The Answer Lies Here, Inside Of Me

by wancemcwain

Summary
When Midoriya Izuku is taken from his mother, all clues lead to All Might himself getting involved in the case. When the child is rescued after four months, he and his mother need to be put under witness protection to avoid the villain who took Izuku to retaliate against them, even while in jail; he's just THAT powerful.

But when it turns out the villain in question has a very specific reason to go after the Midoriyas, it becomes a personal matter for the Symbol of Peace to make sure they are as safe as they can be, in the most secure place in Japan: UA Hero Academy.

Notes

SO! This story is one I told myself I would complete and THEN post but I'm halfway through chapter 3 and I can't stand it I want to share it I really love this one

I have the whole plot figured out and how it ends and everything so if I put my ass to it I might be able to keep a regular schedule but I can't promise anything so please bear with me fhagdf

Also I know this specific plot of Izuku being kidnapped and experimented on by AfO is fairly common and have read it a few times since I started writing this but hey it's a good plot point so please don't think I'm plagiarizing anyone I seriously wrote this way before reading any other story related to the subject

PS extra credit if you read the title to the melody of Bet On It
It was cold in his cage, darkness surrounding him even with the light of dozens of monitors cutting through the shadows. The beeping of machines and dripping of the pipes overhead were not enough to muffle the sounds coming from the other cages. Wheezing of lungs barely working to take a vital, sometimes final breath. Growls and grunts of creatures in deep, fitful sleep. The grinding of non-human teeth against metal bars.

Izuku had learned days ago that crying would work no more; it would not make his mother appear to calm him down as it always did, it would not alert people nearby that he was in danger, it would do nothing for the pain in his tiny body or the hunger gnawing at his empty stomach. At the mere age of two, the only thing he was capable of doing by himself was walk and talk a mile a minute, holding onto his mother's skirt as she smiled down at him.

That was the last thing he remembered before he was brought here, forcefully ripped from his mother's grasp as she screamed and ran after him. A useless effort as a mass of black goo enveloped him and took him away into this unknown place, where he had been shoved into this jail and promptly been forgotten unless they came by to prod at him to make sure he hadn't gone into shock.

He had been hopeful at first, having just began to learn about heroes and what great feats they were capable of. He was sure they would come for him to deliver him into his mother's arms once more, bright smiles shining down on him as they ruffled his hair and told him to be careful next time, just like how he always saw on TV.

Then the days started passing.

Truth is, Izuku couldn't tell very well how much time had passed. For a boy his age a minute could feel like an hour, hours like days and days like weeks. There were no clocks or windows anywhere. The passing of time was a myth that only the whisper of a door sliding open was able to provide,
and even then it was all subjective. He'd spent the first few hours of his capture crying and screaming for help until he passed out of exhaustion and stress. He'd wake up who knows how long after, forgetting where he was and what had happened to him, thinking he'd fallen asleep on the cold kitchen floor while watching his mother cook like how he'd done multiple times before.

But then he'd remember everything and the wailing would begin anew.

The other cages—whatever was in them, would react to his cries and answer them, screeching and gurgling noises filling the room until Izuku's throat was raw. Some of them had stopped making noise after a some time, now just lying still in a lump in their place, never betraying a sign of life. After some time the doors would open and a couple of people would walk in, opening the cages of the immobile ones and dragging them out, ignoring Izuku's shouts for help.

Sometimes they would come for him. Pick him up and carry him like luggage to another room with even more machines. He'd be strapped to a chair, prickled with needles too big for his tiny veins as red flowed out of him towards the machines, everyone ignoring his trembling chin and watery eyes. After a few times of this he'd just lay boneless like a doll, letting them do whatever they wanted.

Food and water seemed like a faraway dream, his tummy not even growling anymore to complain. Every time his blood was drawn, a different tube would flow something towards him, a pinkish liquid that must've been the only thing keeping him alive, enough to keep his heart beating but not to help him escape.

Not that he could even scratch the bars of his cage with his tiny, rounded nails.

It was a day—night? Evening?--that everything around him was quiet. The beeping of the machines had long since blended into the background of his mind, and not a single one of the creatures in the neighbouring cages was moving anymore. He was lying on his back, staring blankly at the steel roof on top of him and trying to remember what color the sky was when the door opened again. His arms throbbed in response, the wounds from countless needles still bleeding under his bandaged skin. The rest of him stood still.
“Is this all your investigation could achieve?” A deep masculine voice said, tsking as he walked around the room.

White light flooded the place, blinding Izuku as if someone had set fire to his eyes.

A different voice spoke. “It's all part of the preliminary process. We have to eliminate all possible weaknesses of the transition before trying for bigger ones; it's all about protecting assets, sir”

The first man hummed, his heavy steps getting closer as he walked through the cages. “Weaknesses” He said, his voice low and grating. “A necessary step to reach the most powerful creature alive, I guess”

The steps turned around, slowing down as they approached the cage holding the trembling child curled up trying to protect his eyes. They stopped right next to him, the sound of sterile tile squeaking against shoes as the man crouched down to look inside.

“And who is this little guy?” The man asked, only curiosity in his voice. Not a single hint of worry about the emaciated toddler inside.

“We wanted to test how the process would work in someone without a developed quirk. A child below the age of presentation seemed appropriate” The second man chuckled. “Ironically enough, one of our tests revealed he's quirkless. Two joints in his pinky toe”

“Should I start with him now, then?”
“Not yet, no. We're still running preliminary tests on him. We did a lot of bloodwork before we discovered he's quirkless, so we had to remake those with a different point of view”

Izuku's tremors had intensified under their words. Quirkless? Izuku was still young, but he'd developed mentally at a rate most people classified as genius, and his speech was at par with a five year old. He knew well what that word meant, and it scared him and saddened him terribly. Wasn't a quirk what all heroes had?

“Oh well” The man with the deep voice said, straightening up. “Just make sure he doesn't die until you have some results. He looks ready to keel over”

“We'll reinforce his nutritional supplement” The second man said, following the other out of the room. The lights were turned off once more, and as the door closed behind them, Izuku uncovered his face to be swallowed in darkness once more.

