took the very front, right hand encased in ice. “I’ll block him off with a wall if we need to.”

The realization that they couldn’t even take a bath without having their privacy invaded was putting a damper on the evening to say the very least. Izumi sunk a little deeper into the water, meaning she very nearly missed a familiar little boy popping over one side of the fence with a large stick. “K- Kota...?”

The boy didn’t acknowledge her, glare focused on something on the other side of the hot springs. “Before you decide to become a hero, why don’t you focus on becoming a good person first?” And with that, Kota brought the stick down, whacking whoever was on the other side. Given the high pitched scream and the following whoops from the other boys, there was no need to guess who just got walloped.

The girls erupted in cheers, starting with Hagakure and spreading to most everyone else. Even Shouko’s lips had curved into a smile, ice melting away. Izumi felt herself break into giggles as Ochako hollered happily. “The evil is defeated!”

“Thank you, Kota!” Ashido cheered out, and the sound of his name drew the boy’s gaze over to the girls’ side. The side currently full of naked girls. Oh. Whoops.

The poor boy grew tomato red realizing what he was looking at, stumbling over his words and then his feet, accidentally taking himself over the edge and onto the girls’ side. Given the high pitched scream and the following whoops from the other boys, there was no need to guess who just got walloped.

Arms held out, she grabbed the boy just in the nick of time, rolling as she held Kota tightly to her chest until they managed to reach a stop. Loosening her grip a bit, Izumi held him out slightly, concern plastered all over her features. “Kota, are you okay?”

“I’m-“ The boy seemed to have almost recovered from his daze when he looked over at his rescuer- or more specifically, the way she was completely naked. Oh. Izumi hadn’t thought about that. The poor boy’s whole body turned red, steam practically pouring out his ears. “I-I-I-!”
“O-Oh! I’m so sorry Kota, let me just put you- did he just f-faint?!”

“Damn, Midoriya, did your boobs kill him?”

“Ashidooooo! Not funny! Someone call one of the Pussycats!”

“Thick thighs literally saved lives today.”

“Hagakure!”

After that fiasco was taken care of and everyone had vacated the hot springs, Shouko couldn’t help but notice Izumi looking… Sad on her return from helping bring Kota to Mandalay. Had something happened? Maybe it wasn’t her place to pry, so Shouko didn’t say anything, but it was a bit worrisome nonetheless.

As the girls all settled in for bed (with the exception of Hagakure who was heading to remedials- Shouko didn’t have her turn until tomorrow), rumours were whispered around the darkened room. Apparently one of the boys let it slip that Mineta’s things had been removed from their room and that they hadn’t seen him since Aizawa all but dragged him from the hot springs with one pissed off look on his face. The whispers became few and further between as exhaustion caught up with everyone, but Shouko stayed awake, staring at the ceiling. For some reason, she felt… Weird. Like maybe something bad had happened, and she just hadn’t learned about it yet. Their phones got no signal here, so it’s not like Fuyumi or anyone could even have informed her had anything occurred. Still, it gnawed at her like a pit in her stomach.

She should probably do something about this, shouldn’t she? Shouko recalled Fuyumi once recommending that she try and handle negative emotions by distracting herself. It probably wasn’t the healthiest advice, but they were Todorokis- healthy coping was never their strong suit. Regardless, Shouko’s eyes, long since adjusted to the darkened room, drift over her sleeping classmates and the bit of light peeking out from under the doorway. What could she do to distract herself when everyone was asleep? Her eyes settled on Izumi’s still form directly to her left, and her chest tightened a bit. So cute… Maybe that was the key? Not staring at her while she slept- that would just be weird. But Natsuo had given her tips on pursuing her crush. If anything could take her mind off the strange sense of dread, it would be the full focus she needed when dealing with Izumi. Think- what was that thing Hagakure mentioned that perked Izumi up back in the hot springs?

Before she knew it, Shouko was reaching over, shaking Izumi’s shoulder gently. “Izumi?”

Much to her surprise, the girl’s eyes opened instantly, completely awake. “Can’t sleep either?”

Well, that was a surprise. Shouko blinked before nodding. “No. I was wondering if you wanted to go somewhere.”

Izumi hummed quietly, speaking in a hushed whisper as to not wake up any of the other girls. “Go somewhere? You mean outside?”

“We don’t have to if you don’t want to.”

“No, I do!” Izumi raised her voice a bit, although she quickly lowered it as she saw Momo stir a bit under her futon. “Sure, let’s go.”

It wasn’t difficult sneaking out. Just about everyone was exhausted to the point that both their teachers and the Pussycats didn’t expect anyone to try and cause mayhem tonight, so there wasn’t anyone guarding the exits. Shouko had staked out a bit of the camp after dinner, and already knew
where the pool Ochako mentioned was. If Izumi seemed to really find a midnight swim agreeable…

“Oh, the pool!” Izumi’s face was bright even in the darkness of the night. “It’s pretty nice for a
campsite pool, actually. Is this what you wanted to show me?”

Shouko shrugged. “I thought maybe we could try going for a swim.”

“Now?” Izumi turned to regard the pool, a slight apprehension taking over her expression. “Aren’t
we going to get in trouble?”

“Nobody will be out here this late.” Unless they also had a similar idea on how to kind-of flirt with
their crush, kind-of distract themselves from inexplicable anxiety. In which case, they could go away.
Shouko got here first.

Izumi looked like she was thinking it over before a mischievous smile made its way onto her face.
“Hehe, I guess you’re right? I didn’t know you had such a bad girl side, Shouko.”

“Probably a better way to rebel than my last attempts.” Shrugging again with a light smile she hoped
was masked by the low lighting, Shouko stepped forwards to tug on the pool gate. Surprisingly, it
was unlocked- Shouko had half expected having to boost Izumi over the fence.

Regardless, she beckoned her friend in, Izumi cheerfully darting off towards the pool before realizing
it was probably a bad idea to run on slippery concrete, slowing herself down to a proper walking
pace. “Eheh, I’ve always wanted to sneak into a pool at night. Like in the movies!”

“Do people do this in movies?” Shouko hadn’t seen enough of them to judge for herself. She’d
mostly just chosen this location considering what Hagakure had said about it being romantic, though
she supposed the invisible girl would have had to have gotten that idea from somewhere in the first
place.

“Mmhm! Usually it’s a public or hotel pool, but this is pretty exciting too. I guess I never really had
friends before UA, so I didn’t get to do this fun stuff.” Izumi sat beside the pool, rolling up her
pajama pants before pausing, processing something they both should have realized beforehand. “...Ah, my bathing suit is back in the room!”

Oops. Shouko felt one cheek redden as she realized she’d completely forgotten that they’d need
swimsuits in her split-second decision to surprise Izumi. “I didn’t even think about that. I’m sorry.”

Izumi hummed, seemingly looking for answers as Shouko knelt beside her by the poolside. “It’s
okay, we can… Uh, do you sleep with a bra on? Because-“

Shouko’s hair was in flames before Izumi even managed to finish. She frantically patted her head to
put it out as Izumi squawked, pool lights illuminating her red cheeks. “S-S-Sorry! I just asked
because I sleep with a sports bra, and kinda thought maybe we could just slip in like that? I’m sorry
again! Gyah, I sounded like such a weirdo, I promise I didn’t mean anything creepy-“

Izumi’s frantic mumbling would have been a pleasantly adorable addition had Shouko not been
trying very hard not to accidentally relight her hair after the suggestion that they slip into the pool in
their underwear. She’d brought her out here to try and make her interest a tiny bit clearer, but this
was…! Natsuo didn’t say what to do in this situation! Regardless, Shouko held her poker face and
nodded despite the internal panicking. “I have a camisole on under my shirt. That should be fine.”

The green haired girl looked relieved as Shouko responded positively, though the bicolored student
found herself missing Izumi’s blush as it gradually faded. “O-Oh! That’s good. Then, uh, lemme
just-“
It’s not that Shouko hadn’t seen Izumi in a state of undress before; they changed in the same room almost every day. But the context there was radically different- changerooms were a normal fact of their lives as students, and it’s not like they looked around much in there anyways. Shouko remembered the rumours that started about a girl in middle school who apparently looked at another classmate a little too long. That was also the first time she learned what ‘lesbian’ meant, and had also learned that they were supposed to be predatory and an active danger to ‘normal’ girls. It was a good thing Shouko couldn’t have cared less about gossip- internalizing that would have been disastrous for her emotions now, she thinks. This crush was hard enough without hating herself for it.

But now Izumi was unbuttoning her pajama shirt in the lighting of the pool, and Shouko doesn’t know whether she needs to feel guilty over the embarrassed way she looks away or not. Slipping out of her own oversized tee shirt (courtesy of Natsuo) and well-loved flannel pants (courtesy of Fuyumi), Shouko slid into the water in her camisole and boyshorts (courtesy of nobody else before her, thankfully). As Izumi followed suit into the surprisingly-warm pool, Shouko pointedly did not look past her face, the girl’s freckled cheeks pink again. Do not look down.

“... Is that an All Might sports bra?”

Well, Shouko looked down. She’s not sure what else she expected. Izumi made a meeping sound as her blush deepened, the girl dropping down in embarrassment until the water touched her chin. “I-It’s just really comfortable is all!”

“I’m sure that’s why you bought it. Comfort.” Shouko finds her lips curving up as Izumi’s blush spreads to most of her face.

“D-Don’t tease me, it’s a really nice fit!” The girl covers her face with her hands. “I’m going underwater, the fish won’t tease me!”

Shouko almost reminds Izumi that they’re in a pool before realizing that was probably a joke. The other girl drops underwater for a minute before coming up, shaking her head like a particularly fluffy dog might. The bicolored student realizes this may very well be the only time Izumi’s mop of hair has ever settled properly. “Your hair’s calmed down a bit.”

“Huh?” Izumi seems to have mostly recovered from the embarrassment earlier as she goes to pat her head. “Oh yeah! Water usually keeps it down for a little. But once it dries, it comes back twice as fluffy, hah.”

It’s hard to imagine Izumi’s hair getting fluffier than it usually is. “Mine stays the same no matter what.”

“Mm, I see why that is.” Izumi nods. “Your hair is a pretty average thickness, and it’s very straight. Your bangs are cut thinner than mine are, too, so they wouldn’t come back especially messy.”

Shouko blinks for a moment. That was… Quite a bit of information. “You know a lot about hair.”

Izumi blushes slightly, reaching back to rub her neck sheepishly. “Oh, yeah, I guess I do. Hah, I had to learn to handle my hair since I was a kid- I used to want two big strands like All Might, ehehe. I guess it’s just something I was interested in ever since.”

“You did a good job when you did my hair. I liked it.”

“You liked it?” The other girl brightened up right away, pearly smile illuminated by the pool lights and their reflection off the water. “I’m really happy! Sometimes it’s kind of hard to tell what you’re
thinking - not that it’s a bad thing or anything! I kinda wish I could have that type of ‘cool girl’ personality, too.”

… Cool? Wow. Shouko hadn’t heard that one in a while. Maybe some students in middle school regarded her like that at the start of the year, but their opinions quickly changed to ‘stuck up’ or ‘bitchy’. Again, not like Shouko really cared, but it was a bit of a throwback. “You’re cool too. Being heroic in your own way is cool.”

Izumi’s smile dies a bit, and she looks down to the water. “Hah… I’m not that heroic yet.”

Shouko fixed her with a look. “Which one of us dove to save a child from a head injury today?”

“Still, that’s-!” Sighing a little, Izumi cuts herself off, leaning against the pool wall. “I don’t feel very heroic over that. Especially with what I learned from Mandalay after.”

After? Shouko suddenly recalls the girl returning with a downcast expression earlier. “You didn’t look very happy afterwards. Kota was fine, wasn’t he?”

“He was fine, it was just the heat that made him pass out. But…” Biting her lip, Izumi brought up a hand to run a finger over the surface of the water, creating little spirals through the liquid. “Do you remember Water Hose?”

It would be hard not to - the public memorial for the team who died so heroically was so grand that Shouko had been brought along with her father to leave flowers at the site. It was a good image, showing him off as a fatherly figure while mourning. She wonders if he actually cared. “Yes. Weren’t they Mr. Aizawa’s classmates?”

Izumi nodded. “Yeah, along with all the Pussycats. They were a married team, and the wife was Mandalay’s twin sister- Kota’s mother.”

His mother… Oh no. “Both of his parents were killed in action…”

“That’s why he punched me earlier.” Wrapping her arms around herself, Izumi sunk a little deeper into the water. “He hates heroes because in his mind, heroics are what took his mom and dad away. How else can such a small kid begin to process that kind of loss? I was up thinking about it when you woke me, about how badly I wanted to help… But what can I do? Then you brought me out and helped distract me, and- Ah, I went and ruined the mood, didn’t I?”

Izumi was starting to fret, brow furrowing in worry, and Shouko instinctively reached out to pat her head. It always made her feel better, so she didn’t think anything of it as her fingers nestled between damp hair. “You didn’t ruin anything. If you’re asking for advice… I’d say your words tend to touch people deeper than intended quite often. I’m living proof of your skill with your speech. So if you want to reach out to him, be gentle and kind. Show him with your behaviour what being a hero means.”

Izumi leant into the touch a bit, but Shouko was sure she was just projecting her own hopes when she swore she saw a tint of a blush on the girl’s cheeks. “… Thank you, Shouko. You’re not that bad at using your words either, you know!”

“Nowhere near as good as you.” Shouko knew she helped Tenya in Hosu, but at a great personal cost, and only when she was imagining what Izumi would say. “Maybe it’s your secret second Quirk.”

For some odd reason, it felt like Izumi tensed at the mention of a ‘secret Quirk’, but her body quickly returned to normal as she giggled, playfully splashing Shouko with water. “Don’t tease meee!”
Feeling her lips curve into a slight smile, Shouko removes her hand from her hair in order to splash Izumi back. “Or could your second Quirk be ‘always the loser in a splash fight’?”

A mischievous glimmer flew through Izumi’s eyes, a smile growing on her face. “Oh, we’re taking it that way? This is how it is?”

“What’s more heroic than the spirit of competition?”

“A competition I’ll win!” With a laugh, Izumi brought her arm back and splashed forth a wave of water. “Plus ultra!”

Shouko retaliated with her own splash, diving underwater to dodge before re-emerging to meet a splattering of water right in the face. Her smile grew as she lunged forwards, aiming for the grinning Izumi.

They went back and forth like this for some time, diving and dodging while trying to get the other to yield first all while Izumi’s laughter punctuated the silence of the night. For a while, Shouko succeeded- she forgot. Forgot her anxieties, the responsibilities weighing her to the floor lifting for just a bit as she splashed her friend. Before she even realized she was doing it, she was laughing too, snickering into the evening as she battled back and forth with Izumi. For a moment in time, they were both free of the pressures and fears that came with training to be heroes in a world that needed them sooner than ever- they were two teenage girls, playing in the pool they snuck into. Things were normal.

Finally, Shouko got the upper hand, slipping under the water and popping up in front of Izumi. Somewhere within the close range scuffle, she managed to grab Izumi’s wrists and pin her back against the pool wall, arms by the sides of the green haired girl’s head. Catching her breath amidst laughs, she looked up to meet Izumi’s equally tired and joyful expression. “I win.”

“Fine, fine, you win this one.” Izumi’s excitable smile quickly morphed into something a little more surprised as she examined Shouko’s face. “... I’ve never seen you laugh like that.”

“Huh?” Oh, man. When was the last time she’d really laughed so hard? Shouko genuinely couldn’t remember. “... It’s been a long time since I had reason to.”

“Maybe you should do it more often.” Izumi’s eyes crinkled gently. “It sounds really nice.”

Shouko knows the only thing preventing her from catching on fire again was how wet her hair was. “If you like it, I’ll try to.”

There was a small pause between both girls, and Shouko realized the implications of their position- Izumi pressed up against the pool wall, Shouko gently holding her there by her wrists. This kind of position should have had her leaping back in a flurry of apologies, but... Shouko didn’t want to move away. The pale moonlight, the warm water, the way Izumi’s expression was fading into something alarmingly ambiguous- this was the type of moment Shouko had craved. Everything else slowed down as the duo regarded each other, two pairs of eyes searching for something in the other’s expression. Izumi broke the silence first, voice soft. Shouko realized the other girl wasn’t making any moves to get away, and her heartbeat picked up. She couldn’t be that lucky, could she...? “It’s nice... Being out here with you. Thank you for inviting me.”

“Thank you for coming.” Why was her throat so dry all of a sudden? Izumi was looking her straight in the eyes, chest rising and falling with each breath. Shouko couldn’t take the leap of faith, not yet, but she could put a feeler out. “Doing this kind of thing with you... I’m happy.”
It was vague enough that it could be explained as Shouko being happy about swimming, not about gently holding Izumi and looking at her like this. Izumi’s eyes widened for a moment before they took on a softness that made Shouko wish she could take a photograph— that look could brighten the darkest of nights. “Shouko, I’m happy doing this too.”

Her statement had a similar vague quality, and Shouko’s heart was set to hammer out of her chest. Izumi was so close, so close, but all the bicoloured girl wanted was to have her closer. Squeezing her wrists a bit and pleading that she wasn’t making the worst mistake possible, Shouko closed her eyes, leant in—

“Hm, isn’t it a bit past curfew for you kittens?”

Shouko and Izumi yelped in sync, scrambling to let go of each other and swiveling towards the source of the noise. One of the Pussycats—Ragdoll, if Shouko remembers correctly—stood just outside the pool gates with a cheerful grin on her face. “Do you remember how my Quirk works? It told me you two were out here and not in your room. I know some kitties love the water, but you’ll have plenty of time to get your fur wet over the week when we train in the pool!”

“I-I’m sorry, Miss Ragdoll!” Izumi lifts herself out of the pool in a slight panic. “We just couldn’t s- sleep, and, um—”

“Don’t worry, kitten!” Ragdoll waves a gloved hand in Izumi’s direction, smiling brightly. “We snuck out as teenagers, too. I won’t tell your teacher this time, but you really have to get back to bed! We’re going to be training you hard tomorrow, and you need the rest.”

“... We’ll get going, then.” Shouko’s not sure whether that was the best or the worst thing that could have just happened, and mulls over it as she pulls her pajamas back over her wet camisole (ugh, she’d have to change into fresh sleepwear from how wet this was). On one hand, if Izumi had reciprocated, she’d be over the moon. Her whole body had been on fire, her heart beating a mile a minute, and the thought of that feeling being returned was unimaginably wonderful. But if she didn’t... Shouko’s gut churned at the thought of Izumi pulling away just then, confusion and perhaps even disgust plastered on her beautiful face. It would destroy their friendship without a doubt, and even if they eventually managed to mend it, would things ever really be the same with this hanging over their heads?

Ugh, she couldn’t think about this right now. Whether it was good or bad wasn’t important— it had happened, and that was all. They’d been interrupted, and no amount of worrying herself sick would change that. Finishing redressing around the same time Izumi did, Shouko allowed a thoroughly amused Ragdoll to escort them back to the main building. As they followed behind the pro, Shouko cast a glance in Izumi’s direction. The girl was red cheeked and staring at the ground, hands clasped firmly together at her hips. She looked... Well, like someone who was embarrassed over being caught sneaking into a swimming pool in her underwear. Izumi didn’t look angry at all, so Shouko got at least cross the possibility of her being disgusted over the attempted kiss off the list (not like Izumi seemed like the type of person to do such a thing, but still...). Had she even realized that’s what Shouko was trying to do? The bicoloured girl had barely moved her head before the two of them were interrupted— there was a good chance she hadn’t even noticed Shouko trying to move in.

This was so much work. How come nobody ever told her romance would be so difficult?! Sighing quietly, Shouko resigned herself to keeping her own head down and following Ragdoll. She’d have to sort this out in the morning.

Ragdoll had been right— training the next day was brutal.
The day had started off magnificently well, at least in Shouko’s opinion. Well, not originally—given the rush to get up and ready, she had no time to talk to Izumi before training started and maybe clear up a bit of the evening’s events. But things improved drastically by the time she and her sleepy classmates had arrived at the training field. Aizawa had gathered Class 1-A together with a stern look on his face, arms crossed. Whether or not he was also angry about waking up at five in the morning was hard to tell, considering he looked exhausted constantly. “Everyone, I have important news.”

“Wait, Mr. Aizawa?” Ashido said after yawning, raising a hand in the air. “Mineta’s not here yet.”

“That’s exactly what I was here to talk to you about.” Aizawa had said. “The boys may have noticed that he didn’t sleep in the room with everyone else. Mineta’s actions earlier were not only highly disrespectful to the female students, but could very well have resulted in the serious injury of a small child. He showed zero remorse after the incident, so he was sent home last night. Considering the gravity of this offense, I’m officially filing for his expulsion from the hero course.”

Shouko almost couldn’t believe it. He was actually facing consequences for all his actions? With what Aizawa had told them after the peeping incident, she genuinely thought there was no way Mineta would ever get more than a slap on the wrist at any point considering all the red tape in their teacher’s way. But it had been true—he was really gone. Maybe it was her imagination or even her own projections, but Shouko couldn’t help but feel like the female portion of the class had a considerable pep in their step when the day started off.

However, even joyous news couldn’t keep training from being excruciating. It was finally lunch, Shouko eagerly toweling off (being stuck in a hot drum of water all day was hell even with an ice Quirk actively being used) before going to get her food. There was very little conversation for the first half of the meal, everyone eagerly scarfing down their food and chugging water. Even the normally ladylike eater Momo was practically inhaling her noodles and pork dumplings. When everyone inevitably went for seconds, though, conversation started up as starving bellies found themselves considerably more sated.

The seating this meal was decided by class number, meaning Shouko found herself between Tokoyami and Hagakure. The latter turned to her with a few rice grains stuck to her face (they looked like they were floating, honestly) and a cheeky tone to her voice. “So, what were you doing last night?”

She knew they were out? “... Izumi and I went for a swim.”

“Oooh, sneaking out! Quintessential class trip activity!” The collar on Hagakure’s sports uniform nodded. “I used to do that all the time in middle school. It’s pretty easy when you’ve got a Quirk like mine.”

Fair enough. Shouko was about to go back to her meal before something struck her. “Wait, how did you know we were out?”

“I had just gotten back from remedials, and wasn’t asleep yet when Ragdoll brought you guys in.” A bite of rice disappeared into where Hagakure’s mouth likely was. It was always odd watching food vanish into mid air whenever the invisible girl was dining. “Anyways, why the pool?”

Shouko shrugged. “You mentioned people sneaking out to those during the hot springs trip. I didn’t know where else to suggest.”

“Oh, you used my idea! Yay!” Hagakure paused to take another bite before sputtering, quickly leaning in and whispering. “Wait wait wait! Was it that sort of sneaking out? Did you hook up with Midoriya at the pool!? We have to swim in there!”
Shouko is glad she’s still damp from her training, or else her head would certainly be on fire. “Wha-no! No. Nothing like that. And…” She casts her eyes to her other side. “Tokoyami’s right there, you know.”

“Dude, he and Jirou have been debating which Panic! At The Disco song is best for, like, the entire meal. He’s not gonna hear you.” Giggling a bit, Hagakure lowered her voice again. “Y’know, theoretically, if you did mack on Midoriya at the pool—”

“Which I didn’t.” Well, she’d tried, but it’s not like she was telling the notorious class gossip that.

“Right, right, you didn’t. But I’m just saying, you two would be the cutest couple.” There was an awkward pause before Hagakure quickly followed up. “I’m winking, by the way.”

Cute? Did other people really think that? Shouko can’t imagine any part of her being very cute, but maybe with someone as adorable as Izumi by her side, it gave her some by association. She takes a quiet moment to stare down at her food, blush rising on her cheeks. “... Thank you, Hagakure.”

“You’re welcome! We don’t get the chance to talk very often, y’know? Just you and me.” It looked as if she nodded again. “You really came out of your shell after the Sports Festival— it’s great that you’re really one of the girls now.”

One of the girls… Shouko couldn’t explain why, but that left a warm, fuzzy feeling in her chest. Given how little of an impact her gender had growing up, what with the way her father attempted to remove any and all aspects of traditional femininity from her, she’d never had the chance to have any number of female friends (or any friends at all, really, but there was a remarkable disconnect from the girls she knew growing up). In many ways, ‘girly’ activities still weren’t her cup of tea, but spending time with other girls to any degree was… Enjoyable. Like she was somewhere she felt wanted for once outside of her father’s eyes. “It’s nice to be part of the group.”

“And it’s good to have you!” Hagakure paused, bringing an arm up to check her watch. “Ah, lunch is ending soon! We should get eating so we aren’t going back to training hungry.”

Shouko nodded in agreement, turning back to her meal. “Right.” As pleasant as newfound camaraderie and midnight pool escapades were, she couldn’t lose sight of the ultimate goal here: to train. Hurriedly swallowing down the rest of her fish, Shouko prepared to return to the training grounds.

Several hours later, training finally let up in preparation for dinner. Although he was fighting not to show it, Katsuki’s arms ached like a bitch. He’d been producing massive explosions over and over, and even with the help of the hot water, the strain on his muscles was almost unbearable. Still, not a drop of weakness would be shown; he couldn’t afford that in front of these extras.

(Still extras, huh? Like you don’t care about Ashido, Sero, Kaminari. Like Kirishima doesn’t make you smile when you’re by yourself thinking of him.)

They’d have to make their own supper tonight. Great. Fantastic. Katsuki knew he was a good cook (it’s a skill you need to have as a girl, his mother said once), but he didn’t trust any of these other morons for a second. Everyone got to shower first- and thank god, like anyone wanted sweat mixed in with their dinners- and Katsuki was planning to be first to avoid having anyone else walk in. Even though the bathrooms here had stalls, he’d still have to towel off and get changed outside of them, and… Well, if Birdface was comfortable changing with everyone else, good for fucking him. Katsuki wasn’t about to out himself at fucking camp, even if the grape shit was marvelously gone.
But naturally, it wouldn’t be that easy. A certain someone stopped him just outside the main building. “Um, Katsuki?”

Who the fuck was calling him by his first name?! Katsuki swiveled around to tear whoever just said that a new asshole, only to find Deku standing there, drenched in sweat and looking awkward as shit. It was… Better than Kacchan for sure, but Katsuki found the use of his proper name from the likes of her almost disquieting. “…What do you want, nerd?”

“U-Um, well…” Deku clasped her hands at her hips, nervously looking up and down again. “I kind of needed to talk to you about something in private? It’s really important.”

Katsuki snorted, turning on his heels. “Seriously? Yeah, right. I’m going to shower.”

“Kach- Katsuki, wait! It’s about the nickname I used to use.”

Well, that gave him pause. What could she possibly have to say about that stupid nickname? He turned his head slightly, looking over his shoulder. This stupid holdup meant that just about everyone had already wandered into the building, so there went his hope for an early shower. Maybe… Maybe he had the time to listen to the nerd talk. “…Fine. Nobody’s fucking here anymore, so get on with it.”

“R-Right! Um…” Deku stands there for a minute awkwardly toeing her shoe into the ground. Katsuki has half a mind to turn around and walk away before she finally speaks up. “I wanted to say I’m s-sorry for calling you Kacchan! I always, um, connected it to Katsuki? Ever since you changed your name, anyways, and I-I didn’t think about how maybe it seemed to close to… Well, your deadname.”

(“Hey, Yuka! Why don’t we come up with nicknames for each other? Like our pro hero names, but a secret just for us!”)

Had she… Had she not known this whole time?

(“Okay, but they better match, ‘cause we’re gonna be on a hero team one day once we get our Quirks!”)

This whole time, had it just been ignorance? Not malice?

(“I wanna be a hero who’s friends with all the other cool pros, even All Might! I need a nice name- Can I be Micchan? ‘Cause of the ‘Mi’ at the end of my name! That way, you can be Kacchan!”)

Their relationship has been toxic for years, so much bad blood and hatred stirred up between the two of them. Katsuki had thought he wasn’t like Deku, never played the simpering little freak while disrespecting him so flagrantly.

(“Whaaaat? That’s so lame and girly! I want something badass!”)

She couldn’t be telling the truth, could she?

(“Pleeeeeeesease, Yuka? I’ll let you borrow my ‘All Might: Fighter of Justice’ DVD if you match me!”)

Had Katsuki been wrong?

(“Oh, fine. Micchan and Kacchan, then.”)
... No way. He could never be wrong when it came to someone like her. The freak was lying like she always was. Deku had to just be trying to fix something she’d purposefully fucked up. She was still fucking talking, too. “I never meant any disrespect, Katsuki, and… I’m so sorry if I hurt you.”

He used to have a huge problem with grinding his teeth. Pent up stress, that dumb anger management therapist had told him. Katsuki’s doing it again, feeling his jaw clench. “Hurt me? With what, your dumb kiddy nickname? Yeah, right. If you had any respect, you wouldn’t be fucking lying, Deku.”

Deku’s eyes widen, and she shakes her head vigorously. “N-No, not at all! I’m telling the truth!”

“Uh huh. Don’t you need to go shower or whatever? You fucking reek.” Ignoring both the fact that he also smelt like crap and the way Deku called out for him to please just listen!, Katsuki stormed forwards and into the building. She couldn’t follow him to the boy’s side, but that fucking cloud of doubt hanging over his head now certainly could. He walked faster as if that might help him outrun it, as if it didn’t cling like a shadow as it always did whenever he was anything less than absolutely perfect. He didn’t give a shit about Deku’s feelings, about the name- she was completely irrelevant to him.

(Tomorrow night, he would regret ever thinking that.)

Chapter End Notes

CONTENT WARNINGS BEGIN

- Canonical sexual harassment
- Transphobia mentions

CONTENT WARNINGS END. SPOILERS BEGIN.

Ah, what a relaxing change of pace! I'll admit, this was a very self indulgent chapter for me, but I had a lot of fun writing some fluffier breaks and just let the kiddos hang out (relatively) angst-free. I hope you enjoyed reading it! Maybe drop a comment or kudos if you enjoyed, and I'll see you soon!
there ain't language for the things i've seen

Chapter Notes

Woohoo, update!

I'm gonna be honest, I am way too sleepy to write a coherent author's note right now, but please know there's A VERY LARGE AND COMMON TRIGGER in this chapter! Please go to the end notes to check that out.

And with that, onwards!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izumi’s a bit of a wreck.

She was already wound up from the disastrous conversation with Katsuki when she headed out for dinner. How did that go so badly? Why didn’t he believe her when she said she didn’t mean it? Izumi had no idea where she was supposed to go from here. Then there was the stress of last night. Everything had been going so well! She was having fun, distracted of her worries of Kota, and then Shouko was right there-! Was she really going to kiss her, or was Izumi just projecting her own wants? Her eyes closed, yeah, but that didn’t mean anything! She hadn’t said a thing about it after! Was Shouko even gay? She had no clue! There was the tried-and-true fingernail method, sure, but every girl in the damn class had short nails for training! Izumi was pretty sure the longest nails belonged to Kaminari, painted black and decorated with lightning bolt stickers. This was too confusing, and it left her mulling over it with mild distress for most of the day (when she wasn’t focused on Tiger’s intensive workout plan, anyways). Then there was the Katsuki incident, obviously, and then what happened at dinner.

They’d all finished working together, and as a couple students volunteered to dish out the curry, the rest of both classes hurriedly lined up with empty bowls and growling bellies. Izumi had been in the middle of the line, rushing over hungrily, and then that Class 1-B girl (the brunette with the long bangs- Komori, maybe?) had tripped over her flip flops, the girl stumbling with a cry into Izumi’s back and grabbing her shoulders to steady herself.

Maybe it wasn’t so bad because Izumi could hear the other student coming this time, hear the yelp and feel the rush of air as she was bumped into and grabbed. For once, she didn’t scream, going dead quiet instead of what happened last time. But even with her empty stomach, bile rose in her throat from the touch, and she quickly jerked away, almost shoving past the girl and the disgruntled Aoyama in front of her as she hurried from the line and out of the dining area. Don’t run, don’t you dare run, look natural even as your mind starts screaming. Thoughts floated through her head that she needed to strangle back, and she wrapped her arms around herself while she picked up the pace, hands tightening around her shoulders as if that would remove the touch. The touch of hands that pulled her back, pawed at her chest, lifted shirts and felt and felt and felt-

Izumi dove for the bushes beside the main building, dry heaving as she balanced herself against a tree with one hand as she knelt down. Branches scraped at her arms, brushing and touching, and she gagged as her empty stomach tried to vomit nothingness. Her mind was racing, memories and shame and anger at herself for being so weak, so pathetic, so unable to cope, and Izumi scrunched her face up as she tried holding in the tears. Why was she like this? Why did every tiny touch send her back?
It wasn’t fair. None of it was fair and it was happening anyways, and her heart felt like it was going
to pound out of her chest, and-

“Izumi? Are… Is everything okay?”

Whipping her head around, Izumi coughed weakly as she stared at Shouko, the girl nudging aside
the bushes with her legs while holding two plates of curry. “You ran off so quickly. Are you sick?”

“A-Ah, I’m… I’m fine.” Right, Shouko hadn’t been there that day Ochako set her off, had she? That
was after Endeavor put her in the hospital (her own father, Izumi’s mind whispers angrily, some
people have real problems like that and you cry like a baby over something you should have gotten
over ages ago?). Shaking away thoughts that needed to be buried, Izumi tried inching back to her
knees to sit in seiza on the forest ground. “Sorry, I just… Need a minute.”

“Should I go?” Shouko cocked her head, only to be met by Izumi shaking hers.

“No, it’s just- stay. You can stay.” With someone around, Izumi could at least halt the thoughts for a
minute. Even if she looked pathetic doing it… Shouko was her friend. Her friend that wouldn’t be
annoyed by her stupid meltdown, she hoped.

Nodding, the bicoloured girl knelt down next to her, still holding both plates. “I bought you food in
case you didn’t want to go back.”

How thoughtful. “T-Thanks.” Taking a few deep breaths, Izumi managed to turn the fire on her
shoulders into an uncomfortable tingle, force thoughts of hands back into the recesses of her mind.
Her own hands pointedly didn’t shake as she accepted the plate, even if she held the fork a bit too
tight as she took a bite. “It’s good.”

“At least considering it was made by so many people.” Shouko takes a bite of her own. “… Sorry I
dragged you outside last night, by the way.”

If there was one thing that could pull Izumi back as she teetered on the line of a panic attack, it was
the urgent need to be polite. “N-No, not at all! I came, didn’t I? I had fun swimming.”

“That’s good.” Shouko kneels too, settling into place and brushing a pebble off the ground as she
starts to eat. “… Sorry. I’m not good at comfort.”

“Comfort?”

“You still look upset.” Shouko shifts slightly. “I wanted to help, but… Well. I don’t have your talent
for it. I just didn’t want you to be alone when you were possibly hurting.”

She’d come to keep her company. Before she knows it, a tiny smile creeps onto Izumi’s face. “… Thank you, Shouko. That’s really nice of you.”

“You’d do the same for me.” There’s a comfortable silence as the girls eat in the privacy of the tree’s
shade. After a few minutes of silence (they really were hungry after all that training, even if Izumi’s
stomach was still unsettled), Shouko speaks up again. “Do you want to talk about it?”

Izumi opens her mouth to deny, but… Does she? Talking about The Unfortunate Incident From
Second Year always seemed nigh impossible- hell, thinking about it for too long could send her
spiralling. Why would she ever want to talk about something that ruined her so deeply? There was
just no point. It had happened, it was over, and talking wouldn’t change the way she seemed to
remain trapped in it anyways. Or at least, that had been Izumi’s thoughts ever since it happened. But
hadn’t her words been what freed Shouko?
Could they free her, too?

“... S-Something really bad happened in middle school, and when my shoulders get g-grabbed, it kind of… Brings me back?”

Izumi speaks slowly, without any sort of confidence as she tries to approach this without any idea how to actually do that. Shouko nods as she listens, putting down her fork. “Something happened?”

“Y-Yeah.” Swallowing anxiously, Izumi closes her eyes as she continues, feeling the breeze and grounding herself in the moment even as she recalls the past. “These two kids- they kind of bullied me back when Katsuki was really bad about it. B-But mostly they'd go along with whatever he said? Then when he wasn’t at school one day... Uh, it kind of got worse. ‘Cause I guess they’d wanted to do something that he told them not to do, and then he wasn’t there, so… They did it.”

Opening one eye to check Shouko’s reaction, Izumi sees her nodding again, though she looks more concerned than before. This was okay. Izumi could do this. Inhaling, she continues. “Um, they grabbed me during cleaning duty after school, a-and… I didn’t have my Quirk then- uh, it hadn’t developed, rather- and I wasn’t in shape at that point either, s-so they just… Dragged me to the bathroom?”

She opens her eye again, feeling her heart start racing, and Shouko is starting to look very worried. Her own eyes are widening, plate off her lap and set on the ground, and her lips are pursed. “Izumi… Did they…”

“Yeah.” The word for what happened wasn’t spoken aloud- it couldn’t be- but it lived in their minds, harsh and real. Izumi knew exactly what Shouko was asking. “Not a-all the way, um. But they… It was enough. They mentioned they chose me because I couldn’t fight back, n-not when they had Quirks and I didn’t. Now when people grab me by the shoulders or say things like M-Mineta did back when we were changing… For a minute, it feels like it’s happening again. I never told anyone- well, until now. I was... Humiliated. To have been treated like some toy and discarded in a bathroom. I couldn’t say a thing for years.”

There’s silence for a minute, and Izumi keeps her eyes squeezed shut. Shame slowly started crawling over her, touching kissing licking over her skin and through her bones. Was Shouko going to judge her, find her weak? What if she’d accidentally ruined everything, said too much, revealed the helpless child she used to be before she was blessed with a power? What if-

Shouko placed a hand on the back of Izumi’s head, another at the middle of her spine, and pulled her in to cradle her head against her chest.

“You’ve been through something painful, too.” Shouko’s voice is so much gentler than her usual mature tone, and Izumi’s eyes blink open in shock as she’s held by firm arms. The bicoloured girl was on her knees as opposed to the other student’s seiza position, emphasizing their height difference. “I’m sorry, Izumi. Thank you for trusting me enough to tell me.”

It took her a moment to realize what exactly was going on. Shouko… Was comforting her. No judgement in her tone, just a softness Izumi rarely got to see in the one who still seemed as if she was still learning to open up. The girl continued, her shirt fabric tickling Izumi’s nose as the loose peasant top fluttered in the breeze. “I don’t understand the exact pain, but I know how it is to be used and puppeteered without your consent. To have other people think they had the right to lay their hands on you and make you twist and turn in the way they wanted. Of course she would. Izumi hadn’t even realized it…”
until now, realized why Shouko’s story had reached her so deeply. Before she knew it, her arms were wrapped around the girl, a gentle touch that went against both their lived experiences with the hands of others. “S-Shouko…”

Her voice came out weak and cracking as tears bubbled at the corners of her eyes, and Shouko made a soft shushing noise. “You don’t have to talk more if you aren’t ready. You’re brave for saying what you did.”

_Brave._ With that, the floodgates finally opened. Izumi broke down, tears streaming down her face and staining the salmon coloured fabric of Shouko’s shirt as she let herself mourn for all that had been unfairly taken from her for the first time. Her friend just held her, remaining the quiet witness to the miserable, angry cries that warbled out and were muffled by the fabric. “I-I-It wasn’t f-fair…!”

“Not at all. It was completely unfair.” Shouko took a deep breath like she was hesitating before going to pet Izumi’s hair. If anything, the gesture only hit Izumi’s heart deeper, and she tried and failed to reel in the sobs that wracked her entire body.

This went on for several minutes, the gentle petting and loud cries continuing until it seemed like Izumi had run straight out of tears. Even then, it took her time to catch her breath, pulling away from Shouko and quickly bringing an arm up to check if her embarrassing meltdown had accidentally resulted in her smearing snot on Shouko’s shirt. Thankfully not, just a whole lot of tears. “S-Sorry, I didn’t m-mean to start crying.”