One time, a few weeks ago, Izuku had run up to his mother to complain how bored he was and pull her to play with him.

Now, laying on the cold metal of his jail, he missed the rainy days were his only entertainment was watching the drops fall from the clouds.

How long had he been here? How was his mom? Were the heroes looking for him? Izuku would've laughed had he had the energy for it. Of course they were; they were heroes! It's just that this place
was hidden very, very well. Obviously. No other reason they'd take so long.

They hadn't given up on him.

The two men from that time had come again a number of times after a few generic faces had emptied and cleaned the other cages. They'd come back with more of the grotesque creatures to fill them back up. Each time they were larger, making more noise and causing a ruckus as they slammed against the cages until an annoyed worker would come in and poke them with a stick that had them screeching and left a smell of burned flesh clogging the air.

Would they have used that stick on him if he hadn't stopped crying so long ago?

The times they took him to the chair were farther and farther apart each time, and so the amount of the pinkish liquid they gave him diminished as well, leaving him tired and disoriented. It was kind of a blessing in disguise though; he was so famished and dehydrated he would pass out most of the time, making the imprisonment a bit more bearable. Sometimes he woke up and there were new bandages on his arms, and he'd be in a position he hadn't been in when he fell asleep, as if he'd been carelessly thrown back into the cell and just left there, without care if his leg was twisted wrong or if his arm ended up underneath him and had lost all sensitivity by the time he regained consciousness.

He was so weak he could barely lift his head, and the world swan around his vision every time he tried to move a muscle, which is why he didn't question it when the ground shook in a muted movement; he must've been imagining it.

But then it happened again.

Izuku blinked, his dry eyes nearly sticking shut from the movement. The tremors kept happening,
each time closer to each other and feeling nearer and nearer as they passed. An earthquake?

The door slammed open and a bunch of people in white coats rushed in, turning on the lights to Izuku's great pain. They ran to the monsters in the other cages and did something that Izuku could not see from his supine position, but it must have been painful as the room was filled with horrible screaming. The sounds that followed were of metal doors being opened and immobile lumps of flesh being carried away by the men through another door Izuku had never noticed before in his terror.

He'd been left behind, alone.

The ground kept shaking, but this time it wasn't just that. He could hear shouting, yelling and explosions. The sound of a wall crashing down and then--

Footsteps.

Coming. Running.

Towards him.

Izuku would've whimpered if his throat didn't feel like sandpaper.

Those footsteps were ones he could identify easily; heavy and with a purpose, even when their owner was running instead of calmly strolling through.
His cage was in the front of the room, in the middle of the first row, directly in front of the main door. Rushing in through the open door, the man panted as he stopped in front of his cage, fumbling to open it.

Izuku could see the bloodied hand reaching down towards his face.

And then, as soon as it had appeared, it was gone.

The man roared in rage as he was pulled back, and the laugh that filled the room had Izuku almost jumping to his feet. The only thing he felt, however, was a jolt of pain at the mere thought of moving his muscles.

There were more noises, this time right next to him, and Izuku could identify most of them from all the videos he'd seen of heroes at the job. A body being slammed against a wall and pummeled mercilessly. Concrete cracking from an unimaginable force. Grunts of pain. Grunts of anger. The muted sound of an unconscious body hitting the floor. Panting.

More voices were coming closer, but Izuku could barely process what they said as he focused on the new, big, clean hand that had appeared in his field of vision. It touched his face gently, and it was so rough, so calloused, so warm. Izuku would've cried if he still had had enough tears to do so.

He was moved, gently, lifted up with a care he hadn't felt in what seemed like a lifetime. A couple of hands big enough to hold his entire tiny body; one cradling his head and supporting his fragile neck muscles, the other holding his back and legs. Cupped like a newborn puppy.
The face that came into view was what Izuku had been dreaming about for so long, he almost thought he was having another hallucination.

The bright eyes. Strong jaw. Blonde hair pulled up in twin bangs high above his head. The smile that set millions of hearts at peace, toned down to a gentler, softer, sadder curve of the mouth. Willing strength from his very soul and feeling like he swallowed sand with every breath, Izuku opened his mouth to utter his first words in months.

“All...Might...”

The tiny child passed out in the hero's arms, and the Symbol of Peace could not stop the rebel tears that rushed down his cheeks.

Chapter End Notes

This is way shorter than I'm used to, I usually try to post 5k chapters each time but can't do much with how much of the time Izuku was passed out now can I (Also I might need to keep some blanks in there for uuuuuuuh future plot purposes I swear)

ngl I teared up writing that last line, ESPECIALLY when paired with the one in the second chapter, which is the same chapter but from the heroes POV

If you're wondering why I made Izuku so young in here, literally the only reason is that I needed Aizawa and Yamada to still be students at UA when all this happened, so if they are 15 years apart and Izuku is 2 years old, they are at most 17 and in their third year at the time (I know their birthdays but I'll do the math with Japan's school year later to figure out when exactly all this is taking place bear with me) Why do I need them there you ask? Have yall seen gakuen babysitters sjdghsd

I'll post chapter 2 next week! That one's ready!
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Take this as early NYE gift, as I said before it's the same chapter 1 from the heroes perspective.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Finding All for One's hidden lab had been a job of weeks.

When a frantic woman had come running into the police station, screaming about her baby having been taken from her own arms by a strange black goo, they knew it was something out of their power. The person in the district with the best connections to local heroes was Detective Tsukauchi, who had arrived soon after to interrogate the frantic young woman—so young, so much terror in her face—to make sure her panic wasn't clouding her memories. If her son had disappeared right in front of her eyes then this was a job better suited to heroes that the police force.

Her words rang true every single time, and so Tsukauchi had thrown himself into the investigation. There had been some previous reports the past years about people disappearing in similar ways; out of nowhere, in front of anyone bearing witness, swallowed up by a black mass. One of the missing people had been large enough that a bystander could take a couple seconds of video before he was taken away, and upon seeing the recording Inko Midoriya had burst into tears.

The disappearances had been going on sporadicaly for the past months, but it seemed it was this particular case of a kidnapped kid that sent the public into a panic; if they would take a child, then *who was safe?*

Leads were nonexistent. No evidence was left behind, no pattern was found, no criminal organization had claimed credit for the panic in the streets. Tsukauchi was at a stall for days.
The boy's mother would be at his office almost daily, asking for any update or offering to help. There was little she could do, but Tsukauchi could not bring himself to ask her to leave; the loss of a son was something he couldn't imagine the pain of, and he would not deny the poor woman the company she so desperately needed. With every passing day she looked thinner, hair messier and eyes duller. It was difficult to function when the light of your life had been ripped from you so suddenly.

It wasn't until a day when Tsukauchi was taking a break—and by God did it feel awful to spend a second without looking for that child—that he saw a light at the end of the tunnel.

His friendship with All Might was not well known to everyone, but they were close enough to warrant occasional calls when the Number One hero could answer. He'd just wanted to get some weight off his shoulders, maybe a bit of advice in how to proceed the investigation when all his resources were dwindling.

All Might had sounded sympathetic, having heard the news through the grapevine rather than the media, and wanted to help Tsukauchi as much as he could.

Until he mentioned the black goo.

All Might had gone silent, and then asked him if he was sure. He'd answered yes, he was; the mother had recognized the method on a video.

All Might told him he'd talk to him later, abruptly ending the call and leaving Naomasa blinking astounded at his phone.

His astonishment grew even more when a mere hour later All Might himself landed in front of his door.
He really could clear cities just in a couple of leaps.

“Naomasa, show me the video” He'd say in lieu of a greeting, his face serious as he'd never seen it before.

While watching the recording, his face turned sour, eyebrows furrowing severely and casting his face in angry shadows. His ever-smiling visage twisted into a snarl.

All Might had not only given him a lead. He'd given him a name.

“All for One?” Tsukauchi whispered in disbelief.

His Lie Detector quirk had rendered it impossible for Toshinori to keep the secret of his quirk when first asked by the detective, and so he knew all the story and truth of his powers. Including its origins.

The villain Toshinori spoke of was not new to him, but it was a name he'd only heard from his friend's stories, a being of tale that seemed too high above mere mortals to bother people in their small community.

What was the biggest criminal of Japan doing kidnapping a two year old boy?
All Might had delegated his agency in Roppongi to all his sidekicks except for one. A willowy man with a serious face who seemed just as infuriated at the mention of the villain and his recent deeds, even if his face never betrayed a thought.

The first thing they did was meet the unconsolable mother. The woman couldn't believe her eyes at seeing the imposing figure smiling softly down at her, offering his hand in a greeting far too western for her. She accepted to shake his hand, because the physical reassurance of the greatest hero having come to her aid personally was something she didn't know she needed. Izuku would've lost his mind; his favorite hero right here, for the world to see.

The other man settled for a deep bow, his stature making her feel like a building was coming down in front of her. Sir Nighteye, he'd introduced himself, the main sidekick of All Might who had come to help find her son as much as he could.

And the first order of the day was gently asking to touch her arm.

Staring into the haunted eyes of the woman, Inko almost fainted when a small smile tugged at the lips of the stoic man in front of her.

“Midoriya-san” He said in a calm, soothing voice. “I don't know exactly when, or how long it will take, but I can assure you this: you will have your son, safe and sound, back in your arms”

Inko had collapsed to the ground, only avoiding falling completely by the strong arms of All Might catching her on the last second.

She'd caught her footing again, and promptly launched herself at Nighteye, crying in a mix of relief and stress that had her exhausted in a couple of minutes, asleep on the couch in Tsukauchi's office with Toshinori's huge jacket enveloping her completely.
The search had taken a new turn upon learning of the culprit, with nearly half the hero force participating to not only save the child and all the other people kidnapped, but also to bring down the biggest villain of all. The principal of UA had joined in with tactical support, mapping out the most likely areas where they could be hiding. Rescue heroes by the dozen searched every nook and cranny for suspicious activity while All Might followed any trace of All for One's presence, always ending up in dead ends.

Every hour, every day, every week that passed made them grow more frantic. Not even the reassurance of Nighteye's vision slowed them down; it didn't matter that the kid would eventually be saved, it mattered that any second he was not found was a second he was at the not-mercy of that monster.

It was nearing the mark of four months when they finally found the place.

Even with the ongoing search, the heroes still encountered villains on the daily. These fights usually derailed them from the search for hours or even days if the damage was too extensive. One of these villains, with a quirk that allowed him jump up several feet in the air and drop with the weight of a mountain had left a gigantic crater where he had attacked, and while the Wild Wild Pussycats evaluated the damage for Pixie-Bob to recover the terrain's natural shape, Ragdoll felt it.

Multiple presences that she had not felt before during their search, hidden deep below the ground and out of range of her quirk. It was a feeling that sent chills down her spine. Multiple average people, a single one with a weakness so small she couldn't define it, a few beings who seemed to be suffering merely by being alive.

And then there was him.

Such a faint presence, with so many vulnerabilities; a frail body, a shaken psyche, soft bones still
developing and a heartbreaking lack of the very essence that filled most heroes.

So many weak points could only belong to a child.

A terrified, hurt child.

It had been hard to pinpoint the entrance to the laboratory, and All Might had to convince himself to not resort to punching a hole through the earth lest he wanted to accidentally bury the innocent people inside.

It had been nerve-wracking. Nighteye had to walk past several buildings for days, “accidentally” bumping into people who came out of them and shaking his head with each one. It was times like these he cursed the inability of his quirk to be used more than once a day.

When he finally managed to hit the jackpot and touch someone who worked for the villain, it was time to formulate the plan and storm the place.

The cover was, ironically enough, a pharmaceutical lab. The entrance was controlled by a buzzer and was supposed to keep intruders out and secrets in. A well placed punch sent the door flying off its hinges, setting off an alarm that had the few people inside scrambling down a hallway.