“Don’t apologize for something natural.” Shouko says with conviction, and Izumi’s not sure if she’s projecting that dampness around the girl’s eyes or not. “If anything, I should be apologizing for touching you so soon after that revelation.”

“Oh, n-no!” Izumi’s nature is to be flustered over apologies, and flustered she becomes, waving her hands in front of herself quickly. “It was… Really nice, actually. Comfortable. A-And you were careful not to touch my shoulders.”

“I did keep that in mind.” Nodding, Shouko reaches up to scratch her cheek. If Izumi didn’t know better, she might think she was blushing. “… It’s also how my mother used to hold me when I was upset over my father. So I figured it might work to comfort you just like it did me.”

One victim comforting another. Izumi lets out a choked laugh, wiping at her eyes one last time. “... We’re both messes, aren’t we?”

A small smile graces Shouko’s lips. “Perhaps. But we can be messes together.”

“That doesn’t sound bad.” Smiling back, the two hold eye contact just a tad longer than usual before Izumi blinks, remembering something as her head swivels to the side. “Ah, dinner! The curry will get cold, and we may not have time for seconds if we don’t eat now and hurry back!”

As if on cue, her stomach growls. She feels herself turn tomato red as Shouko stifles a chuckle. “I agree with you. Let’s get to eating.”

And so, under the shade of the trees and behind the bushes, two girls ate their dinner in peace.

Things would not have been nearly as peaceful if they saw the way Ochako Uraraka had run away in an ashamed panic, two plates of curry dropped on the ground, head ringing with the sound of a story she knew she should not have overheard.

The rest of the evening had been peaceful. Well, ‘peaceful’ was perhaps a relative term. Shouko had her first remedial course that night (and had almost strangled the irritating blonde boy- Monoma or
whatever, she couldn’t bring herself to care enough to learn his name—more than once during it), and had gone back exhausted, but otherwise there hadn’t been much of note. The next morning was hard, but at least they got to choose their own seats during lunch. Hagakure seemed to have taken a liking to Shouko since their earlier conversation and shared remedial class, and while the bicoloured girl had absolutely nothing against the invisible student, her energy got exhausting sometimes. Instead, she settled in next to Izumi, Tenya flanking her other side. For some reason, Ochako hadn’t taken up her usual seat next to Izumi, instead giving it to Tsuyu and sitting beside Tenya. Shouko found that a little odd, and paired with her downcast face and the way she picked at the white rice she’d usually be devouring, it spurred her to speak up. “Ochako? Is everything alright?”

“H-Huh?! The brunnette looked up from her bowl with shock written all over her face. “Um, yeah! I’m fine! Perfectly okay! I just, uh, still have some nausea from today’s Quirk training? Hah…”

…Hm. Suspicious. Even so, Shouko just shrugged, willing to accept it if it meant she at least got to eat her lunch before going back to her own exhausting training. “If you say so.” At that point, Tsuyu had started up a conversation about some training she’d done with Ojiro, and Shouko had allowed her attention to shift to that as she munched on her kitsune soba (nowhere near as good as zaru soba, but it got the job done).

The evening was when the real fun was set to begin— a test of courage. Back in middle school, several of her classmates reported sneaking into the abandoned shrine half an hour from her home over the summer, but that was the closest experience Shouko had with actually participating in one. Now, it was announced it would be a battle of the classes—Class B going in first to set up their scare tactics while Class A would be sent in paired up to face whatever the others could cook up. Of course, with the other remedials being pulled away (much to Aoyama and Hagakure’s sadness and Bakugou’s lack of any reaction) and the recent expulsion, that meant they’d have an even number of students heading in the forest. Shouko had her fingers crossed for Izumi as Pixie Bob started drawing lots and the order in which team would go in first.

Her name popped up third, Pixie Bob looking out with all the pizzaz carried by the flashiest of all the Pussycats. “Aaaaand up third, Shouko Todoroki and Ochako Uraraka!”

Shouko found herself mildly disappointed that she wasn’t with Izumi once again, but at least she was actually Ochako’s friend. As the other girl approached her with a skip in her step that seemed somewhat unnatural, Shouko gave her a nod. “Ochako. Looks as if we’re a pair.”

“Yes! Just you and me!” Her smile almost seemed lopsided. Was she afraid of things like this? Hm. Well, Shouko would just have to make sure she didn’t get too frightened during the experience, then. It was then that Izumi’s name popped up—Pixie Bob calling out that she was paired with Ashido. Ah, well. At least the two of them got along.

The duo patiently waited for their turn as the groups ahead of them were sent in, five minute intervals between them to ensure nobody caught up to anyone ahead of them. Tsuyu and Jirou were first, both of them cool as a cucumber. As expected of the two. Kaminari and Momo went second, and even though the boy seemed dead set on reassuring the girl that ‘don’t worry, it’ll be fine!’, he was all but shaking in his boots. Next came Shouko and Ochako, both girls venturing off into the forest with a call of ‘good luck!’ from Izumi behind them.

1-B, for their part, had done a pretty good job setting up their scares. Shouko only flinched once or twice, but Ochako was yelping left and right, head on a swivel as she looked for the next student ready to frighten them. Shouko offered out a hand. “Here, hold on.”

“T-Thanks, Shouko.” Gulping, Ochako held on, squeezing tight. “You’re a g-good friend, you know that?”
She didn’t always, not really. Shouko was nothing like Izumi, nothing like Ochako, nothing like Tenya or Tsuyu. But in any case, it was nice to hear. “Thank you."

“Yeah, like… The type of friend you could confide in, right?” Something Shouko had noticed over time was that Ochako had one of the exact same habits as Fuyumi- namely, she rambled when she was frightened. A rustling in the bush nearby made the brunette girl jump, bumping Shouko. “S-Sorry! Sorry, I just… Heard something. I hear lots of things, hah…!"

Well, that sounded strange. As Shouko caught Ochako as she screamed over a girl popping out of the ground, leaping into the bicoloured student’s arms, she mused over what she was getting at there. “What do you mean? You’re hearing things right now?”

Something smelt funny- almost pungent, reminding Shouko of the horseradish Natsuo put on his breakfast wrap each morning when she slept over. She ignored it for now, focusing on the girl currently embarrassedly crawling down from her arms and hurrying ahead. “N-Nothing! Nothing at all! I just- I’m nervous.”

“I can tell.” The smell was getting stronger. Shouko found her nose wrinkling subconsciously. What on earth was that? “Do any of the Class 1-B students have a scent Quirk?”

That seemed to distract Ochako from her fear, at least momentarily. “Uh, I’m not really sure. Maybe? I only really know-”

Suddenly, a girl came stumbling out of the bushes. Ochako yelped, but… Nothing frightening happened. The girl- a blonde with long horns and a somewhat snoutlike nose- fell to the ground, helplessly looking up at the two of them. “H-Help…!"

“... Are you supposed to be a zombie or something?” Shouko cocked her head. There was blood dripping down her forehead and what looked like a cut on one arm. Maybe someone had SFX makeup on them? Was that allowed in the test?

The girl coughed, frantically army crawling in their direction and wincing as weight was put on one of her hooved legs. “No, not- I don’t speak Japanese good yet, I- trouble for real!”

Ochako grabbed Shouko’s arm, holding on tight. “Wait, are you joking? Or is something actually-”

They were interrupted by someone else leaping from the bushes- another blonde, this one with messy hair in twin buns and a school uniform that was distinctly not UA’s. The horned girl screamed, and was matched in pitch by Ochako as the newcomer leapt onto the 1-B girl’s back, jamming what looked like a syringe into her shoulderblade. “God, stop running away, would you? I just want some blo- Oh! You two again!”

… That was too real to be some kind of prank. And more importantly, that girl wasn’t a student. Without thinking, Shouko sent off a flame intended on pushing the girl back without harming the horned student on the floor. “Get off of h- gyah!”

Though she’d forced the girl back a few steps, for some reason, Shouko found herself dazed as the scent around her became much more potent. It was almost sulfurous now, and the invader (?) laughed as Shouko burst into a coughing fit, Ochako holding her other hand in concern. “Hahaha, it’s mustard gas, silly! Fire makes it wooooorse!”

“M-Mustard gas? Who are you?!?” Ochako cried, throwing herself in front of Shouko as she hacked, something noxious invading her lungs.

The other girl took a large bow, walking back towards the injured 1-B girl who was attempting to
crawl away. “Himiko Toga! We’ve met, you two, but I don’t think you’d remember. Ochako and Shouko, you’re just as cute as when I last saw you! Shame Shouko’s less bruised up, but no problem!”

Shouko had no time to try and process what the hell she was talking about. Recovering from her fit, she held one hand over her mouth and glared her down. “Ochako, move! I’ll restrain her with ice!”

“Not if I can help it!” With a giggle, Toga knelt down to grab the horned girl, the students all gasping in sync as she held a knife to her neck. “If either of you use your Quirks, I’ll slit this cute girl’s throat! What’s your name again? Pony Tsunotori, right? I didn’t really check 1-B’s files so much, ehehe.”

A hostage situation in a cloud of mustard gas… Shouko gritted her teeth, fists clenched. She was at least seven feet from Tsunotori (if that was her name) and Toga. Even if she casted her fastest ice, she could have that blade across her throat before it reached her. Ochako was a close-range fighter, no good like this. The only choice she had was to listen to Toga. “... What do I need to do to get you to let her go?”

“Glad we’re on the same page!” Toga smiled, revealing fangs like a vampire. She rustled around in her cardigan pocket for something. “Now, Shouko, all I need from you…”

After a moment of shuffling, she pulled out a syringe-like weapon attached to a long, semi-translucent tube.

“... Is to donate a little bit of blood.”

Izumi had come into the forest expecting to be scared, but not quite like this.

Several frantic 1-B students had rushed towards them about fifteen minutes after they’d entered the forest, one carrying an unconscious boy in her arms, and explained in a terrified rush that there were villains attacking. Villains! So far, all they knew was that there was some sort of gas in the air that made the boy (named Kuroiro, if their frightened ramblings were to be believed) pass out, and that someone named Rin had been separated from the rest of them when a blue fire blew through the forest.

Izumi’s heart had dropped. Someone was stuck in the fire? Ashido spoke up, the pink girl equally as frantic. “I-I can create an acid that neutralizes some flame, but not enough for a full forest fire…! But maybe I can come help him escape?”

“Yes!” One of the students, a terrified looking boy with a bandana, quickly motioned for her to come. “We need to get him out of there and away from the villains! Tokage, can you and the other girl take Kuroiro back to base camp?”

“Wh- Fine, but you’d better hurry back, Awase! Be safe!” The girl- Tokage?- motioned at Izumi who quickly jumped into action, taking hold of Kuroiro’s legs and moving in sync with the 1-B student to get the unconscious boy out of the forest. Her thoughts were a swirling, panicked mess- what were villains doing here? How did they find them after everything the teachers had done to keep this trip a secret? Izumi didn’t know, but all she could do was hope everyone was getting to safety. Her brain ran through a list of everyone and where they might be right now. The groups ahead of her were in the most danger (groups like Shouko and Ochako, she remembered in quiet terror), but were there villains outside the forest too? What about-

Oh god.
Kota.

After opening up to Shouko, Izumi hadn’t spent long back with the rest of the class- she’d followed Kota up to his hideaway on the mountain, intent on making sure the little boy had something to eat that night. She was the only one who knew he went up there in the evenings. Oh god, on the other side of the forest… Izumi quickly threw a panicked glance at the student helping her. “T-Tokage, can you carry Kuroiro by yourself?! Kota, that little boy, he’s in serious danger out there! I need to go help him!”

“Wh- That kid? He’s in the forest?!” Tokage’s jaw fell open, revealing a mouthful of sharp teeth. “Uh, I can take Kuroiro, but you shouldn’t go running in there!”

“He’s by the mountain! If you find one of the pros, tell them that’s where I’m going! I’m sorry!” All but dropping Kuroiro in Tokage’s arms, Izumi activated One For All, fleeing right back into the forest. If Kota was on that mountain alone and afraid with a villain-!

No, no, she couldn’t think like that! She had to get there as soon as possible. Gritting her teeth, Izumi upped the percentage of her power, leaping over treetops and realizing in numbed horror that the blue flames and some peculiar gas were all but drowning out the forest. Her classmates… Were they okay?

Focus!, she reminded herself. Izumi had to keep her mind on Kota. She would help the others later, but… Even so, she sent out a quiet prayer as she rushed towards the mountainside.

Everyone, please be alright…!

_____________________________________________________

Shouta was doing some paperwork in the back of the remedial course classroom when he got the message.

It was, as most of his paperwork these days seemed to be, related to Todoroki. He’d managed to get a hold on some of Rei Todoroki’s hospital transcripts and organize them enough to show that she’d been through a mental breakdown due to immense stress (and he had no doubt as to who the source of that was). She’d burnt Todoroki, not Endeavor, and while Shouta had no doubt the man’s lawyers would use that detail to hell and back in court, he could at least try and find enough evidence that the man was a domestic abuser to explain why Rei had a meltdown at the sight of her youngest. Maybe if he could get the older siblings to testify-

And then Mandalay’s message had broken through, ringing through the minds of everyone present: Everyone, we are under attack by at least two villains! Return to base camp immediately! Do not engage!

Without missing a beat, Shouta had leapt from his seat, vaulting over the desk. Villains?! If his heart didn’t pound in terror at the idea of his students- his kids- being in danger, he would have wasted time wondering how the hell they’d been found at such a remote location. Instead, he barked for Vlad to stay with the students while he rushed outside to join in combat. Those kids weren’t authorized to fight with their Quirks, and the Pussycats were primarily rescue heroes. If he could get out there, maybe he could send Ragdoll or Mandalay back to watch the kids while Vlad joined the fight. Pulling on his goggles, Shouta slammed open the front door, eyes wildly checking the area, and-

He barely got out of the way of the villain right by the entrance, flame exploding mere millimeters from where he jumped with catlike speed atop of the building’s front awning. Hoisted by his combat weapon, Shouta bit back a hiss as he felt the blue fire under his legs. Jesus christ, that was hot. Hotter
than Todoroki’s by ten, Endeavor’s by at least five, and that meant he needed to stop that Quirk as soon as he could. Eyes shooting over to the villain, a younger man covered in scars like patchwork and done up in black, Shouta activated his Quirk, watching as the other man didn’t even attempt to use his power as he lazily grinned upwards. “Eraserhead, huh? Nice reflexes. You’d be ashes if you were a second late.”

Leaping down, Shouta drove a kick into the man’s sternum, relishing in the grunt the villain made as he tumbled to the hard ground. Flipping him over, the hero allowed his capture weapon to rise, wrapping it around the dark haired man’s legs and slamming his face into the dirt. Shouta wrenched the other man’s arm back (and for a moment, he almost became nauseous at the realization that this was the exact way the Noumu had held him at the USJ moments before waves of pain had shot through his body). “Who are you, and what are you doing here?”

“Me?” The man sounded like he was smiling, and Shouta allowed him to twist his head slightly to speak more clearly. Like he’d predicted, the villain was grinning like nothing was wrong. “Right now, I’m going by Dabi. And our goals… Are strictly confidential.”

Snap. Dabi hissed in pain as Shouta clenched his wrist and pulled. “There goes your wrist. From there, I’ll break your elbow, dislocate your arm, then snap your humerus. Don’t play with me. What are your intentions with my students?”

“So cruel, Eraserhead.” Dabi chuckled wheezily, stitches stretching. “We’re here to capture a person of interest and to kill as many of your precious little lambs as we can. But hey, you shouldn’t be too worried about that. It’s not like you really care about them past your paycheck getting cut if we off too many of the brats, anyways.”

Given his profession, Shouta is very good at ignoring when villains try and get under his skin. But for some reason, the disgust in Dabi’s voice… Shouta thinks back to the USJ, his only thoughts being prayers to a god that he didn’t believe in that his students survived, pleas to trade his life for theirs. He thinks about pretending to sleep in the corner and watching their antics with a small smile buried under his capture weapon. He thinks of the nights spent sleepless as he poured over Todoroki and Bakugou’s case files, desperately searching for the best way to get them the hell out of their houses. Shouta bares his teeth, and twists Dabi’s elbow until the man is gasping. “You don’t understand what it means to be a teacher. My students are my children. You won’t lay a finger on my kids.”

“Touchy, huh?” Dabi wheezes, coughing for air as Shouta threatens to snap his elbow. “And a liar at that. If you care so much, what about Shouko Todoroki?”

That shocks Shouta enough that he blinks, and he curses himself internally all while counting his blessings that Dabi wasn’t trying to use his Quirk. “What the hell do you know about that girl?”

“I know everything. Maybe more than you.” Dabi’s smile grows, scars stretching until blood drips down from his lips. “She’s still living at home, isn’t she? Why haven’t you got her out if you care so much?”

“The situation is none of your bu-”

“It’s all of my business.” Anger flashes over bright blue eyes that are unsettling in a way Shouta can’t put his finger on. “Fakes like you… I’ve done more for that girl than you ever will. Heroes preach about saving, being symbols of peace and strength, all while children suffer and die under them.”

Shouta tightens his hold on Dabi’s arm. “What the hell do you mean you’ve done more for her?”
“Check the news if you survive tonight.” The other man grins even wider, and Shouta can’t help but cringe as a stitch snaps, more blood splattering out. “See what happened to that little fiancée of hers. Oh, Eraserhead, a fake through and through. And yet, you’ve deceived yourself into thinking you really do care about these children. I wonder... Can you save even one of them?”

Dabi laughs, almost sounding hysterical, and one of Shouta’s knees goes straight through his back. All he can do is watch in shock as the man melts into thick slime in front of him, leaving behind nothing but a goop-soaked capture weapon and dread in Shouta’s heart. What... What the hell was that? How did this villain know about such a highly confidential case? Why did he care so much about one girl when he’d just expressed a desire to kill his students?

How deep did the Todoroki family’s pain run? What had Shouta gotten himself into?

No time to think about that. There’s yelling by the forest, and Shouta whips his head up to see several of his students and a few Class 1-B kids running at him frantically. Quick, head count: Koda, Satou, Shoji, Iida. The green haired Class 1-B girl too, holding the boy with pitch black skin in her arms. It was the girl who spoke up first, frantic and with tears bubbling in her eyes. “E-Eraserhead! That girl from your class- Midoriya- she ran off to the mountains all by herself! She said Kota was there alone!”

Oh, god. Midoriya. As if on cue, there’s a massive explosion, and all heads swivel to see where it’s coming from- directly from the mountainside. Shit. Shouta wants to grab his hair and scream, but he forces himself to stay calm. These are his students- they put their trust in him, and he refuses to break down until each and every one of them is safe and sound. He puts on his authoritative voice, his shield when he feels like breaking down. “Everyone, get inside with Vlad and the remedials. I’m going to go fight. Do not leave the building for any reason.”

And with that, he’s off like a horse out of the gates, rushing into the forest with his scarf at the ready and narrowly avoiding getting it tangled in the trees. Shouta cannot afford to think about what Dabi said- they were taunts, nothing more, said to throw him off. But even so... What he’d said at the end...

Can you save even one of them?

… Yes. Shouta would save every last student in the forest himself if he had to. He was a hero. If he wasn’t willing to risk his life for his children, he had no right to call himself anything even remotely close to that. For a moment, Shouta closed his eyes, inhaling deeply. His Quirk wasn’t Telepathy, it wasn’t Voice, his words could reach nobody in the inky black night within the foul, burning smoke. But even so, he spoke as if he was calling out to each of the children he swore to protect.

Everyone, do not let your stories end tonight!

Chapter End Notes

CONTENT WARNINGS BEGIN

- Semi-graphic discussion of sexual assault (this is nigh-unavoidable without skipping the entire first section)
- Canon typical violence
And so it begins! I've been waiting to get into this arc for a while, and I hope everyone's excited to see where it goes with all these changes! Apologies for how short this one was- we'll get back to normal chapter sizes soon enough.