As the heroes stormed the place to apprehend everyone on sight, All Might and an entourage of the strongest heroes of the city made their way down towards where they were running off to, guiding them right to their boss in their panic. The elevator that the men in lab coats clambered into was easily ripped out of the tunnel and thrown to the side as All Might jumped down, dropping for what felt like hours as the ground never seemed to get closer.
He finally touched down with a mighty impact that shook the ground, and the thick steel doors closing off the main lair were torn apart by his bare hands. Inside, even more people scurried away, screaming and setting fire to every visible file, laptop or machine they left behind to eliminate as much evidence as possible. All Might rushed through the lab, knocking people out easily at speeds the human eye couldn't register. As he went deeper and deeper through the labyrinthine halls, he stopped at a bend at the sight he caught at the very end.

His greatest enemy, his master's murderer.

All for One running out of a room, making eye contact for a second before bolting down another hall.

Dread curled in the pit of Toshinori's stomach, thinking what could be so important the villain didn't charge to attack him. He ran after him, slamming his feet on the walls for greater propulsion as he gave chase.

There was a door at the end of the hall, seemingly the last corner in this endless maze, and All for One seemed desperate to reach it before All Might reached him. It didn't happen, and All Might slammed his fists hundreds of times in a second on the villain's back, throwing him against the wall and repeating the process on his face.

All for One finally activated one of his many stolen quirks, sending out a repelling wave that threw the hero off of him. He wiped the blood out of his eyes and hurried through the door.

The kid was the only one left in his cage, all the other subjects disposed of and taken away by the workers who had managed to get away while All for One took care of all the data in his own office.
He'd almost reached the kid when All Might grabbed his leg, pulling him back and smashing him into the ground, finishing the job with enough strength and rage behind each punch to finally put the villain out of commission. The bastard was just too powerful to drop dead from that, it seemed. Not that it mattered where he was going.

Leaving the actual capture of the man to the heroes that came in after him, Toshinori bussed himself with the fragile form laying inside the cage. He was so small, all skin and bones, sunken cheeks and dull eyes staring up into nothingness. His hands had never been as gentle, as careful as he was while picking up this child, this baby that had done absolutely nothing to deserve this fate.

When the boy set his eyes on All Might's face, his green eyes lit up with a gleam that left the hero weak on the knees, and when little Izuku used the last dregs of his strength to say say his name, awe and reverence in each syllable, Toshinori felt his heart tear itself out of his chest and land in the hands of the creature in his hold.

Chapter End Notes

It's a short lil thing but I felt Izuku's rescue needed its own chapter.

Also I am ABSOLUTELY doing the 'haha I haven't updated since last year' joke for chapter 3 because I'm The Worst tm
Izuku was so small in comparison to the bed he was in, in any other situation it would've been funny.

Not this time though.

Children's hospitals had much more appropriate beds, smaller and softer to accommodate them better. Colorful and covered in animal printed sheets to bring some joy to the kid using it. Izuku's condition upon his rescue had been so severe he had to be rushed to a hospital more suited for hero injuries than civilians. No other hospital had the amount of available equipment that he needed to survive the shock he fell in after being rescued.

No civilian hospital expected someone so young to be in the state he was in.

The sudden rush of adrenalin after realizing he was being saved had almost sent Izuku into cardiac arrest, his little body falling limp in All Might's hands as he passed out. After that it was a rush to get out of the underground lab and to the surface, which Toshinori managed in record time with the only structural damage being the fake lab used as cover that he blasted through to reach the ambulance waiting by the site. Luckily his little heart was still beating when they hooked him up to the monitors, but it was so faint it might as well have not.

All Might had to remind himself he would only slow down the ambulance with his weight if he
rode with the little child, almost reluctant to let him out of his sight before remembering he could reach the hospital in a couple of minutes with a well placed leap. Musutafu was a really small city compared to Tokyo. He made sure the unconscious body of All for One was being taken away for his immediate arrest and imprisonment properly, and then took off.

He arrived in time with the ambulance, making his way in right when they were wheeling little Izuku into the emergency room, an oxygen mask placed firmly on his face as the hospital lights made his pale skin seem even more so. The boy's mother arrived not long after, escorted by Tsukauchi himself who made quick work of getting rid of the media swarming the entrance as if summoned by the sight of All Might jumping through the buildings, completely out of place in their small city. They didn't even know about the child they'd just rescued; just wanted to get as many camera time of the number one hero as they could as they speculated what he was doing so far from the capital.

Inko had been frantic, looking around as if her son would just appear from one of the doors and run into her arms. Toshinori had walked up to her, settling a gentle hand on her shoulder.

“He'll be fine” He told her softly. Her green eyes a perfect copy of her son's as he had gazed up at the hero minutes ago. “Remember what Sir Nighteye said. He'll be safe and with you sooner than you realize”

Inko took a shaky breath, hands clutched over her chest. “I-I just can't believe it...he's right here and I can't, he's not--!”

“You will see him soon” Toshinori reaffirmed, his other hand joining the other so both were a firm anchor on the small woman's shoulders. Was everyone in this family so small? “He was...not in the best conditions” He admitted. “He had to be rushed here due to the gravity of his state. I've seen similar cases before; chances are he'll have to stay here for a while, but you might be allowed in before the day ends”

Her lower lip trembled, fat tears collecting at the corners of her eyes. All Might might've been a bit
ashamed to admit later even his superpowered senses didn't allow him to foresee the speed at which she threw herself at him, hugging him with as much force as her soft arms allowed against his muscled form. All Might was the kind of hero that was usually too busy to properly interact with his fans; it was always defeat the villain and jump immediately to the next emergency. He wasn't used to this kind of contact since most people around him were too intimidated or too in awe to consider he might be okay with the occasional handshake or one-armed hug for a camera.

If his memory served him correctly, this was the first time he was embraced so wholly since his master's passing.

He carefully wrapped his arms around the woman, barely managing to wound around her shoulders with their height difference. This case had dragged him all the way here to finally find and capture his greatest enemy, with the consequence of this poor woman's innocent child suffering for it to be made possible.