Thank you for reading! Don't be afraid to drop a comment if you'd like, and maybe check out this fic's Discord server (https://discord.gg/pRruQ3C)! I'll see you all soon!
Hi everyone! I want to apologize upfront for what a long wait this has been. My health nosedived again, and I had a convention to prepare for (were any of you at Anime North? I went as hero suit Tsu for most of it!), so writing got pushed to the wayside. But I’m back now! Thank you again for all your comments, and I’m sorry I didn’t reply again. I need to get better at that, bleugh.

Anyways, check those content warnings in the end notes, and read on!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

How the hell was this girl so fast?!

That was the thought that rushed through Shouko’s head as she tried and failed to catch Toga as she bounded away, ice blocked off by the trees she ran into. She and Ochako had been backed into a metaphorical corner- in order to save Tsunotori’s life, they’d both rolled up their sleeves, both gasping in pain as a thrown syringe hit the crook of their elbows with dangerous precision. Looking back at it, the fact that she was missing a good pint or so of blood was probably why Shouko couldn’t focus enough to hit her. Whatever. She’d donated blood in middle school once- she could fight through this like she’d still battled through training that night. But now it was time to focus on the injured girl on the dirt path.

Ochako was already running to help, crouching beside the wounded 1-B student. “T-Tsunotori! Are you alright?”

“I’m… I’m okay.” The girl slurred her words slightly. “It’s… My shoulder and my ankle.”

Big blue eyes were blinking rapidly, her breathing sounding shallow, and Shouko grimaced. This girl was in shock. “We need to take her back to base camp.” Even as she said it, her heart was pulling her back into the forest. Izumi, Tsuyu, Tenya… Where were her friends? Were they safe? What if they were fighting a villain who wasn’t content to leap away after collecting blood for whatever purpose?

Ochako turned to look at her, biting her lip, and Shouko knew right away that the brunette’s own heart felt the same as hers. “But-”

“Uraraka! Shouko!”

Both heads swiveled to see the group running at them from the direction of the forest clearing. It was Kyoka and Sero, both wearing matching panicked faces. Kyoka had an upper arm covered in tape like bandages- no doubt from her partner. Uraraka spoke first, relief in her tone. “You two are safe!”

“‘Safe’ is kind of pushing it!” Sero’s longer legs brought him there first, the boy panting as he placed his hands on his knees. “There’s a Noumu out there! Like from the USJ!”

A Noumu… Shouko’s stomach dropped. “So this is the League’s doing…”

“We don’t have time to talk!” Kyoka sounded frantic, pupils like pinpricks. “We have to find
Yaomomo and Kaminari, they were the first group in!”

“And we’re looking for Deku and Ashido- have you seen them?” Ochako had knelt down next to Tsunotori, applying pressure to her shoulder wound like she’d been taught in their first aid classes.

Sero shook his head. “No, but we passed some 1-B girl carrying a guy who said Midoriya ran off into the forest to help someone. No idea who- she was really frantic.”

So Izumi was still in here… Shouko gulped, hands balling into fists by her sides. “Kyoka, Sero. Can you take Tsunotori here back to base camp? We’re going to find everyone.”

“We can’t!” Kyoka almost yelped. “We need to find Yaomomo and Kaminari! Weren’t you listening?”

Of course she was! Shouko grit her teeth, feeling her jaw clench in that familiar way when stress was taking over and she was fighting to hold her tongue. No, now was not the time to argue. Kyoka was scared and stressed out just like she was. She couldn’t fall back on the instinct to bark out orders and angrily refuse to compromise- she was trying to be a hero, wasn’t she? A real one, not at all like her father. Not like the one he’d shaped her into. Think; what might a true hero do? Taking a deep breath, she approached Kyoka, putting her hand on the girl’s uninjured shoulder. “Kyoka, please listen to me. You’re already hurt, aren’t you? What if you encounter that Noumu or one of the villains running through here? Ochako and I are perfectly fine, and our Quirks are more combat oriented.”

She spoke uncharacteristically softly, trying her best to channel the gentleness she saw in Izumi (like you did the other night, a voice reminds her, comforting her with her own tone). Even so, Kyoka looked conflicted. “But… Both of them…”

“We’ll bring them both back. I promise.” Shouko looked her in the eyes, blue and grey meeting deep indigo. “We need you to take Tsunotori to safety. She was attacked by a villain. Do you trust me to save Kaminari and Momo?”

Kyoka bit at her lip, seemingly unsure of how to respond, before finally exhaling. “… Okay. I trust you. But please bring them back safe. They’re both… Really important to me.”

“I promise.” Squeezing Kyoka’s shoulder, Shouko turned her head to Sero, turning on more of the authoritative tone that came naturally to her. “When you pick up Tsunotori, watch her shoulder and her ankle. She was stabbed, and something happened to her foot.”

“G-Got it.” Sero looked just as shaken, but pushed on forwards towards Tsunotori, allowing Ochako to help the quivering girl into his arms. “But are you guys gonna be okay? Mandalay said to head right back to base camp.”

“We need to get to any students still stuck in the forest.” Ochako spoke up before Shouko could, determination gilding her tone. “The pros can’t get that many people out that fast. We promise we’ll be as safe as we can.”

The other girl was clenching her fists too, courage painted over her trembling lip and shaking knees. Ochako was close with the exact same people Shouko was- of course she’d have the same need to save them. Seeing Kyoka and Sero off, the brunette turned back to Shouko, nodding. “Come on, let’s get going. We need to help!”

“Couldn’t have said it better myself. Make sure you’re covering your mouth- if this really is mustard gas, we shouldn’t be breathing it in.” Putting a sleeved arm up to cover her mouth, Shouko started
off down the path with Ochako in hot pursuit, both almost subconsciously stepping around the blood stains on the path. Was it Tsunotori? theirs?

Shouko didn’t know. She pushed it out of her mind, running deeper into the woods.

Izumi’s heart was—well, perhaps ‘racing’ was too slow a term. It was beating so fast that it might just hammer right out of her chest.

The pure shot of adrenaline she’d gotten when she’d seen that huge villain towering over a quivering, petrified Kota was just… In any case, she barely made it even with the extra burst, grabbing the boy and rolling with him as the earth where he’d just been standing was blasted to pieces. Izumi had realized, somewhat hysterically, that this was now the second time she’d barely arrived in the nick of time to save someone’s life.

Now, though, she was back on her feet, standing protectively in front of Kota as she stared down their attacker. He was huge, pure bulking muscle visible even past his cloak, and Izumi felt her blood chill as he examined her in the way a curious child might look over an ant before it crushed it. “My, my, a little girl playing hero? You got pretty lucky, kid.”

“K-Kota, run! Get out of here!” Izumi yelled, standing up and facing the villain with a snarl that she hoped hid her terror. “Who are you?!”

“Little old me?” The man chuckled. “Call me Muscular. No need for introductions on your part, Izumi Midoriya. Shigaraki’s description was spot on— you really are the runt of the litter, ain’tcha?”

Description…? Izumi gulped, fists clenching as she stanced up. Even as she tried to make herself look bigger, sound scarier, she knew her knees were shaking. “I—Why did he give you a description of me?!?”

“Oh, you didn’t know?” Half of Muscular’s face was visible under the cloak’s shadow, and his lips curled into a cruel grin. “Well, I don’t see any point in explaining why I knew who you were right now.”

Gritting her teeth, Izumi raised her fists a bit higher, night wind blowing her hair back. “W—Why not?”

Muscular chuckled like they were a pair of friends sharing a joke. “Well, little lady, that’s because you’re about to be dead where you stand.”

His casual tone and his words… Something primal in Izumi’s stomach screamed to run, get the hell out of here! Every part of her knew she needed to flee, but… No, Kota was still here, standing in her peripherals and frozen in terror. Even if she did grab him and run, wouldn’t that mean Muscular would just go and attack someone else? She had to stop him here. No matter how afraid she got, Izumi couldn’t let him past her.

Steeling herself, she managed to keep the terror off her face as she powered up One For All, veins glowing green as the energy of her Quirk surged over her skin. “Not if I have anything to say about it!”

With a leap and a scream, Izumi jumped forwards.

Momo panted, lungs pumping as she tried to keep her breath steady through the panic, the gas that had already entered her lungs before she’d made a filtering mask, and the strain of lugging two
people along.

By the time Mandalay’s message had made it through her head, the smaller-than-herself Kaminari had already stumbled to the ground. Momo herself had been suspiciously choked up as she’d knelt to try and help him, and by the time the gas had become visible… Well, she was goddamn lucky she’d had enough time conscious to make herself a gas mask before collapsing unconscious just like her partner had. Once her head had cleared, she’d quickly made one for Kaminari, but the boy was already out like a light, little mumbles and groans the only hint of consciousness left in him.

Momo didn’t know exactly what the gas filling the forest was, but judging by the itching of her skin, the pain in her throat, and the way her eyes watered even with the eye protection… It was probably mustard gas. She tried to push the images she’d seen in history books of blistered, bandaged victims aside as she moved. Momo wasn’t just pulling Kaminari- Kinoko Komori from the other class was tucked under her other arm, the girl also unconscious and donning a mask courtesy of Creation. Momo had been forced to leave her equally unresponsive partner, Jurota Shishida, hidden beneath a bush- she just couldn’t carry someone his size, especially not as she was forced to lug Kaminari along. She’d put a mask on him and prayed whatever villain was invading wouldn’t find him amidst the underbrush. At least she’d bumped into a small group of Class B students- she was able to point Kendo and Tetsutetsu in the right direction after giving them gas masks.

This had all happened so fast- what was going on? Where were her classmates? Was everyone safe? Where was Kyoka? If someone had so much as laid a finger on her best friend, so help her god-

“Yaoyorozu!”

Momo almost screamed into the mask before the owner of the voice became visible. It was Uraraka, the girl turning the corner along the path. After a moment, it became apparent Shouko was following closely behind. The bicoloured girl called out as they ran over. “Momo, are you hurt?”

Taking a moment to thank her lucky stars it was her classmates and not whoever was causing this gas, Momo shook her head. “No, I’m fine, but these two inhaled a lot of gas, and- Ah! Both of you, take a mask!”

Hardly thinking about it, she quickly produced a pair of gas masks out of her thighs. The other girls got close enough to pick them off the ground, sliding them over their heads. Shouko spoke up next, eyes sliding to the pair of students currently being held up. “Are they injured?”

“I don’t know if anything happened to Komori before I got the mask on her, but Kaminari isn’t hurt beyond whatever the gas did to him.” As if on cue, there was a low groan from the blonde boy. “Shishida is still in the woods. I just couldn’t carry him- he’s too big.”

Uraraka rubbed her arms anxiously. “You haven’t seen Deku and Ashido, have you? We’re looking for them.”

Right, they’d gone right after Kaminari and herself, hadn’t they? Momo shook her head again. “No, I’m sorry. They might have rushed into the trees if you didn’t bump into them on your way here. Have you-”

She was interrupted by an enormous booming noise. All heads whipped in the direction of the mountain, where a massive explosion seemed to have taken place. Momo’s heart dropped. What was going on up there? Mandalay’s message hadn’t said anything about a villain near the mountains! “W-What was that?”

Shouko was grimacing as she stared up at the mountainside. “Whatever it is, it can’t be good.” Her
eyes flicked back to Momo, and as level-headed as she looked… Momo could feel the desperation radiating off her. Shouko was as panicked as the rest of them. “Kyoka was looking for you. She and Sero are heading back to base camp, so they should be safe. She asked us to find you and bring you back.”

That was a weight off Momo’s shoulders. Her friend was safe, if nothing else. “Thank goodness she’s fine… But I can’t go back yet. I need to hand out as many gas masks as I can if this seriously is mustard gas.”

“We weren’t planning on going right back either.” Uraraka said. “We seriously can’t go until we make sure Deku is okay!”

Ah, right. Uraraka seemed a little more than friendly with Midoriya, and it seemed more and more like a love triangle might form judging by Shouko’s increasingly obvious crush (Kyoka had once joked about betting money on who would confess first before Momo teased her about her own inability to let a certain blonde boy know how she felt). Of course both girls would be desperately searching. “Then we should stick together. I’ll help you search for her if you’ll help me carry one of these two.”

“I’ll take one.” Shouko turned around, and after some lifting and shifting on both her and Momo’s parts, carefully held Kaminari on her back. Momo’s exhausted muscles almost sighed in relief as she was left with only Komori to carry.

She was pulled from the feeling as another explosion, this one bigger than the last, rocked the mountains again. Momo’s hair was almost blown back as wind from the impact reached her even down in the forest. Gas swirled and curved around them as all three girls stared with wide eyes at the amount of smoke billowing out from the mountain. Uraraka was the first to speak, voice hesitant and borderline fearful. “Who’s up there…?”

One downside of the masks was that expressions were hard to read through them. Though the mouthpiece covered Shouko’s lips, Momo had a feeling the other girl was biting them in anxiety. “That sort of power… Could it be Izumi?”

Midoriya did have a notoriously powerful Quirk, yes, but… Momo squinted slightly. There was some sort of action taking place after the initial explosion, but it was far too distant to see. “But why would she be up there?”

“That’s true, but…” Shouko trailed off before sighing and turning around. “You’re right, there’s no reason for her to be there. We need to get moving to find her.”

With a final, shared nod, the girls ventured deeper into the forest.

It seemed like something finally worked out for Shouta this evening.

He’d ran into Jirou and Sero (almost literally, given how fast everyone was moving) as he rushed through the woods. They’d been fleeing back to base camp as they were instructed, but according to them, Todoroki and Uraraka were staying to try and help other students. He knew they were quite literally hero students, but why couldn’t they just listen to orders and worry about themselves for once? Now he had to keep a special eye out for those two while trying to rescue everyone else- he’d drag them kicking and screaming back to base if he had to. They wouldn’t be getting themselves in any unnecessary danger on his watch. It was Shouta’s job to protect everyone- he’d taken that responsibility when he became a teacher. He wouldn’t fail them again.
But oh, if those explosions over on the mountain didn’t make his stomach drop. Didn’t that 1-B girl say Midoriya had gone up there…? His mind was frantically running through every terrible possibility, each nightmarish scenario as to what might be happening to her up there. He was so distracted in his rush that, once again, he almost bumped right into a student as she practically popped out of nowhere in front of him, stumbling in from the bushes. Suddenly, he was half a foot away from Shouko Todoroki, the girl panting as she took a knee on the dirt path. “M-Mister Aizawa?”

Well, there was one problem child. But the question he now had was in regards to her partner. He knelt down next to her, scanning her over for any obvious wounds. “Todoroki, are you hurt? Where’s Uraraka?”

“I’m fine. Uraraka and I were attacked- we got separated while running.” The girl shook her head in frustration. “I can’t find her.”

Leaning in, Shouta put a hand on her shoulder. He looked her straight in the eye, noting that she was unusually calm for someone who had just ran from a villain. “Listen to me, Todoroki. You need to get back to base camp. You of all people should know you’re not allowed to fight these villains, shouldn’t you?”

It took Todoroki a minute to respond- it was almost like she was trying to process all that. “… But everyone is in danger.”

Shouta sighed. “I don’t have time to debate this with you. I’m ordering you to return.”

He understood why she’d want to keep searching, but the girl needed to realize this was something meant for a pro, not a group of barely-trained high schoolers. Suddenly, Todoroki reached out, hand clasping around his wrist as he moved to stand up. Her hands… Were her nails always so clawlike? “That’s- I actually fell on my shoulder while I was running. It hurts.”

… A sore shoulder. What was up with Todoroki? She would never complain about something like that in this sort of situation. They were wasting time here. Holding in a sigh, Shouta reached into his utility belt, searching around for one of the ziploc bags he kept inside. “Make some ice, and I’ll give you a bag to put it in. You can hold it to the sore area until you get back to base. Vlad King will look at it for you.”

The change was subtle, but the tiny widening of the girl’s eyes… Shouta was observant enough with people. Given his careers, he had to be able to understand unspoken language when words weren’t giving him a truthful picture. And in that little shift of Todoroki’s face, he saw someone who realized they were backed into a corner. It was the only warning sign he got before the girl suddenly lunged at him, Shouta barely making it out of the way with a combat roll. As he resteded himself while trying to figure out what exactly just happened, he saw Todoroki standing a few feet away, looking at him with a pouty frown. She twirled a knife in between her fingers like you might with a pencil. “Darn. And here I was trying to hold you back just a little longer, Eraserhead.”

His first instinct was to ask Todoroki what the everloving fuck she thought she was doing, but… That playful, dangerous expression… He’d never seen anything remotely similar like that on Todoroki, even in her angriest moments. Shouta grit his teeth, standing straight up. “… You’re not Todoroki.”

“Bingo!” Her face split into a far too large grin before her skin started peeling. Right before Shouta’s eyes, Todoroki’s face started melting into a greyish goop, revealing a grinning blonde underneath. In seconds, an entirely different person stood in front of him, still wielding her knife. “Himiko Toga. Great to meet you!”
In seconds, Shouta had his capture weapon flying. The scarf wrapped around Toga’s arms, the girl squawking angrily as the knife was knocked from her hands. Wrenching her arms back, Shouta forced Toga to the ground, holding her down with a hard knee to the back. “Who are you and what are you doing here?”

The girl snorted against the ground. “I just told you, I’m Himiko Toga! And isn’t this how you pinned Dabi a while ago? Do you have a thing for binding people’s arms? Kinda kinky, Eraserhe-Gyah!”

Toga cut herself off with a shrill shriek of pain as Shouta lifted his free leg and stomped down as hard as he could on the back of her knee. Something cracked underneath his foot. “My students are in danger. I don’t have the patience to deal with you. Tell me what you’re here for.”

“Oww, mean!” Toga spoke so vibrantly even as she wheezed from the pain. “This is so not my day. I got chased by some bird demon and everything! But you shouldn’t press a girl for her secrets, y’know. It makes me want to run away!

With that, Shouta felt his knee go straight through her back. Not this Quirk again! He tried to tighten his capture weapon, but the scarf went straight through Toga’s wrists as she liquified. Laughing all the while, her voice echoed in the forest even as she remained only as a pile of goo. Cursing under his breath, Shouta got to his feet. God dammit. What the hell did they want? He needed to get to those kids more urgently than ever. Suddenly, a small voice from the side caught his attention. “Mister Aizawa?”

Turning swiftly, Shouta’s eyes fell on the voice’s owner- it was Asui, cradling a sniffling Kota in her arms. Not willing to fall for the same trick twice, the dark haired man swiftly flashed his Quirk at the frog-like girl, who merely blinked in confusion. No, if Erasure didn’t do anything, this had to be the real girl. “Asui, are you or Kota injured? And why is he out here?”

“We’re both alright, ribbit.” Asui said as Kota clung to her tighter. “He was on the mountainside when the attack started. Izumi saved him from a villain. I ran into both of them after the fire separated me from Kirishima, and she asked me to take Kota back to base camp while she went to help others escape.”

God dammit. Someone else being a hero too soon. And that fuss on the mountain… “.What state was Midoriya in?”

Asui’s big eyes crinkled anxiously. “She was really badly beat up. Both her arms looked broken, ribbit.”

So she’d used her Quirk to fight. Did nobody learn anything from Hosu? Shouta sighed. “I didn’t want to do this, but I don’t think I have a choice anymore. Asui, I need you and Kota to find Mandalay on your way back and tell her something…”

Izumi was running on pure adrenaline, and she knew it. Her arms were completely useless, flapping behind her as she sprinted through the forest, and her nose was broken to the point that she knew it would never be fully straightened again. She’d beaten Muscular, saved Kota, but at the cost of her own body. If she stopped for even a minute, she knew the pain would hit her all at once with the force of a freight train.

But Izumi couldn’t stop. Couldn’t let that happen, couldn’t let her mind calm down as it tried to process that she was very nearly crashed to death ten minutes ago, couldn’t risk not finding the others. Non-stop. It was then that she heard the announcement through her head, Mandalay’s Quirk
All UA students, in the name of Pro Hero Eraserhead, you are authorized for combat! You may use your Quirks to defend yourself and others! Escaping the forest remains your top priority- return to base camp immediately!