Toshinori could allow himself a moment to offer her the reassurance she so desperately needed now that it was all over.

When Inko was finally allowed to see her son, she fought to keep her breathing even as she followed the nurse down the hospital halls. The kind woman leading her tried to talk to her all the way there; about how brave her son was and how strong he was to have endured all that time on his own. Inko recognized the attempt to make her feel better, but she could only think how she would have preferred her son to not have gone through all this at all, brave or not.

The room she was let into was way too large for the little figure of her son.

Izuku swam under the sheets of a bed too big even for her, an IV catheter connected to the back of
his hand administering him the nutritious fluids that would be his main source of food and water for a few days as his body got used to solids again. An oxygen mask was secured over his mouth, likely brought over from the pediatric wing seeing how it was properly child sized. Izuku's muscles were so weak he had trouble expanding his ribs to breathe on his own. A tiny children's neck pillow prevented his head from lolling around as his neck muscles couldn't handle the strain just yet.

His arms were covered in bandages.

“Oh, Izuku” Inko whispered, both hands covering her mouth to hold back the sobs racking her frame as she moved to stand by her son's bed. She would be damned if she interrupted her little angel's rest with her crying.

It seemed like it was just yesterday when she got the positive pregnancy test. Seemed like hours when she carried him within her, excited to finally meet the new life she was creating. Seemed like seconds since Izuku was born, screaming into this world and ready for all the adventures life had waiting for him.

He was only two years old.

It wasn't fair. It wasn't fair!

Inko could only pray Izuku would forget about the experience, that her overwhelming love and attention might be able to erase any trace of this moment from his memory. But her baby was also so, so smart; he was already more vocal than most kids his age, and could hold semi-coherent conversations with her with no problem. They'd even created their own little language, a mix of hand signals and specific noises with a sprinkle of actual words. It was an entire system that Izuku had come up with and it was such a special thing she shared with her little light.
“How could I let this happen to you” She cried, dropping her face into her hands and quietly sobbing into them.

The soft click of the door handle turning alerted her of someone opening the door, and it startled her into standing up straight, forgetting to wipe the tears drying on her cheeks.

The looming figure of All Might dressed in casual clothes stood by the door, awkwardly hovering there without entering the room as his eyes traveled between Inko and her son. A plastic bag hung from his hand.

“Midoriya-san” He greeted, finally deciding to step inside, carefully sliding the door shut behind him. “Sorry for the disturbance”

“N-Not at all” Inko could only say as she dried the tear tracks from her cheeks. He went past the bed and towards the little table near the chairs on the other side of the room, setting the bag down.

“I brought you some things from the cafeteria” He said, voice small and completely out of place with his image. “I-I imagine you won't want to leave him any time soon, so...”

She smiled, huffing a laugh as she covered her mouth. “Thank you, All Might”

“Please, call me Toshinori” He said. It was a risk to let people know his true name, but it was common enough to let it slide this one time. Besides, he felt like he would be seeing the child and his mother very often, and didn't want her calling him by his hero name all the time.
Inko smiled, eyes crinkling in that way Toshi couldn't help but compare to Nana's smile. “Thank you, Toshinori-san”

He stayed for a while, moving over one of the chairs to sit by the bed after making sure with the nurses that Inko could lie down on the bed next to Izuku. She ran her hands through her son's hair, working out tangles and matted strands as best as she could; Izuku would be able to get a sponge bath once he woke, but even with four months worth of dirt Inko could not stop touching him, making sure he was there at her side.

She and Toshinori talked and talked, about the differences between Musutafu and Tokyo, the intricacies of hero work, their favorite time of the year, Izuku's obsession with katsudon since the moment he could chew solid food. They talked about anything and everything under the sun; everything except the secret lab Izuku had been kept in and his kidnapping and subsequent rescue.

It was not necessary at the time.

“Midoriya-san” Toshinori started, fumbling with his pockets. “I'd like you to have a way to contact me, if you ever need it”

Inko shook her head. “Oh no, I wouldn't like to impose”

“I insist” He said, pulling out his phone. “I'll be staying in the city for a while, to work out the case with Detective Tsukauchi. Even through these terrible circumstances, you and your son have made it possible for us to capture who might be the most dangerous villain an the country”

Inko's eyes widened in surprise. Had it really been someone like that who had taken her son?
She finally relented and took out her own phone, exchanging numbers while trying not to feel too giddy; sure, Izuku was more of a hero fan than her even at his age, but this was the number one hero who had given her his personal number! She might've been a bit of a fan herself, but could control herself well enough. Had this happened when she was just a teenager she probably would've been jumping and crying in joy.

Toshinori stood up, sparing a last worried but relieved glance at Izuku. “I have to get going now. Detective Tsukauchi should be coming by sometime later today or tomorrow to talk to you”

She nodded. “I'll be right here”

“He might want to talk to young Midoriya once he awakens, as well” His gaze traveled to the sleeping child. “I know he's too young to be able to answer many questions, and also will be very tired, but Tsukauchi is really good with children and will make sure to not overstep any boundaries”

Inko looked conflicted, hand stilling on her baby's hair. “Izuku is smarter than you might think, and he can speak well enough to hold a conversation” Her hand went to hold her son's little one. “I'll let him talk to Izuku when he's strong enough to speak, but I will stop him if I see Izuku becomes uncomfortable” She frowned then, hard eyes fixed on his face, determined.

Toshinori smiled, glad to see the little boy had such a strong woman protecting him. He wouldn't have put it past her to have jumped All for One herself had she come across the man.

“I would expect nothing less, Midoriya-san”
For the next few hours Izuku slept. He seemed to be having trouble getting used to the soft bed, occasionally wriggling in place or grunting as he tried to turn around but Inko held him firm against her side so he wouldn't get tangled in the wires and tubes monitoring him. Contrary to what one might think he didn't react negatively to physical touch, but rather seemed to sink into it, fingers trying but failing to close around hers and nuzzling as much as he could against her chest with the oxygen mask in the way. It was as if he recognized her through his dreams.

Inko hoped they were nice dreams.

She spent the night awake, looking over him and guarding his sleep. Every once in a while a nurse would pop in quietly, bow quickly to apologize for the interruption and jot down Izuku's vitals before leaving. At some point a doctor walked in to check on him as well, and Inko noticed she wasn't wearing her white coat; if it weren't for her introducing herself as Izuku's doctor on shift, Inko would have thought she was another nurse.

“'It's a precaution we're taking with him, in case he wakes up” The doctor explained, reading over his chart. “Considering the...circumstances of his situation, we wanted to avoid him seeing anyone in a lab coat during his stay”

Inko's heart clenched at the thought. She hadn't even considered it; Izuku had been experimented on, held in a lab for months and having who-knows-what done to him. Those bandages on his arms were just clean replacements for the ones he already had when they rescued him, the puncture wounds littering his skin were scarred over from the too-big needles they used and how often they would pierce his skin with them before they healed properly. There was the possibility they would be permanent, and they didn't even know if they could get any needle near Izuku once he awoke.

It was in the first hours of the morning that Izuku woke up.

After Toshinori had left, the nurses suggested Inko turned off the lights and closed the blinds, since they didn't know whether Izuku had been kept completely in the dark during his kidnapping. If he did, the harsh lights of the hospital and the rays of the sun could be too much for his sensitive eyes.
So when Izuku woke up to a dark, white room, with machines beeping and tubes and wires around him, he whimpered.

Inko had startled at the sound, not having noticed his eyes had fluttered open. She quickly sat to be in his field of vision, but for some reason seeing her made Izuku's face twist more into despair.

“Izuku? What's wrong, baby? It's me, it's mama” She talked to him, slow and soft as she gently held his hands in hers.

Izuku sniffled, but no tears came from him as he tried to wriggle away from her. The weakness of his body and the pillow holding his head in place prevented him from doing much more than burrow further into the bed.

Inko didn't know what to do. She wanted to call a nurse or doctor but was afraid the presence of more people would send Izuku further into his fit, but also didn't want to move from the bed and leave him alone. His eyes were frantic as they darted this way and that, trying not to focus on her, and his monitor kept beeping faster and faster as his heart accelerated. Her son was scared, and she could only sit by his side.

His heartbeat increasing must have sent an alert to the nurses' station, and a few seconds later the door opened, a nurse stepping in with worry on his face.

Izuku closed his eyes and whined at the sudden light flooding from the hallway, and the nurse quickly shut the door behind him.
“Did he wake up?” He asked Inko, carefully getting as close as he could to check Izuku's vitals while the boy's arms trembled in an effort to bring his hands up to scrub his eyes.

Inko nodded, eyes unable to leave her son. “I don't know what's wrong, he's shying away from me”

The nurse sighed, deciding other than Izuku's increased heart rate and breathing he seemed to be alright. “He might be thinking he's still down there. This room is too sterile, too similar to where they got him from. I'll talk to the doctor about moving him to the pediatrics wing” He looked at Izuku as he wriggled in place, head turned away from his mother. “We can't confirm it yet, but he might've had hallucinations due to dehydration while captive; he might be thinking you're not real”

Inko's eyes watered. Her son couldn't tell she was right there?. “What can we do?” She whispered, almost unheard through the machines.

“We need to convince him that what he's seeing is real. Something that would make him understand he's no longer in that lab”

But what could that be? If his own mother was not enough to make him feel like he was safe from harm, what would help?

Inko saw her phone lying on the bedside table, and she knew.

When Toshinori reached the room, the nurse on shift was waiting for him.
The call he'd gotten from Inko had been rushed and he almost couldn't understand what she was saying, but he finally managed to calm her down enough for her to explain Izuku had woken up and she needed his help.

The nurse saw him arrive and sighed in relief.

“All Might, I'm so glad you could make it” He said, not a hint of acknowledgement to being in front of the greatest hero in the world. It always surprised Toshinori, how medical staff were always so professional around him.

“What happened? Is young Midoriya alright?” He asked, concerned. When he had given Inko his phone number he didn't expect her to call so soon; if something went wrong with the child he would tear All For One apart limb by limb.

“He seems to think he's still in the lab. Thinks his mother is a hallucination and won't listen to her. We can't take the machines away or remove the IV while he's in treatment so that seems to convince him further he's still trapped” The nurse relayed to him. If it was any other person he would've immediately removed all those stressors from the room, but as critical as Izuku was they couldn't just take away all his support least they wanted him to stop breathing. “Midoriya-san seems to think seeing you there will make Izuku understand he's been rescued. We can't know for sure, but it's worth a try”

Toshinori nodded, standing up straight. He had offered the woman her help if she ever needed it, and if this was what she needed, he would deliver.

“Slowly, please” The nurse said, knocking on the door two times before slowly pushing the door open.
The first thing Toshinori heard was the frantic beeping of the machines as the boy's fear was read by them. Then he noticed the darkened room and how young Midoriya had been blocked out of sight with a blanket, which was put back down after the nurse closed the door behind him.

“Sorry” Inko said. “He doesn't like the light”

Toshinori nodded, approaching slowly.

Izuku was whining with his eyes closed, shaking in place. The hand with the catheter was twitching, as if the mere knowledge of the needle under his skin was setting him off.

He stopped by the side of the bed, placing a hand softly on the mattress next to the boy.

“Izuku?” He whispered, eyes fixated on him. “Open your eyes”

The new voice seemed to make Izuku still. His heartbeat went down a bit, but still faster than it should, as he opened his eyes.

When his brain processed who exactly it was he was looking at, they finished opening completely, jaw slackening in a silent gasp.
His vitals started going down so suddenly Inko was scared he'd pass out, but finally he stabilized, heart beating only a little faster than normal while his body stopped shaking as he gazed at the hero in front of him.

Toshinori smiled softly, a tuned-down version of his hero smile, and knelt down to be at eye level with the kid. He reached to hold his hand, and almost cried when he saw it was so small he couldn't even wrap it completely around one of his fingers.