She hadn’t even considered how many rules she was breaking by fighting Muscular like that. Not that Izumi would have hesitated even if she had remembered. Seeing Kota right there, frozen in terror as that monster raised his hands…

Maybe after everything with Shouko, she’d developed a bit of a rage response to someone so huge and overwhelmingly powerful thinking they had the right to lay a finger on a child.

Shouko. Where was she? Where were Ochako and Tenya? She’d seen Tsu, thank god, but where was everyone else? Finding them and making sure they were safe was her top priority. Izumi was so pumped full of adrenaline, powered solely by the terror that her friends might be in danger, that it took her a minute to process that someone was grabbing her by the back of her sports bra (the only part of her top that hadn’t been destroyed during the fight) and yanking her backwards. Once it hit her, she opened her mouth to scream until a hand slapped over it. “Midoriya, don’t! It’s just me!”

“Wh- Kirishima?!” Her voice was still panicked, but the hand over her mouth muffled most of the noise. As it was removed, Izumi swivelled her head to find that her initial guess was right- Kirishima had pulled her behind a tree just off the path.

“You can’t be loud, it’s- dude, what happened to you?” Kirishima’s eyes widened in fear as he looked Izumi over, taking in rapidly blackening bruises and hideously bent arms.

Izumi wheezed, shaking her head. “Villain. I won. Why… Why did you pull me here?”

Crouching down, Kirishima made a motion for Izumi to follow his lead, which she did. “Because you were about to walk right into Tokoyami.”

“Tokoyami…? What about him?”

The redhead grimaced. “Tsu was my partner originally, but we got separated in the fire. I guess Tokoyami was in the same boat when I found him. We tried to escape together with this Class B girl- the blonde one with the horns- but then this crazy girl with a knife jumped out of nowhere and stabbed her.”

A knife?! “I-Is that the same villain that caused that gunshot noise earlier…?”

Kirishima shook his head. “I have no idea. But when Tokoyami saw her get stabbed, I think the stress was just too much, and… You’re about to see.”

There was a rustling down the pathway. Turning to look while staying hidden behind the tree, Izumi’s bruised eyes widened in horror as she saw the black mass making its way through the forest. Dark Shadow, bigger than he’d ever been, was roaring in between animalistic grunts. Purple and black intersected in a writhing flurry of chains, looped and twisted as they caged something small at the center. Something familiar.

“In the center… That can’t be…”

“It’s Tokoyami.” Kirishima whispered grimly. The boy was thrashing helplessly as his Quirk overtook him, screaming whenever his beak wasn’t covered by the monster.

Izumi remembered the Sports Festival- she knew from Tokoyami’s own words that Dark Shadow was both stronger and harder to control at night, and had a whole page dedicated to the strange Quirk
in her notebook. Her current theory was that the beast had a bit of a mind of its own, judging by how it became enraged against Tokoyami’s will when Shinsou trash-talked him during the Sports Festival. And if those two things were true… “Oh my god. Dark Shadow overtook him.”

The redhead lowered his voice as the flailing mass grew closer. “He lost it. I don’t think he can reel it back in alone. Everything in its path is in danger.”

From all her days prowling the internet to satisfy her thirst for anything Quirk-related, Izumi remembered the small but vocal number of people who truly did believe Quirks were some angry god’s punishment on a disobedient mankind. She couldn’t believe in such a crackpot theory any less normally, but this sort of rage against the wielder… She at least understood why some people felt their powers were a curse. “H-He’s weak against light… But neither of our Quirks can provide that.”

Izumi wracked her brain for any solution. She didn’t even have her phone with her as a flashlight- it had been broken almost instantly during her fight with Muscular. So much for that expensive reinforced case. Her brain was still swirling (she wondered how bad her inevitable concussion was right now), ideas floating through aimlessly. Steadying her shaking body by grabbing onto Kirishima as she almost keeled over in her kneeling position, Izumi kept her eyes trailed on the shadowy beast. “I… I can lead him away from you. I’ll run deeper into the forest towards the fire.”

It was a terrible plan, one that was self-sacrificial at best, and Kirishima looked at her like she’d just grown a second head. “Dude. You literally look like you got run over by a truck. I can’t let you do that.”

“But- It’s-” Izumi tried to come up with a justification as Kirishima continued to stare at her. After more sputtering, she finally gave up, shoulders slumping in a way that would have sent lines of pain through both arms had she not been too dosed up on adrenaline to notice. “... We can’t just leave him. Even if our Quirks can’t make it, we need to find-”

A loud shifting noise from deeper into the woods caught her attention. Both their heads swivelled to the sound just as a faint, icy breeze brushed their hair back. Even from their position hidden behind the trees, it was instantly obvious- a glacier had risen fair over the treetops, a familiar pattern of smaller ice fixtures quickly following in a line. Izumi’s heart jumped- Shouko. She was still in the forest, but she was fighting back. Kirishima was the first to turn, hopeful smile visible on his face even in the dim evening. “... Light?”

Izumi returned it. “Light.”

Shouko, for multiple reasons, was reconsidering this whole training camp thing.

One of those reasons was that she was currently facing down a straightjacket-wearing villain with teeth that just didn’t quit on their quest to impale her entire group. She was facing off against him with Momo, the girl holding a newly-created shield and baton combo to block attacks and break each tooth dagger that got a little too close for comfort. The ponytailed girl whipped her head around to face Shouko after cracking down another tooth. “Can you make some distractions!? I can make a larger weapon with some extra time!”

“I’m trying!” Shouko hits the villain with another wave of ice, knowing full well it won’t hold him back for long enough. His Quirk let him break through her ice with ease, and even though the gas in the forest was (curiously enough) starting to dissipate, she still needed to be careful with her fire until it was completely gone. There was a limit to how much gas these masks could filter, and the last thing their group needed was to be knocked unconscious next to a villain. Besides, they were in a forest- she could easily make things worse by accidentally lighting a tree ablaze and worsening the
forest fire.

The villain made a groaning noise as silver blades tore through the ice wall. From behind them, Ochako made a wheezing noise. “Does he have any weak spots?!” Given her Quirk’s nature as a close-combat ability, the brunette girl was mainly stuck carrying the two unconscious students and dodging each tooth-blade that got too close. Judging by her occasional shrieks, she was only just barely able to dodge given the extra weight she had to lug around. This was unsustainable.

Shouko shot off another wall, trying to make some distance. They weren’t going to last long against a villain that she couldn’t counter unless she bought Momo some time—something Shouko wasn’t sure she’d be able to do. “Dammit…”

There was a low rumbling from behind, something Shouko ignored until she heard Ochako gasp. “What is that…?!”

All heads turned to face the rapidly rising noise, eyes widening as the source became apparent. The rumbling turned into a shrieking growl as a large, howling black beast barrelled down on their group. Trees cracked and the ground shook beneath their feet as the gargantuan form rapidly approached, but what Shouko noticed first was a flash of red and green running from it. Kirishima was bolting towards their group, wincing as a black tendril hit his back (is his Quirk protecting him?, Shouko wondered) but gritting his sharp teeth and refusing to stop running. Cradled in his arms like a bride was none other than Izumi, who was staring down their group with panic in her eyes while she screamed into the night. “Shouko! We need light now!”

Screw the gas, this issue seemed slightly more pressing. Raising her left arm and preparing to set off a burst of flame, Shouko yelped as she was suddenly tackled forwards and directly into Ochako by Momo, barely saving her from being impaled by a sharp tooth that soared over their heads while they all fell to the ground. She hadn’t seen it in her blind spot. “Momo-!?”

“Let it run over us and into the villain first!” Momo yelled, the twinkling noise of Creation being followed by the sound of fabric tearing as a large sheet of metal shot out of her back. Jamming one end into the ground so that it functioned as a lean-to shelter, Momo pressed her back against it and swivelled her head to face Shouko and Ochako, both of whom were still getting their bearings. She was panting, and her eyes were wild, but there was authority in her voice as she shouted out. “Brace against it with me!”

Now wasn’t really the time to argue. Scrambling to ensure Kaminari and Komori were both covered enough, Ochako jumped over to hold it in place, Shouko following right after as she pressed her back against the cool metal. Seconds later, they were joined by Izumi as Kirishima clumsily tossed the yelling girl over the barrier, sliding behind the protective sheet himself just as Izumi seemed to get over the shock of being thrown. Almost instantly, there was a force so great against the barrier that it nearly flattened all three human supports. Gritting her teeth as the sky above them was replaced with the inky blackness as the monster swirled above and around, Shouko pushed back with all her might to keep the barrier up as the other supports did the same. Kirishima scrambled to join them, relieving Shouko of some of the force and giving her a second to look up at the screaming storm surrounding them. It really was just like those videos she’d seen of waves curling over surfers, a tube of pure blackness. She didn’t have long to admire the strange beauty of it all—there was a roar and a garbled screech as the beast crashed directly into the unguarded villain, swallowing him up in an instant.

It’s not like there was any time to cheer over their victory either, though. Momo scrambled to pull something from her leg as Creation’s signature sound started up again, looking over at Shouko as the newly made item became visible—a flare gun. “Now, light!”

Once again, no reason to argue. Trusting Ochako and Kirishima to hold the barrier for a second,
Shouko removed her left arm, feeling the heat rise through her body as she summoned a pillar of fire that broke through the darkness overtaking them. At the same time, Momo covered one ear with her free hand and shot the flare gun with the other, flashing through the sky with a bang. The inky blackness sputtered, and as Shouko let her fire grow while Momo shot another flare out, they managed to reel it in, starry night sky peeking through until it was fully visible. The entire group took a moment to catch their breath, Ochako and Kirishima slumping down in synch and letting the makeshift barrier tumble to the ground. They stayed there for a second, close enough that they were almost piled up on each other, all letting their pounding hearts calm down. Ochako was the first to speak, sounding both exhausted and in awe. “You’re something else, you know that, Yaoyorozu?”

Momo’s pinkening cheeks were visible even in the dark night, and she managed a tired giggle. “Ah, that’s-! Thank you, Uraraka.”

“Tell me about it.” Kirishima nodded before his head perked up, almost like he was remembering something. “Tokoyami!”

“What about him?” Shouko cocked her head as the red haired boy stumbled to his feet, rushing a few feet ahead. The back of his shirt was basically destroyed, and even though Hardening had protected him from whatever the hell that was, Shouko could see the redness that would no doubt soon be followed by some nightmarish bruising.

Izumi looked like she was trying to lurch to her feet, and Shouko’s stomach lurched as she saw the deep purple of her arms, noticed the way they didn’t seem to be bending properly. The green haired girl didn’t even seem like she cared as she spoke. “That thing—That was Tokoyami. His Quirk gets out of control in the darkness, and- and he- He turned into that when he saw someone get hurt.”

That monster was just Tokoyami’s Quirk?! Shouko could see the similarities between Dark Shadow and the thing that nearly swallowed them up, but… Well, she’d ponder over that later. Their redhaired friend was speaking up. “He’s okay! Over here, guys!” Kirishima waved them over to where he was kneeling over something. Noticing Ochako already helping Izumi stand, she instead followed Momo, their temporary shield abandoned on the ground.

As their group approached, the shape took form, revealing a coughing Tokoyami sitting in seiza while Kirishima rubbed his back. His gaze slowly turned towards the incoming girls, eyes full of shame. “I’m… I’m so sorry.”

“It wasn’t your fault, Tokoyami.” Izumi offered him a small smile, eyes crinkling. “I heard the story of how it happened. Are you okay?”

His eyes flicked to the ground. “I myself am unhurt, but… Are all of you?”

“We’re totally fine!” Kirishima beamed in that way that reminded Shouko of a friendly dog. “Thanks for taking out the villain for us!”

Everyone spared a moment to glance at the groaning villain leaned against a nearby tree trunk. Yeah, he wasn’t getting up any time soon. Tokoyami swallowed deeply. “I’m just glad it wasn’t any of you.”

Smiling, Kirishima stood, offering Tokoyami a hand up. “Don’t worry about it, dude. Why don’t we all head back now? I think we’ve all had enough of these woods for one day.”

Shouko could agree with that sentiment. Before she could open her mouth to share that thought, though, Izumi cut in. “Wait, not yet! I found you two, but I don’t know where Tenya is, and Ashido’s probably still out there! We got separated!”
Momo looked the girl over, mildly stunned. “... Midoriya, you really aren’t in any state to stay here and search.”

“I have to!” She cried out, not seeming to notice the way everyone winced seeing her broken, flopping arms. “I need to make sure they’re both okay.”

Putting a hand on her friend’s shoulder (carefully avoiding the bruised bits, something easy to do given that her tee shirt was basically just scraps at this point), Shouko tried to reason with Izumi. “You’re hurt. I’m sure they both went back to base camp, anyways.”

The other girl shook her head furiously, green hair bouncing around. “I’m staying in the forest until I know for a fact everyone is safe. I’ll do it by myself if I have to!”

Biting her lip, Momo tried again. “Just listen—”

“Yaoyorozu, please!”

Izumi and her stubborn heart. It was one of the reasons Shouko liked her so much while also being a point of worry for her. She was clearly running purely on adrenaline at this point, and wouldn’t be taking no for an answer. After a tense moment of silence, Shouko gave in. “Fine. I’ll come with you, but only to make sure you don’t get in more danger.”

Ochako waved an arm frantically. “Me too! You’re being really reckless, Izumi, but… We’re friends! I’m helping!”

Kirishima chuckled. “You’ve all got some seriously manly spirits! I’ll come if Midoriya ain’t gonna back down either.”

Coughing to draw in attention, Tokoyami cast his eyes to the ground. “If I’m being honest... I feel like I’m too much of a liability out at night. What if that happens again? I’m sorry, but I’d be putting you in danger coming. Not to mention it, er, simply isn’t a good plan.”

Well, he certainly wasn’t wrong. Making a sighing noise, Momo rubbed her temples. “… I’m taking Tokoyami and the two unconscious students back to base camp. I know I can’t stop you, but I can make you a little safer.” The ponytailed girl reached down to her newly-glowing thighs, pulling out a long roll of bandages and a few wooden splints. “Let’s at least fix your arms up a bit.”

It took a few minutes and resulted in a lot of cringing on Izumi’s part, but those mandatory first aid classes turned out to be useful in building a proper splint. Soon, both the green-haired girl’s arms were properly braced and ready to go. “Thank you, Yaoyorozu.”

“Thank me when you’re back. Be safe, Midoriya.” Thinking about it for a second, Momo unclipped the bright orange flare gun she’d used against the rampaging Dark Shadow, pressing it into Ochako’s hands. “There’s one flare left in this. Shoot this straight into the sky once you find everyone you’re looking for. I’ll make one for myself, and fire it off if everyone else is safe at base camp so you don’t keep looking for people who are already safe. This isn’t a toy- don’t ever point it at a person.”

Ochako looked mildly intimidated, but followed Momo’s instructions to clip it onto the belt loop of her jean shorts. Once that was finished, it was Shouko who spoke up next. “So are we going?” This still wasn’t a plan she was fully comfortable with, but she wanted to at least be by Izumi’s side during it to keep her safe.

“Yeah, we shouldn’t waste time. Let’s go find the others!” With a sudden burst of energy, Izumi took off back down the forest path, Kirishima, Shouko and Ochako blinking in surprise as they followed her. They couldn’t stop her when she was in this determined state.
Shouko clenched her jaw and kept running. She’d just have to protect her.

Chapter End Notes

CONTENT WARNINGS

- Canon-typical violence
- Syringe usages

CONTENT WARNINGS END. SPOILERS BEGIN.

Ochako, but with a Gun.

For real though, thank you so much for reading! I know we aren’t at the forest camp climax yet, but this would have been a really long chapter if I tried squeezing it in. Leave a comment or kudos if you enjoyed, and I hope to see you all soon!
**i am ready to follow you even though i don't know where**

Chapter Notes

Ohohoho, time for Suffering.

I actually have nothing to say except that you should check out those content warnings if you're worried! Please enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Katsuki remembers wishing there’d be some kind of excitement to spruce up these dull-as-hell remedial courses. He’s starting to regret that wish as the classroom falls into chaos.

Desks have been pushed aside haphazardly to make room for the unconscious students, all of them laid down in the center. Some had gas masks (courtesy of Ponytail, apparently), some didn’t. The latter group looked much worse for wear, troublingly reddened skin and some blisters visible just beyond sleeves and pant legs. Glasses, Tape Elbows, Floating Uniform and that shark-tooth chick from 1-B were in charge of delivering eye drops and dampening faces with wet washcloths, all of them frantically rushing around to tend to the unluckiest bastards despite Vlad King’s repeated instructions to calm the hell down (though he’d said it a lot more politely than that). Frog and some other 1-B kid that looked like some kind of fanged grasshopper were taking care of that blonde with horns in the corner of the room, the girl looking pale and mumbling to herself as the students tried to wrap up stab wounds and keep her conscious. Most everyone else was huddled in smaller groups around the room, some in tears, some just deathly quiet. He wanted to turn down his hearing aids to silence out the cries, but… Whatever. It felt wrong somehow.

For his part, Katsuki wasn’t talking to anyone- how could he? Tape Elbows was busy, and the other three idiots that clung to him…

Nobody had seen them come back yet.

… Not that he was worried or anything. Not at all like Earlobes, the only other person in the room by herself. She was crouched against the same wall Katsuki was leaning against, hands wrapped around her knees with her face buried in them. Every so often, he’d hear a little sniffle out of her. It was disquieting, seeing how sarcastic and reserved she was in class. Nobody was acting right. It pissed Katsuki off. (It scared the hell out of him.)

He was distracted for a moment by Vlad King calling out. He’d been on and off the phone all while guarding the door, mobilizing other heroes and a police response, but… Katsuki remembered the bus ride over. Help wouldn’t be arriving for a while, and it showed in the stress creases on the pro’s face. “Everyone stay calm and wait for the first responders and other heroes. Help is coming.”

… Even so, they were missing a lot of people. But they’d be fine. They had to be fine. Shitty Hair would come running in any minute, and Katsuki could let out the breath that felt like it was stuck in his throat. He’d be carrying Deku, the helpless nerd probably having passed out from the gas that had apparently been the cause of all these unconscious kids. Raccoon Eyes and Pikachu would come in next, and then Pink Cheeks, Bird Head, Icyhot and Ponytail along with the kids from the other class. Everyone would be fine.
They didn’t have any other choice.

Earlobes didn’t seem to think so, though. Finally, after a particularly offensive sniffle, he’d had enough of her and the way that she was acting like everyone wasn’t gonna be just fine in the end. They were hero course, weren’t they? They’d all come back and be their usual obnoxious selves in no time. Sliding down to sit and scooting next to her, he spoke quietly enough that only she could hear. “What is it?”

The girl shot him a dirty look tears pricking at her eyes as she whispered. “Everyone’s missing! Kaminari and Momo are missing! That’s what it is, jerkface!”

Katsuki exchanged barbs with Earlobes from time to time. If nothing else, he respected the way she could keep a cool smile while hitting him back with an insult. Most of the class laughed it off or got offended, but not her. To see her on the verge of crying with a weak insult… It wasn’t right. He sighed. “… Look, don’t you tell them I said this, or they’ll get big heads about it. But they’re gonna be fine. Pikachu and Ponytail are strong, aren’t they? They’re gonna run in here soon, and you’re gonna be sobbing up a fit for no reason. It’ll embarrass you in front of that nerd you keep making fuckin’ googly eyes at.”

For a moment, the girl blinks, and then her cheeks flash red. “Wha-”

“Seriously. The whole class knows, except for maybe Pikachu himself.” Katsuki rolled his eyes. The only person who stared more blatantly with lovestruck eyes was Icyhot whenever Deku did anything at all. “What I’m saying is to stop crying. You don’t need to cry for people who are gonna be alright.”

Earlobes paused, taking a moment to look him over as a quivering smile made its way onto her face. She didn’t look fully relaxed—her eyes still shone with tears—but it seemed like the waterworks weren’t gonna start up anymore. “… Y’know, Bakugou, you’re the last person I’d expect to try comforting someone.”