Izuku's mouth opened and choked up sounds tried to come from his throat, but it wasn't until he turned and finally saw his mother than he could speak. “Ma...”

Inko's eyes flooded with tears as she smiled, nodding at her son as he smiled weakly at her, finally understanding she was real and there with him. “Yes Izuku, hi” She cried. “Mama's here”

When the tiniest laugh bloomed from the child, it was as if the sun had breached through the darkness in the room.

It was a group effort from half a dozen nurses to properly move Izuku with all his equipment to a room in the pediatrics wing. It was a welcome change; the floors were a navy blue tile with soft contrasting cream colored walls, forests and animals pictured on them. Soft stuffed animals lined the shelves around the room next to picture books and fairy tales. Izuku was much more at place in a room like this, and he looked way more comfortable surrounded by color and warmth than in the sterile white room he'd been in before.

They had brought in a low intensity lamp so Izuku could start getting used to the light again, and if Inko barely moved from his side before, now it was impossible to get her away from her son as he cuddled against her side, her arm thrown around him as she read him a picture book she'd chosen
from the shelf.

He had finally gotten his bath, but had fussed until Inko had been allowed to be the one doing it, and now he was squeaky clean and tired, but he refused to let his eyes close as he looked at the pictures on the pages as Inko read to him. He had also been brought food a while ago, but he could only swallow a couple spoonfuls of mashed potatoes and bananas before he closed his mouth, refusing any more, and now the tray lie forgotten on the table next to them. It would be a while until his stomach could hold more food.

A knock on the door interrupted Inko and both Midoriyas turned in unison to look at the door as it opened to let a man inside.

The man took off his hat and stopped by the door. “Midoriya-san? I'm Detective Tsukauchi” He introduced himself. So this was the man Toshinori had told her would come talk to her.

Inko nodded at him. “Please, come in” She looked at Izuku to gauge his reaction, but only saw pure curiosity in his eyes as he followed the man who sat down on the chair next to the bed.

He looked like something straight out of those old cop shows they would play on TV late at night, with his long brown coat, hat and white gloves. He strode purposefully but somehow softly at the same time, as if he was trying to show a gentler side to the kid in the room but couldn't help his years of training as an officer of the law.

Izuku's eyes were fixed on him, wide and shiny as he struggled to turn his head towards him.

The detective leaned forward casually, smiling at Izuku. “Hello Izuku, it's nice to meet you”
Izuku blinked at him. “Tsuchi” He said, voice tiny and high pitched.

Naomasa laughed at the way the kid said his name. He was too small to pronounce it properly, but it was a cute nickname. “That means 'earth', did you know?”

“No” Izuku said in lieu of shaking his head. Seemed he had an easier time speaking than moving after he’d gotten the appropriate hydration and with the help of a few healing quirks of the medical staff.

“Izuku, the detective would like to talk to us, would that be alright?” Inko asked him, and Naomasa was surprised at how she spoke to him; softly but to the point, not a single baby word or funny sound. Izuku looked for a moment, considering, and then hummed in assent.

Naomasa had worked with kids plenty of times, but Izuku had to be the youngest he'd ever have to deal with, and also the situation was really delicate; Toshinori had told him of the freak out Izuku had had the night before and he had to be careful to not say anything that would trigger the kid into another panic attack.

“Do you like heroes, Izuku?” He asked, remembering how Toshinori told him he'd calmed down at the sight of him.

Izuku smiled brightly through his oxygen mask. “Yes!” He was so excited at the mention of heroes, he had to take a second to breathe deeply after the single word. “All Might!”

“Is he your favorite?” Naomasa asked. He leaned in to whisper to him, playing it up like some big secret just between them. “You know, he's a good friend of mine. He helps me a lot catching bad
“He punches” Izuku said, closing and opening his fists. “Smash!”

“He sure likes smashing” Naomasa agreed. Then turned a bit more serious. “Tell me Izuku, you’ve seen All Might catch bad guys, right?”

Izuku stilled for a second, eyes glazing over in a faraway look. He hummed.

“Can you remember how he did it? What moves he used?”

“Like how we watch those hero fights on TV, remember?” Inko jumped in, rubbing her thumb over Izuku's hand. He looked up at her, smiling a little. “We like to narrate the fights as if we were there, right?”

“Yes, the moves” Izuku giggled, looking happier. “All Might jumped” He started, and Naomasa leaned forward even more, listening carefully. “Really fast! Then, huh, it shook”

“The ground?” Inko beat him to the punch, knowing exactly what Izuku was saying but choosing to help Naomasa understand him better instead of just telling him afterwards.

Izuku smiled. “The ground” He continued. “Then, um, door was open, and...” He went silent and stood still. They didn't hurry him, waiting for him to find his voice again. It was less than a minute but it sure felt longer. “And he ran”
“Who is 'he', Izuku? All Might?” Naomasa asked him. If he had taken the time to think it over, then this part was important.

Izuku frowned. “No. The man” Was he talking about All for One? He'd have to confirm with Toshinori later. “Saw his hand. Then gone. Then All Might was there! And I fell asleep”

Naomasa met eyes with Inko, then continued. “Did you see that man a lot?”

“No” Izuku said. “Others. In a chair. Arms hurt” He whimpered, looking down at his bandaged arms. “Red” He looked meaningfully at the IV line administering fluid to him, apprehension on his eyes. He seemed to be fine enough with it as long as he didn't see the needle, but the catheter still made him uneasy.

Red? Where they taking blood from him? Naomasa had seen his medical file; Izuku had dozens of puncture wounds on his arms, too big to be from injections.--Almost as if they were trying to harvest something from him. But what would they want with his blood?

“And” Izuku started on his own. “A-And...” He choked up, sucking in a shaky breath even though no tears appeared on his eyes. Naomasa stood up, alarmed that he'd triggered a bad memory on the child and ready to call a nurse if needed. Inko held Izuku's hand, petting his hair and hugging him as best as she could. “He, he said” His mouth twisted in sorrow, completely out of place in a child so young. “Quirk. No quirk”

“He didn't have a quirk?” Naomasa asked, confused. Why would one of the villains talk about not having a quirk?
“No” Izuku cried out. “Me”

He was looking directly at his own feet.