“Bah, that’s not it.” Katsuki turned his head away from her, looking at the group tending to the unconscious students in the center. “It was just annoying. That’s it.”

“Sure thing.” Earlobes turned as well, smile remaining on her face as the tension drained from her posture. Finally, he’d stopped that annoying sound. That really, one hundred percent, absolutely was the only reason he’d done it.

Even so, Katsuki found he didn’t want to stand back up. So he didn’t, remaining seated next to Earlobes and silently watching everything unfold around them. Two classmates quietly observing the chaos together with the knowledge that it would be okay.

(It had to be.)

Once Momo’s head stops spinning, she realizes she’s being carried.

Her eyes blearily adjust to the world around her, processing the ache over her whole body. It felt like she’d been hit by a truck, and she had the distinct feeling that her left leg wasn’t bending the right way even though she couldn’t see it. Oof, breathing felt harder than usual, too. She was tucked in someone’s big arms like a bride, held up against a warm chest, and dark eyes slowly looked upwards to see who was holding her. It was… That 1-B student, the tall boy with the wind Quirk who was so loud that you could sometimes hear him through the wall separating their classrooms. He looked far more frightened than she’d ever seen him, head bobbing slightly as he ran with her tightly in his
grasp. What was his name again? Momo’s voice came out weaker than intended. “... What’s happening...?”

The boy turns his head down for a moment, blinking in surprise before swivelling back to shout at someone to his left with typical volume. “Yaoyorozu’s conscious!”

Her mind picked through the events leading her to this peculiar situation. Momo had been taking the unconscious Kaminari and Komori back with Tokoyami’s help when they’d (almost literally) run into a pair of boys from the other class attempting to escape. Awase and Yoarashi, right, those were their names. They were still out there and conscious due to a wind Quirk being a fairly helpful tool when it came to pushing gas away from your area. They’d all decided to group up and head back like that, but they’d barely been running together for two minutes when something completely blindsided her from just off the dirt trail. It was...

Momo’s heart almost stopped as she remembered what had smashed into her so hard that she’d hit a tree on the other side of the path, sliding down it like a broken ragdoll. “The Noumu…!”

“It’s gaining on us!” The Awase boy shouted in a panic from somewhere to her right. “Keep running!”

She could hear Tokoyami panting to her left. When he spoke, his voice was strained, likely from trying to hold Dark Shadow in. “Can you hit it with your wind again, Yoarashi?!”

“It’s not doing a thing!” Yoarashi shouted back. “It’s like it can’t be knocked over or something!”

“Noumus… Multiple Quirks… Might be why.” Momo almost wheezed over her words. Why was her chest so tight? It pinched every time she said anything. The jostling from Yoarashi’s running wasn’t helping at all, but she couldn’t blame him for it. A trickle of something wet and warm - blood? - ran down her forehead. She shivered.

Yoarashi’s breathing picked up, and Awase’s cry of terror came back. “It’s not slowing down at all!”

“Shit!” Her rescuer cursed, holding her tighter against his chest. Momo could feel his heart pounding through his chest. There was a monstrous scream that sounded like it came from just behind them, and her heart rate matched his. “Yaoyorozu, I’m sorry-!”

She braced, expecting another impact or worse as the beast caught up to them, but... Nothing. Holding in her breath, Momo slowly exhaled in confusion. Where was the final blow...? From the slowing pace Yoarashi was taking, he was confused too. Tokoyami made a noise of confusion from her side. “It’s... Turning around?”

Yoarashi spun on his heels abruptly, giving Momo a clear view of the Noumu lumbering away from them nonchalantly. The wind Quirk user spoke up, sounding perplexed. “But it almost had us.”

“Did those villains call it back?” Awase tried.

There was a moment of silence, and then Momo’s eyes widened as she realized something. “Maybe... They’ve completed their mission.”

A deathly quiet fell over the group. Tokoyami spoke slowly. “What does that mean...?”

“I dunno, but it can’t be good.” Yoarashi adjusted her in his arms as they watched it go down the path. Wait, if it was going back... Momo could feel the light bulb ding above her head.

She turned weakly to her side, but spoke with authority. “Awase, can your Quirk fuse inanimate
objects to living things?"

He tilted his head at her in confusion. “Uh, yeah?”

“Then here.” Even though Quirk overuse caused a sharp pain through her already-injured body, Momo slowly pushed a small piece of metal through her arm. Grabbing it, she held the circular object out to Awase. “Run and fuse this to the Noumu. It’s a tracker so we can figure out where the villains are going!”

It took a moment, but Awase’s eyes lit up. “Good thinking, Yaoyorozu!”

As he grabbed it and rushed down the path towards the beast, Momo only watched in silence. She should be a lot happier over the realization that this would mean they could track their attackers after the fact, but… Something wasn’t sitting right. It felt like something terrible had just happened, light dread pooling in her stomach as she watched Awase smack the tracker into the Noumu’s back.

She sincerely hoped her instincts were just wrong.

Five minutes earlier…

Shouko bit her lip watching Izumi march ahead of the others, too full of adrenaline to realize she wasn’t making a very rational choice. Her arms were splinted, all she had on was a sports bra and a pair of shorts, and the familiar signs of bruising were beginning to appear nearly all over her body. She didn’t need to be out searching the villain-infested woods, she needed to be in an ambulance. But Izumi always fought through the pain, didn’t she? The girl knew how to put it aside, grit her teeth, and do what had to be done. Shouko did too, years of training with her father making such actions necessary for survival, but not to the insane extent Izumi pushed herself to. Kirishima nudged her, Shouko turning to look at the worried redhead. “Yo, we should probably stop her…”

“I can hear you, Kirishima.” Izumi made a sighing noise from up ahead, stopping and turning around to face the group. “I know this isn’t smart, but I just can’t leave until I know everyone’s safe! If Tenya or Ashido were still out here and something happened… I wouldn’t be able to forgive myself. I need to make sure everyone’s fine.”

Pushing yourself through injuries like this, Izumi… Shouko sighed as well, muttering under her breath. “Though she be but little…”

Ochako made a nervous sound. “Deku, I know it’s impossible for us to change your mind… But you at least promise to turn right around if we see Yaoyorozu’s flare, right? That means everyone is safe.”

“Of course.” Izumi nodded before looking down. “Guys… I know I’m being really troublesome, but… Thank you for coming. My heart won’t let me go back until the people I care about are safe, no matter what. It means a lot to me that you’d help me.”

Shouko felt the corners of her lips turn up slightly. “I think I speak for us all when we say we wouldn’t ever abandon you, even if this isn’t what I hoped you’d do. Someone needs to watch over you.”

Izumi giggled, and Shouko felt the heat rise in her cheeks as Kirishima and Ochako nodded in sync. “Thanks, Shouko. Now let’s go save everyone!”

Seemingly in an agreement of sorts, the group set off again, following Izumi’s lead. It was a few
minutes until conversation started up again, Kirishima making a humming sound. “Y’know, once everyone’s safe and back at school, we should all hang out more! I like you guys.”

Ochako giggled, covering her mouth with her hand. “I like you too, Kirishima! Maybe our two friend groups can all go out on a big dinner date together!”

“That’d be nice.” Izumi was the most focused on the search, but it seemed she approved of the lighter topic, a little bit of tension draining from her shoulders. Leave it to Kirishima to improve even the darkest of situations with his positive way of speaking. “I don’t think Kach- Katsuki would go out to eat with me even if everyone else was there, though.”

Kirishima cocked his head at the girl, Izumi still a few steps ahead of the group. “Y’know, Midoriya, I meant to ask why he’s always ragging on you. I know the two of you grew up together, but I can’t understand why he doesn’t like you.”

The green haired girl sighed. “I can’t really explain it fully, but… I think part of it was that he thought I was looking down on him most of our lives. I always tried to be his friend, but there was that big miscommunication hanging over our heads the whole time. And our other two friends- uh, my former friends, I guess- weren’t very good to me in middle school, so I just got pushed further away from him.”

Shouko remembers what Izumi told her about Bakugou’s friends, and tightens her fists. Ochako makes a nervous sounding noise before audibly swallowing. “U-Uh, I see. His friends.”

“Huh. Sorry that happened, dude.” Kirishima pursed his lips. “Maybe I can talk to him for you? We get along real well.”

Izumi shook her head, green hair flopping about. “I don’t think it would work. I tried talking to him about it the other day, but… I don’t think he believed me when I said I didn’t disrespect him on purpose.”

“Oh, talking about friendship drama?”

That voice wasn’t from their group. Everyone practically jumped, whipping around to look at the source, who was… Apparently not there. Ochako spoke up anxiously. “W-What was that?”

“You know, throwing your voice is a great trick for a magician to learn. It means you can take your audience’s focus off the key item.” From the treetops this time! Spinning back around, Shouko noticed two things: one being the gaudily dressed man with a white mask atop the trees, and two being that Izumi wasn’t in front of them anymore.

Bicoloured eyes widened. “Izumi? Izumi?!”

Kirishima shouted up at the man, all friendliness gone from his voice in a heartbeat. “Where the hell is Midoriya?!”

“Before I get into that, allow me to introduce myself.” The man took a dramatic bow. “My name is Mister Compress. League of Villains member extraordinaire. Your little friend is in this little marble thanks to my Quirk.” A gloved hand revealed a small, shining blue orb. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I’m off to deliver her to my friends! Have a lovely night.”

With a tip of his top hat, the man was off, bounding over the treetops effortlessly. Shouko didn’t miss a beat, slamming her foot into the path and shooting up a wave of ice, but the man dodged with the grace of an acrobat even as he was chased down by the glacier. She felt her lips curve into a snarl. He had Izumi. He had her friend. “Everyone! Chase him!”
All three remaining students burst into a dead sprint, rushing after the man trotting over the treetops. How could he be so fast if his Quirk was just that marble trick he’d shown?! Adrenaline started to seep into Shouko’s veins, and she ran even faster in pursuit of the kidnapper. Even so, it didn’t seem like it was enough. Two toned hair whipped around in the wind as she met Ochako’s frantic gaze. “Ochako, can you use your Quirk on the two of us and throw us at him?! We need him on the ground to have a fighting chance!”

“Throw you??!” The brunette’s eyes widened. “That’s dangerous!!”

“My Quirk can protect us when we land!” Kirishima yelled. “Come on!”

After a moment’s hesitation, Ochako screeched to a halt, arms out. “Then come here, I’ll float you! I’ll run over and meet you wherever you land!”

Rushing back to where she stood, Shouko felt her stomach twist uncomfortably as gravity left her. Kirishima grabbed her around the waist, something that would have had her instinctively driving an elbow back into his nose had she not quickly realized he was holding her so he could protect her from the harsh landing. “Todoroki, you ready?!”

“Born ready.” As her feet left the ground, she felt Ochako grab onto her ankle, yanking the floating pair back, and-!

Kirishima and Shouko were thrown through the sky. Some delirious part of her brain made a quick note to ask Ochako if she was a baseball player by any chance- her missile’s aim was right on, and they crashed directly into Mister Compress. With an array of screams and shouts as the weightless feeling snapped out, all three of them slipped down through the foliage, crashing and rolling in a way that made Shouko’s entire world spin. As soon as her eyes were able to focus on anything but the nauseating landing, she realized they’d all fallen just on the brink of a forest clearing- and that they weren’t alone.

A man in a black and white bodysuit. The villain she instantly recognized as Toga, staring at them in surprise. A lizard man, shocked expression on his scaled face. A woman in a red button up giving them a cocked eyebrow under her sunglasses. A scarred up man looking at Shouko in a way that she just couldn’t place.

The villains!

“Compress!” The suited villain called out! “You got Midoriya? We gotta go! We can stay a little longer!”

Shouko’s attention was drawn from that confusing statement to Toga’s squeal. “Oh, it’s Shouko again! See her, Dabi? See her?”

“I see her.” The scarred man (Dabi?) was still examining her. “How about that.”

“Give back Midoriya!” Kirishima shouted, and Shouko turned her head just in time to see him aim a hardened fist at Compress, all three of them still piled on the ground. Suddenly, a bizarre tug overtook her body, pink glowing in her vision as some telekinetic force picked her up and slammed her into Kirishima, the boy glowing blue.

Both of them shouted out in pain, and the action gave Compress time to scramble to his feet and rush towards the group. “These little brats, ruining my good coat with dirt! Yes, I’ve got the girl. All marbled up.”

The pressure increased, and Shouko heard Kirishima grunt as the force pushed the two of them harder against each other. Who was doing this? The red haired villain, holding her hand out as it
glowed itself. It must be her Quirk. Could she move her body parts? Yes, her arms still worked. With a grunt of her own, Shouko shot ice at the perpetrator, the woman letting out a gasp as she stumbled out of the way. The hold on their bodies released, both students managing to land on their feet and back away from the other as the villain shouted. “Jeez, that’s the ice one, isn’t it?”

“Ice and fire.” Dabi said with a hint of… Bitterness? “Long and short range, if my memory serves me well. Quite the Quirk, kid.”

She wasn’t even going to honour that with a response. Izumi was in danger, and that was all Shouko cared about right now. She rushed at Compress, flame encircling her arm and firing out at the man as he dodged. “You want a student?! Take me instead of her! Isn’t the daughter of Endeavor a more valuable prize?!”

Her own fire was cut short as a wall of blue flame shot out, blocking her path. Christ, that was hot, and Shouko had a built-in tolerance to intense heat to start with. Jumping back, her head shot over to the flame villain, Dabi staring her down. “Oh, we know your heritage well. And you’re right about that making you a nice trophy to bring home with us, but the little brat with Compress has a connection to someone even better. Sorry, second best.”

“Even though Shouko’s super cute!” From behind him, Toga popped out and lunged, vicious fanged smile on her face.

Shouko jumped back, shooting up a wall of ice to keep her at bay. Her head swivelled around to Kirishima. “I’ll fend them off! Get that marble!”

“Got it!” Hardened arms in front of him, Kirishima took off at Compress, the man dodging about in that irritating acrobatic way. Shouko spun back around- good timing, too, since she barely managed to get out of the way of a thrown tape measurer from the bodysuit villain.

The battle was a blur. Fire, ice, dodge, punch, slide. Shouko wasn’t fully experienced with multiple attackers at once, but going up against Endeavor day after day gave her enough to keep them all at bay. Fighting came easy to her. The hard part was handling the screaming voice in the back of her head that begged where is she, where is she, bring her back, if I lose her I lose everything. The thought of Izumi being taken away from her was enough to make Shouko’s blood run colder than the ice she fired off at Toga, made her want to curl up and scream until she couldn’t even manage a whimper. These people were vicious killers, monsters hiding under bodysuits and scaled skin, and the injured Izumi being stuck with them was a fate too terrible to bear. She’d get her back. She had to get her back.

Blue flames clipped the back of her thigh, and Shouko bit back a yelp of pain as she felt the new burn. It hurt, badly, and for a moment she wanted to recklessly shoot back with fire of her own. Focus, her brain reminded her, remember why you’re fighting now. For words screamed at the Sports Festival that were strong enough to shatter the chains binding her to a destiny she thought she’d never escape from. For tender hands running through her hair as they braided it, treating her to a night of being a normal girl. For soft eyes staring back at her in the dim pool lighting late at night, and every dream it could have become. For each beautiful memory tucked away and preserved like a valuable jewel.

Shouko was fighting for love.

She fired up an ice wall as she heard a shout from the woman in the button up as she brought her hand up to some sort of earpiece. “Kurogiri said he’s retrieved the Noumu and the secondary target! Get ready to go!”
“Finally.” Groaned Dabi, dodging flying ice. “I’m getting tired of this kid.”

Shouko whipped her head around. She couldn’t see Compress’s face as he duked it out with Kirishima, but his body movements were slowing down for sure. Kirishima’s expression was full of determination as he swung his fists, trying to get in a good hit. Behind her, she heard Toga cheer. “Yay, Kurogiriiriiii!”

In that moment of trying to recall where she’d heard that name before, she let her guard down. Pink glowed around her body, blue surrounding Kirishima, and Shouko hardly had time to brace for impact as both of them were violently tugged off their feet and slammed into each other, shouting in pain as it released them and dropped both students unceremoniously on the ground. While trying to untangle themselves from each other, a cold wind shot through the clearing, Shouko and Kirishima both turning to see a misty portal opening up in the center. That’s where she knew it from- the USJ’s portal villain! Her stomach dropped. If they got through there, Izumi was good as gone.

She couldn’t let that happen.

“Sheevey, you two!” The bodysuited villain was the first to hop through, waving them goodbye as if it was a cheerful departure from friends. Then went the lizard, the magnetizing woman, Toga- and Shouko wasn’t going to let another one escape while she tried to get herself off of Kirishima.

Extending a hand, she twisted her wrist and sent a spiral of ice directly at Compress, hitting the running man directly in the side. Stumbling, the man quickly lost his footing on the icy ground Shouko rushed to create, and as he tripped, something flew from his pocket.

The marble!

Kirishima lunged forwards from behind her, snatching it out of mid-air. “Got it!” Landing on his stomach just past Compress, the redhead threw up his fist in victory. “She’s safe, Todoroki!”

Thank god. Shouko found herself letting out a breath she didn’t know she was holding in. Stumbling to his feet, Compress cursed, backing up and off of the iced area of the ground while holding his stomach. Shouko hoped that hurt.

“Dammit-! You little brat!”

Jumping up, Kirishima hardened his free hand, holding it in front of himself like a shield. “Come and get it, shitty villain! I’ll beat you so hard your ancestors’ll feel it!”

“No!-” Compress snapped. He pointed at Shouko. “That one! Your little ice rink scheme scuffed up my lovely coat! It’s brand-name!”

Shouko blinked in confusion for a moment before standing up, glaring down at him. “We have Izumi back. You’ve lost.”

“Hm, you fell for one of his stupid ‘magic’ deceptions?” Shouko had completely forgotten Dabi was still there, the man standing by the portal a few feet away from them and casually crossing his arms. He sighed, walking into the portal with a final few words. “I thought UA kids would be smarter than that.”

Kirishima squinted. “Deceptions? I have the marble!”

“You have a marble.” Seemingly getting his composure back, Compress stood up straighter, snapping his gloved fingers. With a flash of light, the marble in Kirishima’s hand vanished to reveal…

An ice shard. It fell to the ground with a small clatter. It sounded like the loudest, most horrific crash
possible in Shouko’s mind, though.

“Did either of you kids listen back in the forest? What a shame.” Compress continued as he moved backwards towards the portal, one hand moving to lift up his mask. A balaclava-clad face was revealed, a cruel smile growing underneath it. “Part of being a magician… Is taking your audience’s focus off the main item.”

He opened his mouth, pulling something off his tongue. A shiny blue marble.

Shouko jumped forwards, but she knew she wouldn’t be fast enough. He was moving back, chuckling, too far-

“Take this, you son of a bitch!”

Something whizzed past Shouko’s ear, almost brushing her hair. Compress’s eyes widened for a brief moment before he was shot directly in the hand with a projectile that proceeded to almost explode directly on the man, a blinding shock of light and sparks that made the bicoloured girl squint. The marble went flying straight up into the air as Compress stumbled back and fell into the portal with a shriek of pain.

Shouko whirled her head around to see Ochako emerging from the forest, panting heavily, and holding the smoking flare gun with both hands. She smiled shakily. “Y’know, Momo said never to aim this at a person… Guess I can see why.”

Shouko almost responded with suitable awe at the improvised weapon before remembering something. The marble! Looking back up in the air, she saw that it had flown so high that it was still descending. She could make it! Running forwards, Shouko jumped straight out, reaching for it-

There are a lot of things people didn’t know about Shouko. She was a private girl by nature, except for her occasional oversharing bouts. Nobody outside of her family knew about things like her childish love for chocolate, the way she tended to a birdhouse outside her window, and so on. There was another thing about her only known to the Todorokis, and with good reason. When her mother burned her, her skin wasn’t the only thing that was damaged. She’d had to have surgery on her eye, the fear being that she’d go completely blind in it from the scalding water. It had been a partial success. Her vision in the left eye was noticeably cloudy, and if you really paid attention when she moved them, it didn’t have the same range of motion as the right.

And as Shouko undershot the grab on the marble, it was clear that her depth perception was affected as well. She didn’t catch it, but someone else did.

A hand emerged from the portal, a man stepping partially out. Dabi. It was like time slowed down, Shouko falling slowly as their eyes met. What a vibrant blue, thought that delirious part of her brain. It’s familiar. Scarred lips curved up into a grin as a flash of light popped, the marble turning into a noticeably horrified Izumi Midoriya. Dabi had her by the neck, hand clenched tight enough that there would no doubt be bruises. She spoke up, words quiet and petrified. “Shouko-”

She was interrupted by Dabi’s chuckle. “Well, isn’t that a tragedy? Poor little Shouko-lat.”

Izumi chokes, green eyes wide and terrified, and Shouko meets her gaze with a similar level of horrified realization that this was it. The girl’s lips open slowly. “Shouko, I love y-”

She was yanked back. The portal closed, leaving Shouko alone on the ground in the dark night sky.

It took a moment for her brain to process it, to really accept that she was gone. She was on her hands and knees, calloused palms resting against the chalky dirt. Her knees hurt-skinned, most likely.
Shouko noticed the smell in the air- burning. The forest fire still hadn’t been put out, had it? That made sense. The night air was cool on her skin, though the breeze brought that unpleasant scent right to her nose. Someone was at her side, talking to her frantically, but she couldn’t even hear them over the static in her head. She slowly got to her feet, and then it hit her.

Izumi Midoriya was gone. Shouko Todoroki had failed to protect her.

Shouko inhaled deeply, and screamed into the night sky.

Dabi has some regrets.

As soon as he’d stepped through the portal, shit had hit the fan. Compress had been yowling about how 'that brunette bitch took my fucking finger off!', but Magne was dealing with that particular drama. Shigaraki had been ready with the chloroform the second the portal closed, and Midoriya was down in seconds, slumped unconscious on the floor. Good god, her arms were all kinds of screwed up, weren’t they? This girl had been through the wringer. Looking back at it, she was probably the one who took down Muscular. That was one impressive feat, and also ensured the old hospital bed they bound her in had enough additional restraints to hold back that sort of power. Poor kid was gonna be in for one hell of a shock when she woke up- completely tied down, gagged, blindfolded and with noise-cancelling headphones. Something about keeping the kid psychologically tortured with the sense deprivation crap so that she’d be as broken as possible when it came time to kill her in front of All Might. Dabi honestly thought it was a bit much, but whatever. That’s not what he was regretting here.

The kid was apparently in love with his little sister. And judging by the horrified heartbreak on Shouko’s face as they vanished into the portal, it was probably mutual.

Whoopsie daisy.

“I seriously can’t believe it!” Himiko cackled. The two of them were sitting on the bar’s roof (Shigaraki didn’t let them smoke in the bar, even though fucking Giran was allowed to, so what the hell?), resting up after one hell of a mission. She waved her cig around with a laugh. “The one girl your sis is in love with, and we kidnap her!”

Sighing, Dabi looked up at the night sky. It was as clear as it could get deep in the city, all the light pollution blocking out most of the stars. The moon, though, was clear as day. It was at half. His mother used to show him the shape of the rabbit in the moon at night after bandaging his training injuries, but he’d forgotten how to find it a long time ago. “Shut up.”

“Touchy.” The blonde brought her knees up to her chest, rocking back and forth. “You’re okay with fighting her and almost letting her get killed, but the line is drawn at killing her high school crush? I did that to mine!”

“You didn’t even go to high school, idiot. You stabbed some girl you stalked and stole her uniform.”

“She was my crushhhhh!”

Rolling his eyes, Dabi took a hit from his cigarette. “It’s different somehow. If you’d seen the look in her eyes, you’d understand. The kid just looked… Heartbroken. She’s had enough people she loves taken from her life already. Feels shitty of me to be the one who takes someone she actually cares about away.”

“Hm.” Himiko grabbed another cig from her purse (and he’d never understand how she just let them float freely around in there). Wordlessly, Dabi lifted a finger, the girl lighting it off the flaming tip.
“Thanks. And I dunno, I guess that’s just part of being a super cool villain like us! You gotta compromise your ideals to make the world you like in the end. You didn’t think you’d ever have a happy ending with your family, did you?”

Well, of course not. But he’d dreamt about it before, waking up from a happy dream of his mother and siblings and wondering why the fuck he hadn’t just offed himself already. “No. Guess some part of me just didn’t want to admit I couldn’t have their happiness and my own at the same time.”

She cocks her head. “So what are you gonna choose, then? Your family or yourself?”

Dabi thinks about it for a minute. He remembers cold hugs from his mother that suited his ice-bodied tastes perfectly. He remembers sneaking to Fuyumi’s room to spend hours at night chatting with his twin, with the other half of his heart. He remembers teaching Natsuo the best way to catch bugs in the summers. He remembers the first word out of Shouko’s mouth being Touya as her chubby baby hand pointed at him. Those were some of his most treasured memories, beacons of light amidst the darkness.

But he also remembers the bad. He remembers the way his mother would sometimes twitch at his bright blue eyes, his shock of red hair that reminded her of a monster. He remembers Fuyumi politely asking their dad to please be nicer to Touya and getting a black eye for her troubles. He remembers Natsuo being treated like he was less than a human being, watching the light leave his grey eyes over time. He remembers his precious baby sister, beaten and bruised in the name of their father’s pride. He remembers how he abandoned all of them to that hell house to save his own ass from their father after the incident that charred him permanently.

He’d made his choice already when he attacked his younger sister, lied to his brother, tricked his twin into helping commit murder. After tonight, he’d be on the news. Fuyumi knew his face. She’d never forgive him for doing this to Shouko. There was no room for him in the light. Who did he think he was, trying to pretend like he could have it both ways? He was selfish through and through.

“We always said we’d tear this rotten world down together. I can’t do that without breaking Shouko’s heart a couple times over. So I guess I’ll just have to stay happy by your side, then.”

Himiko’s smile isn’t as creepy as it usually is.

Chapter End Notes

CONTENT WARNINGS BEGIN
- Canon typical violence
- Finger trauma (mentioned)
- Psychological torture (described to a small extent)
- Brief mention of suicidal ideation
- Mentions of child abuse
- Smoking

CONTENT WARNINGS END. SPOILERS BEGIN

Ahh, angst. My favourite flavour.
Sorry this one's a little short! I didn't want to stretch it out by adding too much padding after the big kidnapping, so it kind of ended up this way. Thanks so much for reading, leave a comment if you'd like, and I'll see you soon!
but you know that you had it once

Chapter Notes

I usually only put content warnings at the bottom. That said, I'm going to post two right up here due to their seriousness: this chapter contains a GRAPHIC INTERRUPTED SUICIDE ATTEMPT as well as GRAPHIC PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE. These two things cannot be skipped over; they're plot essential. If you're afraid these could trigger you, approach this chapter with extreme caution if at all. I can briefly summarize things in less detail over on my Discord (kale#4506) if you need me to.

With that out of the way, hello! I'm sorry I couldn't get to everyone's comments- I was hospitalized again, and that kept me pretty busy this month, so I wound up prioritizing writing over comments. That said, I read them all, and you all really cheered me up while I was sick! Anyways, definitely read the other content warnings down below, and I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

When Shouko comes to next, it is in a hospital bed. This is far from the first time it’s happened, but it is the first time she felt such a soul-crushing sense of despair as soon as her eyes registered the bright hospital lighting. She couldn’t even bring herself to childishly hope it was just some kind of nightmare.

Izumi was gone.

There’s a gentle touch on her forearm, briefly startiling her out of her misery. “Shouko?” As she slowly turned her head, the source was discovered- Tsuyu Asui sits on a chair, big eyes blinking down at the bedridden Shouko. “Good morning, ribbit. Or afternoon, actually. How are you feeling?”

The bicoloured girl pauses to think about it. Physically, she feels mostly fine. Her left calf is a bit tender, there’s definitely some bruising from when that magnetizing Quirk kept throwing her directly into Kirishima, and the forearm where she had blood taken kind of hurts, but she can deal with mild pain. Emotionally… She looks over at Tsuyu, the girl’s face as unreadable as always, and decides not to answer the question. “Izumi’s gone, isn’t she?”

Tsuyu pauses before nodding. “Yeah. It’s all over the news. The villains they captured at camp said they’d specifically planned the attack to kill as many of us as possible and kidnap her. They didn’t know why they wanted Izumi in particular, ribbit.”

For a second, Shouko’s heart stops. “Is anyone dead?”

“No.” Tsuyu’s response is a tidal wave of relief. “But there’s some pretty bad injuries. Ashido and Ojiro were stuck in the gas for a long time, and the doctors say it could be a week until they regain consciousness. A lot of the 1-B kids are the same.”

Regain consciousness… Shouko blinks, looking over at Tsuyu. “How long was I out for?”

“You’ve been asleep for about seventeen hours, ribbit.” The frog-like girl responded. “Kirishima and
Ochako said you passed out after they took Izumi. The doctor came by and explained it was a mix of emotional shock and exhaustion.

Well, it made enough sense. Shouko did have both of those things. “I don’t mean any offense, but… Why are you here?”

Whether she really was irked by the question or not, Tsuyu didn’t show it. “I’m not offended. Ochako, Tenya and I have been taking shifts waiting here so you weren’t alone when you woke up. We figured you’d want a friendly face to wake up to and so you’d have someone to explain everything to you.”

“That’s kind of you three.” Leaning back in her bed, Shouko eyed the bedside table. Her bag was there, unzipped and awaiting its owner. The shock was starting to hit again, the desperate realization that she had just missed Izumi, that she was stuck with a group of murderers, that she had so many swirling questions that might never be answered…

The earrings were in there. If it really was the afternoon the day after the attack, Izumi’s birthday was tomorrow.

Something in Shouko’s mind that had desperately been holding on finally snapped.

Turning her gaze back to Tsuyu, she spoke monotonously (even by Shouko standards). “Tsuyu. There’s money in my bag. Could you go downstairs and buy me lunch from the cafe? I can’t stand hospital food.”

The girl gave Shouko an odd look, but eventually nods, standing up and brushing her sundress down. “Don’t worry about money, I’ll buy you something. They sell some pretty tasty curry udon, is that okay?”

“That’s great.” Nodding as Tsuyu headed out of the room, closing the sliding door behind her, Shouko quickly made for the bag. She’d have maybe ten minutes until the other girl got back with food- this needed to be fast. Everything seemed to be melting into each other, the grief too great to bear, and Shouko’s hands scrambled faster as she unzipped the pouch she’d just pulled from the bag, removing the necessary item.

The scalpel gleamed in the harsh hospital lighting.

How was she supposed to do this again? Shouko bit her lip as she rolled back her left sleeve. She’d looked it up online the night after she stole the implement, trying to find a way that would best ensure she’d never wake up again. Was it vertical? She was sure it was vertical.

This was going to hurt an awful lot, her wrist muscles already tensing up as she slowly brought it down with a shaking hand. She shouldn’t do this. She knew this was a horrible, selfish choice, knows what it’s going to do to her family. Shouko could picture Fuyumi’s face when the police arrived with the news, could see the anguish in her mother’s expression, wonders if Natsuo would even be allowed at the funeral. She didn’t think about her father. He didn’t deserve a place in her final thoughts. And what about Tsuyu, returning to the room to find a bloodied body? What about the rest of her class, already having been through hell two times over, having to hear that one of their own chose to die?

… In a moment of what she’d later recognize as pure, self-centered anger, Shouko realized she didn’t care. She was so goddamn tired of caring about other people. She longed for the detachment she’d had at the beginning of the year, where empathy was foreign, where there was no shock of fluffy hair and vibrant green eyes to make her think she could be anything but some owned puppet.
Shouko had lived for others. But she would die for herself.

She started to press the scalpel onto her wrist.

“Hey, Shouko, Tsu said you were awa-”

Shouko’s head violently swivelled to the side, scalpel retracting from where she’d started her incision. It was a tiny, shallow wound at that point, but the mere sight of the cut and the way it slowly started to bleed was enough to shock her into reality. Ochako was standing in the doorway, face frozen in a tableau of cheer until her eyes moved agonizingly slowly, down to where the medical implement was dripping blood onto the sheets. The brunette just stared, as if she wasn’t sure what she was looking at. Finally, she spoke. “Shouko… What are you doing…?”

It was like time suddenly returned to the room, Shouko scrambling for an explanation as to what exactly she was trying to do, why she was holding a bloody scalpel above an open wound. “I- Why are you-”

Ochako has put two and two together, horror creeping onto her face as colour drains from rosy red cheeks. “… P-Put it down.”

Her voice is hushed, terrified, and Shouko obediently drops the scalpel. There’s a clink as it hits the floor, and the brunette girls’ eyes widen as she stares at both it and the small amount of blood that had been splattered onto the tile after the implement made first impact. A rush of shame hits Shouko like a battering ram, pulling her out of the self-destructive haze she was in just a second before. “I… I wasn’t doing anything wrong.”

She speaks like a child caught with their hand in the cookie jar, and as Ochako’s horrified gaze meets her eyes, the guilt amplifies. “Shouko… Why were you doing that?” Her fists were clenched tightly, body trembling with fear or disbelief or something else Shouko sure as hell didn’t have the ability to understand.

Her face burned with… something. Not scalding and sudden like boiling water, but a growing shame and urge to run away and hide that trickled over her skin and itched under reddening flesh. Shouko slapped a hand over her scar, scratching instinctively. Bad. Stop it. That’s how the damn thing got so patchy and uneven in the first place. “It doesn’t matter.”

“It does matter!” Ochako slapped her hands down on the guardrail of the bed, rattling Shouko out of her itching fit. “If… If you were doing what I think you were-“

“It doesn’t matter!” Shouko suddenly shot back, head turning with an infuriated scowl stretched over her face. Her eyes felt moist. “She’s gone, isn’t she?! Izumi’s gone! What else do I have?! I don’t have anything to stay here for!”

The brunette made a sound in between a whimper and a sob, tears prickling in wide eyes. “Yes you do! We all care about you!”

“I never asked you to!”

“Don’t you care about us?!”

Shouko wheezes in a rough mimicry of a laugh. “Of course I do. You, Tenya, Tsuyu… You’re all my first friends. But without Izumi… Now that she’s gone-“

“You’re gonna give up that easy?” Completely changed from what it was only seconds before, Ochako’s voice is suddenly cold. Shouko looks up from the blankets to see her staring her in the
eyes, tears streaming down her childlike face. “What if it was the other way around? You think Deku would give up and die if you were gone? She got caught specifically because she was trying to save people! Shouko, I- dammit, I overheard what she told you in the forest during dinner!”

… She couldn’t mean…! “About what happened in middle school?!”

“I heard it all.” Ochako hangs her head in a sort of shame, wiping at her eyes. “It broke my heart. I didn’t mean to, it wasn’t my business, but to offer that sort of secret to you first… Deku needs you. What do you think she’s going to do when they rescue her and she finds out you gave up on her?”

Shouko opens her mouth to reply, tries to find the words to justify her own death, but… She can’t. There’s dead air in her throat, nothing that can possibly go up against the memory of Izumi’s fierce sense of heroism. How could it? How could Shouko even try? Instead, she bites her lip, digs her nails into her palms, breathes once, twice, three times. It was time to take a leap of faith, try something with Ochako that she’d never offered the other girl before- honesty. “… I don’t know what to do. I’m afraid. I’m so, so afraid.”

“Me too.” Ochako gently reaches over the bed guardrail to touch Shouko’s hand. The bicolored girl doesn’t pull away. “I’m scared out of my mind, but I’m not going to give up on her no matter what that means. And when we do see her again…”

There’s a pause, and Shouko looks up to see a sort of… well, she can’t place the emotion behind Ochako’s eyes. It’s something between acceptance and peace, the look of a girl finding a sort of happiness in yielding. It’s too strange, and Shouko speaks up. “… Yes?”

Ochako smiles, that peculiar expression still visible. “When we save her, I hope you can stand by her side.”

There’s a brief pause before Shouko cocks her head. “… What do you mean?”

The other girl giggles, standing a bit taller and moving to clasp her hands behind her back. “You’ll get it eventually. I’m more observant than you give me credit for, y’know!”

Huh. Shouko really didn’t know what to say to that, so she says nothing. The two of them stay in a comfortable silence of sorts before something the brunette said earlier finally hits the bicolored student. “Wait, did you say ‘when we save her’?”

“Oh!” A lightbulb flicks on in Ochako’s mind- figuratively, anyways. “Right, that’s what I was running up here to tell you in the first place! I was walking by Yaoyorozu’s room earlier- I think the whole class is visiting her next? They were all checking up on Ojiro and Ashido right now when I slipped away to see you- and anyways, she made a tracker and a 1-B kid stuck it to one of the Noumus!”

Right, there were Noumus running around, weren’t there? Shouko counted her lucky stars that she didn’t run into one- she remembered what Aizawa had looked like after his encounter with the beast at the USJ. “Ok. And?”

The smaller girl leant in a bit, trying and failing to be casual about the way she kicked the dropped scalpel under the bed. “Well! I overheard her talking to the police and some heroes about it, and I got an address! We know where the League is storing their Noumus! And it would only make sense for them to keep their monsters near their hideout, right?”

It was all coming together, and Shouko’s eyes widened with realization. “… We have a clue as to where they must have Izumi.” It briefly occurred to Shouko that they were operating off the
assumption Izumi was still alive, but that thought was banished so quickly and with such a force that it nearly physically rattled her. Absolutely not. She wouldn’t entertain the possibility for a second.

“Yeah!” Ochako bounced a bit on her feet. “Please come with me to rescue her, Shouko! She’d do it for any of us- we have to be heroes she’d be proud of!”

Honestly… She shouldn’t. This wasn’t a good idea- not only did memories of Hosu remind her how deeply against the law this was, but they didn’t have any sort of plan beyond approaching the overheard address. But Shouko wasn’t thinking about that in the moment. For a brief few seconds, all she could think of was curly green hair and a smile that was bright enough to cut through the gloomiest of clouds, real enough to move an ice queen’s heart. Love, she decided, made you a bit crazy. But that was fine.

“I’m in.”

Shouko was cleared for release a few hours later. Her father had booked her a hotel room considering he apparently couldn’t make it down to pick her up for a few nights- and wasn’t that just bizarre? Not him being busy, that was just expected of someone like the number two hero. He’d normally have sent Fuyumi to come get her. So why not just do that instead of wasting money on a hotel room? Her sister hadn’t even been responding to her texts. It was strange. Well, no time to worry about that- they had a little less than a day to plot a daring rescue, and the hotel room at least meant they had a private ‘home base’ of sorts to do their plotting in.

It had quickly become apparent that Shouko and Ochako wouldn’t be enough to pull off this kind of mission. While Shouko settled into the hotel, Ochako had gone over to the hospital to offer up the subject of a rescue mission to the class just as they were all visiting Yaoyorozu. It wasn’t like either of them had expected the whole class to jump at the bit, but… The results were less than ideal.

“He was the only one who said yes!” Ochako cried out as she all but stormed into the room, followed by a somewhat anxious looking Kirishima. “Tsu and Tenya wouldn’t even look at me!”

Only one person willing to help out. Shouko sighed, getting up from where she’d been sitting on one of the beds. “Kirishima, thank you for coming.”

“No problem, man. I owe it to her, don’t I?” The redhead sighed, rubbing the back of his head. “I… I dunno, it’s not like we were close or anything before all this. But I just kept thinking about how we almost managed to save her, and if I’d just fought a little dirtier with that Compress guy, or if I wasn’t stupid enough to fall for his trick-”

“Hey, it’s okay.” Ochako bit her lip, putting her hand on the boy’s shoulder as he started rambling. “You did everything you could, okay? And you’re helping now!”

Kirishima looked like he wanted to say something else, but just sighed and shook his head. “You’re right. I just… She looked so scared when she was taken away. What kind of man would I be if I didn’t try and help here? We’re heroes, right?”

“Yeah.” Shouko nodded in agreement, though she did cast a brief worried look at the duo. “Can we do this with only the three of us?”

Ochako made a humungous noise, lips curving into a small frown. “It’s not ideal… But we can probably handle it, right?”

“Man, I really thought Bakugou was gonna jump in and help.” Kirishima sighed. “He looked really freaked out when we brought you back to base and told them Midoriya was gone, Todoroki.”
Somehow, she found that hard to believe, and if Ochako’s expression was anything to go off, she wasn’t alone in that. Kirishima noticed, eyes widening slightly. “I’m serious! Didn’t you notice how quiet and still he was in the hospital room, Uraraka?”

The brunette sighed, toeing her shoe into the floor. “Yeah, that was pretty strange coming from him, but… I guess he made his choice.”

There was a pregnant silence in the room, nobody seemingly knowing where to go from there. Finally, Shouko sighed, getting to her feet. “I’m going to go get something from the vending machines. Do either of you want anything?”

After briefly accepting some money from Kirishima with the promise to bring him back some chips, Shouko made her way down the stairs to the machines near the lobby. She wasn’t even all that hungry after the meal Tsuyu brought her back- walking just helped her think. What was their plan here? Just go to the address Ochako overheard and hope they could stumble upon the League’s hideout? Could three half-trained fifteen year olds pull off a rescue mission, especially when they couldn’t legally use their Quirks? It was a lot to chew on, and was part of the reason she didn’t notice the other person rounding the corner until she literally bumped into them, falling straight on her rear.

“Dammit, Icyhot, could you watch where the hell you’re going?”

That… Was a familiar voice. One that hadn’t addressed her since beating her senseless. Shouko instinctively bristled, looking up at Katsuki Bakugou as the boy rubbed the chin she’d bonked against her forehead. Getting to her feet, she offered up a chilly glare. “You should have heard me coming too. What are you doing here?”

“I’m literally deaf, you moron.”

“... That’s fair, actually.”

“Seriously. And I’m staying here overnight. My parents booked me a room since they don’t seem to care enough to drive out and get me tonight.” Realizing he’d probably said too much judging by Shouko’s raised eyebrow, Bakugou kept talking. “Sides. I was coming to find your little peanut gallery anyways.”

Dusting off her jeans, Shouko stared bitterly at the boy. “We’re not changing our minds. We’re going to save Izumi.”

“I’m not here to talk you out of it, idiot.” Bakugou snapped before taking a deep breath and looking down at the floor. “I… I’m coming with you.”

Now it was Shouko’s turn to wonder if she’d also suffered some degree of hearing loss. “… What? Why?”

“You heard me just fine.” The boy made a scoffing noise, not looking up at all. “Deku… The nerd’s helpless without someone to save her ass. That’s the only reason.”

“No it isn’t.” Even if it wasn’t wise, even if she risked pushing help away… Something didn’t add up for Shouko. “You’d never waste a breath on her normally or care what happens to her. We both know this. Why do you actually want to come?”

There was a silence between them, tension thick enough to be cut with a knife. To be honest, Shouko didn’t exactly expect it- she’d been anticipating Bakugou to just snap back at her with some profanity-filled declaration. But instead the boy looked silently down at the ground, still not moving. Finally, he inhaled deeply, still refusing to look up. “… That isn’t important. Deku’s always been
Something close to anger stirred in Shouko’s chest. “She’s the strongest person I’ve ever met in my life. After everything she’s been through- after what happened to her in middle school- she doesn’t deserve you badmouthing her.”

Bakugou brings his head back up, eyes flashing with anger before it dissipates almost instantly, replaced with confusion. “Wait, what the hell do you mean ‘what happened to her in middle school’? I went to middle school with her. Nothing happened.”

Oh, shit. She hadn’t meant to say that. Shouko feels her face tense. “None of your business.”

“No, what the fuck did she say happened?” Bakugou takes a step towards her. “I know everything about her. If something did happen, I’d know.”

Some of Shouko’s abrupt fear was replaced with an equally as abrupt anger. Even though he had no idea what she was talking about, the mere implication that Izumi was lying about this was just-! “...Your friends. Did they ever say anything to you about what they wanted to do to her?”

“The extras? They said dumb shit about her, but I told them-” There’s a pause. Something cracks in Bakugou’s facade, and his face drains of colour. “No. No, they didn’t.”

“We both know what they did.” A part of Shouko felt terribly guilty about this- it’s not like Izumi ever betrayed her by sharing the secret about her father, after all, so what gives Shouko the right to do this to her?- but there was too much anger boiling in her stomach to think it over. “She survived that, never told a soul until me, and got into UA anyways. Don’t ever imply that Izumi can’t be strong by herself again.”

Shouko wants to turn on her heels and march off, get away from this asshole, but there’s a keening noise as she does just that. Mismatched eyes flicker back to the blonde boy. Bakugou drops into a crouch, burying his face in his hands as he makes a pained noise into them. “No, they wouldn’t. They couldn’t have- why would they-”

She briefly considers rubbing Bakugou’s nose in the fact that he apparently spent most of middle school fraternizing with rapists, but… No, it would be wrong to use Izumi’s trauma to punish someone else. That wasn’t Shouko’s right. Instead, she sighs, crossing her arms. “They did, and she kept going anyways. That was strength. Now tell me why you actually want to rescue her.”

There’s a silence, and Shouko once again considers walking away and letting Bakugou have this crisis by himself, but a small voice stops her. It’s so quiet that she’s not sure she didn’t imagine it at first. “Because I fucked up.”

“What?”

“Because I fucked up, okay?!” Bakugou’s head snaps up, and Shouko looks down at the crouching boy in surprise. “The last fucking time I ever talked to her was to throw her apology back in her face! I told her to piss off! You think I could live with that being the last thing I ever told someone I grew up with?! What kind of sociopath do you think I am?!?”

Shouko blinks in shock. “I-”

“No, shut the hell up for once and listen!” Bakugou’s eyes bristled with the sort of rage expected from him, yes, but… Shouko had seen that pain behind the eyes of her siblings, her mother, in the mirror. This boy knew he had made a mistake, and he loathed himself for it. “I can’t stop thinking about her. I haven’t slept since Deku was kidnapped. She was telling the truth when she apologized-"
I knew that! But I couldn’t fucking admit I was wrong, like some kind of spoiled kid! My whole body hurts when I think about it, my mind can’t stop screaming at me when I say it out loud, but it’s—I- fuck it, I was wrong. Wrong.

What was Bakugou talking about? Shouko really didn’t know, but some gut instinct told her it was better not to press on this topic. “Bakugou…”

She speaks slowly, but pauses when the boy shakily gets to his feet. His head is still pointed downwards when his voice emerges, quiet and with a touch of insecurity that feels completely foreign coming out of the mouth of Katsuki Bakugou. “That’s why I need to come. If I can’t grow the hell up and save her after all the unforgivable shit I pulled… After what the fuckers I hung around with did… Then you were right to call me a villain.”

Ah. Shouko feels something in her heart clench tightly at the memory of their violent exam and the words thrown around thoughtlessly. There’s a moment of silence between the two (later, she’d figure they were damn lucky no other guest down that hallway chose to exit their rooms while all this was going down) before Shouko inhales deeply, taking a leap of faith. “No. I was wrong to.”

Bakugou’s head tilts up, suspiciously watery eyes looking at Shouko in confusion. “Huh?”

“I was wrong to call you that because a villain would never admit his mistakes to someone like me in the name of saving someone else.” She extends a hand to the boy. “I’m sorry. We might never get along, and that’s fine by me. But we both care deeply about the same person, don’t we? For Izumi’s sake… Let’s work together to bring her back. We’ll become the heroes she can be proud of.”

There’s another pause, Bakugou not looking like he was certain he’d heard all that correctly. Shouko, meanwhile, knew what she’d said— and she’d meant it. She didn’t like Bakugou, no, but she knew genuine sorrow when she saw it. This was a man who’d left behind his treasured pride in the name of saving something much more important to him— the life of a person his heart had never been able to abandon fully. The silence ends as Bakugou makes a tsk noise, eyes darting to the side, although Shouko can see the way his eyes still crinkle with an unfamiliar softness. He accepts her hand, holding it in a firm grip. “… Then what the hell are we waiting for? Let’s save Deku.”

Underneath the bright hotel lights, two enemies make peace.

Izumi doesn’t know how long she’s been here. Anywhere from several hours to several days, considering she has absolutely no idea how long she was out nor does she have any way to mark the passing of time. She keeps wondering if perhaps she’s dead.

She can’t hear or see anything. It’s complete silence and pitch blackness, and it feels like something’s covering her ears and eyes to prevent any light or sound from entering. Her only real stimulation is the occasional need to swallow her saliva, as whatever is jammed into her mouth to gag her is preventing her from spitting it out— that and the burning pain in her arms, of course. Izumi knew she had badly destroyed them at the training camp, but each tiny shift of her body sends firecrackers of pain up each limb, her cries unheard over the gag. She can hardly move in the first place from how tightly she’s bound to… Whatever she’s bound to. She can’t see. It feels like some sort of gurney, but there wasn’t any way to confirm that fact. Not like it mattered, either— pondering little things like that was all that was keeping the girl sane. If she really is dead, Izumi thinks, this must be hell.

Thoughts of her friends looped like old movies behind unseeing eyes. Thoughts of sleepovers, of training together, of soft hair and mismatched eyes… Izumi had cried and cried for a while at the start once it became clear that even the power of One For All couldn’t break out of these bindings, the idea of her memories being the only things to keep her company here too much to bear. In a way,
she’s come to accept it now. At least she has something to hold tightly to.

Without any way to measure time, it’s hard to tell how long it is until her blindfold is torn off. It’s enough to make her jump, sending another rocket of pain up her arms. Green eyes blink as they try to adjust from total blackout to the bright lights overhead, colours slowly shifting into focus as whatever was blocking her hearing is removed at the same time. When she finally comes to, the sight of front of her makes her wonder if she’s dreaming- Shouko Todoroki is leaning over her, fully dressed in her school uniform and hurriedly working on getting her gag off. She’s… She’s being rescued…?! Once the duct tape and spit-soaked ball of fabric are finally removed, Izumi is able to find her voice, speaking weakly with strained vocal chords. “S-Shouko…?”

“Oh, Izumi.” The other girl speaks, an angel in human form as far as Izumi is concerned, and reaches down to gently cup her green-haired friend’s face. Izumi feels her heart patter. “It’s okay. You’re safe now.”

A wave of relief washes over Izumi’s entire body, and before she knows it, she’s weeping again. “Oh m-my god, Shouko, Shouko, I was so scared, you’re here, oh my god-”

Tears continue to fall down her cheeks even as Shouko leans down to press a kiss into her forehead. Izumi’s heart leaps in her chest. “It’s all going to be okay now. You don’t need to be afraid.”

*Shouko is here*, everything is going to be fine. Maybe Izumi’s a bit hysterical, but can she really be blamed for that given everything? “H-How long was I gone for?”

“That’s not important.” Shouko pulls back from her forehead to brush a lock of Izumi’s hair away from her damp cheeks.

The response definitely implies that she was out for one hell of a long time. It’s okay, Izumi can learn that later- for now, she’s overwhelmed in pure joy. “W-Where is everyone else? Can you undo my restraints?”

“Everyone else?” Shouko cocks her head, red and white hair falling over her shoulders in that way that made Izumi’s pulse rise a bit every time. “Undo them? You might have misunderstood.”

… There’s an uncomfortable twist in Izumi’s stomach at that particular statement. Maybe it’s just the carefree tone of the other girl’s voice when she says it, but something feels terribly wrong. “M-Misunderstood?”

Shouko leans down again, and a creeping shade falls over her expression as her reassuring smile morphs into something much, much sharper. “Why would I let you go when I’ve got you right where I want you?”

There was a beat of silence, Izumi completely unsure of what she’d heard. Her mouth opened to ask Shouko to repeat that- after all, such a sinister phrase was unthinkable from the bicoloured girl in this
situations, surely Izumi’s ears were still out of it thanks to the noise cancellers but was quickly silenced by Shouko swinging a leg over the gurney (is that what she was strapped to?) to straddle Izumi’s hips. The green-haired girl blanched, mouth going dry. “S-Shouko…?”

As the other girl leant down, Izumi watched in silent horror as Shouko’s eyes darken, pupils almost taking on a catlike cruelty before her skin starts sloughing off in grey clumps. Cold silver slop hits bare skin as Shouko melts away, a giggling blonde girl in a sailor uniform appearing instead. This couldn’t be real. What the hell was going on?! The smiling girl pressed another kiss over her forehead, one that made Izumi’s stomach flip with revulsion instead of joy like last time. A mockery of affection. “Himiko Toga! Nice to formally meet you. It was so cute, seeing you all beaten and bruised! I’m not supposed to do this, buuuuuut I couldn’t resist! You’re all mine now. I never have to let you go. This is what you wanted, wasn’t it? To have her hold you like this?”

Izumi Midoriya screamed at the top of her lungs. All For One fired through her body, begging to break through the restraints and run run run runrun run away from this, from the girl with a belt full of knives straddling her, from everything and everyone, but all she could do was howl in pain as her broken arms made crackling noises against her bindings. Toga made a hysterical giggling noise as she held tightly to her thighs in order to stay on Izumi’s body. “You’re so feisty and cute. I love that about you.”

There was the sound of a door slamming open as Izumi broke into sobs. “God dammit Himiko, didn’t Shigaraki tell you not to touch the kid? He’ll take your finger off if he catches you.”

Toga pouted, casually raising her eyes to the door just as Izumi wrenched her head in that direction. “Geez, Dabi, I wasn’t actually gonna do anything! I just wanted to spook her a little. It’s so boring just sitting here and watching her lie around idly- plus she looked so cute all broken like this! Aren’t we villains?”

“We’re villains with a game plan. Get off the girl.” With a long, childlike sigh, Toga reluctantly slid off the still-crying Izumi (though not before running short fingers along her midsection and causing another yell of terror). Izumi’s whole world was shaking, face heating up rapidly, and she could briefly see a scarred-up villain (Dabi?) in her peripherals muttering under his breath before smacking a miffed-looking Toga upside the head. “The goal is to break her down under sensory deprivation, not outright physical torture. I’m not coming with you if you get kicked out of here, y’know.”

Izumi makes a gagging noise as she struggles to hold down stomach acid, and some part of her that floats above her current panic attack marvels at the fact that neither villain really seems to react to the disgusting sounds currently emitting from her. Toga merely rolled her eyes. “Fiiiiiiine. When are we gonna get to really see some action? I’m bored!”

“Soon enough. For now, let’s just get the kid all bound back up and agree not to tell Shigaraki about all this.” Dabi responded.

The mere mention of all her sense-deprivation attachments sent Izumi into a deeper panic than before, thrashing wildly in her bindings as she ignored the howls of pain being sent up her arms. “N-No! Please don’t!”

“It’s not personal. This is just business.” Dabi replied as if it was a simple conversation as he picked up the gagging fabric and nearby roll of duct name, scarred eyes crinkling in disgust as the moist rag touched his skin. “Gross. Open your mouth.” When Izumi refused to, teeth clacking together hard, he merely sighed and covered her nose up until she was gasping for a breath. Rag stuffed in and mouth taped up, all Izumi could do was scream over the fabric as her blindfold and headphones were snapped back on, her last sight before she was plunged back into the hellish dark being Toga’s yellow eyes, gleefully seeming to glow with excitement as Izumi cried.
Were they still in the room, staring at her as she wept into the gag and spilled tears until her eyes burned under the blindfold? She had no way of knowing. All she knew now was the pain in her arms and the darkness overcoming every sense. Izumi Midoriya realized in that moment that perhaps she was in the last few days of her life. This could be the end.

Mom, All Might, Shouko, everyone… I’m sorry I wasn’t strong enough.

While one girl fell asleep crying into the endless dark, the other laid in a hotel bedroom. Kirishima had gone to spend the night in Bakugou’s room considering the lack of his own (and Shouko wondered if she was just imagining the blush dusting both their cheeks when the prospect of sharing a bed was brought up), meaning Ochako was now curled up next to her in bed. For all her naturally cute mannerisms, the brunette snored like a freight train, something Shouko had already learned along with all the other girls from their few nights at their ill-fated training camp. It wasn’t necessarily what kept Shouko up, though- not when thoughts of Izumi were on her mind.

Would they really be able to find her? They obviously had to try- not doing their best to bring the girl home wasn’t even an option- but the odds seemed stacked against them. All they had to go off was the address Ochako had overheard from Momo. It wasn’t exactly the goldmine of evidence one would hope to have when chasing down a criminal organization holding a hostage. And even with all that put aside, Shouko laid awake pondering how Izumi was doing. Was she in pain? Was she being fed, given water? Did she have a soft place to lay her head at night? Did she know they were coming for her? The idea of her scared and injured somewhere (given the state of her arms last time they’d all seen her…) was enough to make Shouko see red.

And then there was the topic of what she’d been trying to say when she was dragged through the portal, but… Just thinking about it made Shouko’s heart feel like it was trapped in a vice grip. So she chose not to. Icing over her feelings, despite her many steps in the right direction, was still second nature.

What time was it? Rolling over to the bedside table, Shouko opened up her phone from where it was charging. Almost midnight. She really should try and get a little sleep so that she was fully rested for tomorrow night when the four of them were meant to implement their rescue plan. The bicoloured girl was about to click the phone off before a sudden notification got her attention. It was from someone who had no reason being up this late given his usual sleep schedule:

Tenya: Shouko, if you’re awake, I’d like to meet with you.

Now that was an odd one to get this late. Tenya was usually the one preaching about the importance of an early bedtime on developing minds, even though Shouko knows he’s had deeper eyebags ever since Hosu (and oh, if she doesn’t feel mildly guilty about that one- had her story contributed to their trustworthy class president’s apparent lack of sleep?). For him to text her at almost midnight, it would have to be pretty important. A second text follows almost right afterwards.

Tenya: It’s about Izumi.
… Well, if there was any doubt about whether or not she was going before, it was thrown out the window. If it was related to Izumi or her current state in any way, shape or form, Shouko knew she’d leap on it. Before she even knew it, her fingers were moving to tap out a response.

Shouko: Where do you want to meet?

Tenya: Outside the hospital, if that’s not too far from your hotel room.

Shouko: I’ll be there as soon as I can.

Closing the chat messenger, Shouko paused at her phone background. Her lockscreen was a selfie she’d taken with Natsuo the first night they’d stayed over, and the actual background was another selfie- this one with Izumi. They’d put it through a filter, and although the green-haired girl had been understandably miffed at how the app had automatically lightened her naturally darker skin, they’d focused more on drawing cute cat whiskers and decorating the photograph with stars and sparkles. It was the kind of thing Shouko had never done before, Izumi’s smile being so bright that she couldn’t help but make it her background. The thought of this image being one of the last surviving images of the girl who’d saved her from a burning hell was…

Shouko steeled her lip, slipping out from the covers and making for her shoes by the door. She wouldn’t let it be the last. They’d find Izumi if they had to tear down all of Japan.

Chapter End Notes

CONTENT WARNINGS BEGIN

- GRAPHIC INTERRUPTED SUICIDE ATTEMPT (involving a scalpel + wrist)
- Intense and graphic suicidal thoughts
- Implied past sexual assault (mentioned)
- GRAPHIC PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE (mild sexual undertones)

CONTENT WARNINGS END. SPOILERS BEGIN.

So not too many warnings, but the ones that are there are big. Honestly, I feel like the quality of this story has dipped. I'm still enjoying it a lot, but... I dunno. I guess it used to be better written! Hopefully you're enjoying nonetheless. Please drop a comment or kudos if you enjoyed, come join us in the TPOMM Discord (https://discord.gg/bXjzUg5), and I hope to see you soon!

End Notes

So that's that! Reviews are my lifeblood, so please drop me one or a Kudos if you can!
Thanks so much, and I'll see you soon!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!