Inko looked at Naomasa, then at her son. “Izuku? What do you mean 'no quirk’?”

“He said, he said” Izuku swallowed, throat closing. “My toes”

Naomasa knew now what he meant. “You have a double joint”

Izuku started sniffing, but no further sound made it out. His eyes watered, but he didn't start crying. That worried Naomasa and even more Inko; a child that age should be crying his little heart out over something so upsetting, and even more when Inko knew Izuku was as prone to crying as she was. Once they'd both started wailing just because a neighbour brought them a cake to thank Inko for helping get her cat down from a tree with her quirk.

Why wasn't he crying?

“I think that's enough for today” Naomasa said, standing up. He looked for something in his pockets. “Midoriya-san, here's my card. I'd like to talk to you once Izuku gets discharged. I think it's be better to talk further about this once you're comfortable back home”

Inko nodded, grabbing the card with one hand. It was a bit rude, but her other hand was hugging
her son and she wasn't going to let go of him any time soon. “Thank you, detective. I'll call you once we're out of here”

Izuku was still sniffling, eyes still looking at his feet.

“Izuku?” Naomasa said. Izuku looked up at him, still a bit out of it “It was really nice to meet you”

Izuku blinked at him, and then smiled a little. “Bye bye Tsuchi”

Naomasa grinned at him, putting on his hat and tipping it at him. “Bye bye, Zuku”

When Naomasa left the room, his smile vanished.

What had they done to that kid?

After the conversation Izuku had with the detective, Inko talked with the doctor about what Izuku had said about being quirkless, and a new doctor with an X-Ray scan quirk was brought in so they didn't have to move him around too much. The doctor introduced himself to Izuku and made small talk with him from the foot of the bed, casually getting his job done while distracting the child. He jotted down his findings on Izuku's chart and then subtly handed it over to Inko.
Izuku did indeed have a double joint on each pinky toe. Clinically, he was quirkless.

Inko held her son close to her chest, and hummed a made up song until he fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Oh hey, I haven't seen you since last year :D ndgfhsdgaf sorry

I know y'all want the babysitting part of the fic but that's gonna be a couple chapters further in, I can't just put Izuku in a lab for 4 months and then forget all about it, you know? Kid needs his rehab.

I'm absolutely winging it with how a 2 year old would speak. I'm not a big fan of the 'mommy pwease can I haz' way of baby speech so I just try to make Izuku speak like a 5 year old would and cut some words out or rearrange it, idk.

Izuku's gonna have SO MANY nicknames

I didn't even know 'Tsuchi' was an actual word until I googled it ngfhg how fitting

Izuku does indeed have PTSD but I've never written it before, I read about how it would present itself in children and I have a more or less good idea on how to go about it but I still don't wanna be disrespectful with it ykno, there's also already a list of things that could trigger a panic attack on him but instead of giving you the list I'll just write it and let you see which ones they are. They should be fairly obvious considering his situation though

quick question to you guys: do you only watch the anime or read the manga? Because this story WILL have spoilers for the manga; particularly the Overhaul Arc. I'll tell you in the notes when it happens just in case but jsyk
A week later, when Izuku had regained enough strength to sit on his own and no longer needed the oxygen mask, he'd been discharged from the hospital.

Inko had been given instructions on the special diet he would need to follow and a series of exercises to recover muscular mass. Izuku would still need intravenous fluids while at home since he couldn't hold both food and water at the same time, and could only eat so much each day. He'd gathered enough strength to move his head around, but still used the pillow as it tired him too much to hold it upright all the time, and he could raise his hands up to his face easily enough.

He'd also been mostly able to sleep peacefully through the nights, with how tired the recovery made him and how some of his meds had that little side effect; but a couple of times he had woken up screaming, looking around frantically for his mother and holding onto her for dear life as he refused to look around the darkness of the room.

He had been such a good patient all the staff was both sad and glad to see him go, because they'd grown attached to him but also because it meant he was recovering and, frankly, they hoped to never see him again at the hospital if possible. They had gotten Izuku a little surprise before he left, though; a special visit from Recovery Girl herself. The heroine had known of Izuku's case, but had been unable to help him as her quirk drained the patient's energy and Izuku didn't have any to begin with; even now if she used it it would probably send Izuku to square one regarding his physical therapy. Izuku had been ecstatic no less, happy to see another real hero.

“I've heard a lot about you, Izukkun. They tell me you've been a good boy?” She asked him, walking besides him as Inko wheeled him down the halls towards the entrance. Her white coat was bundled up and tied around her cane.

Izuku nodded, smile blinding as he kicked his feet in excitement. “I've been good, ma'am!” He said. “Are you going to heal me too?”
“I'm afraid not, dearie” She shook her head, patting Izuku's hand. “My quirk would not help you right now, but you seem to be doing more than okay on your own”

Izuku looked sad for a moment that he wouldn't be able to receive one of her healing kisses, but he brightened up nearly instantly. “I can eat now, a whole bowl!”

She laughed heartily, nodding her head in approval. “That's wonderful, Izukkun. I know you'll be just fine”

They had been assigned an officer named Sansa as escort for their trip back home, a cop with a cat head that Detective Tsukauchi himself had recommended. They were picked up by a van specially chosen for it incorporated lift so Izuku wouldn't have to be picked up from his wheelchair and then put back down over and over. Only when they reached the apartment complex did Inko pick him up to walk upstairs while officer Sansa carried the wheelchair behind her. Izuku stared at the cat-headed officer over his mother's shoulder, eyes shining in joy as Sansa made funny faces at him.

Outside their apartment stood another officer, this one with a dog head—and Inko didn't know if it was just a thing for police officers to have animal characteristics or if they were chosen specifically because their appearances would put Izuku more at ease—who told her he'd personally made sure the place was safe and they could go in without worrying.

“We've also set pawtrols around the block, woof” The officer said. Izuku looked at him in wonder and stretched a hand forward. To Inko's surprise the officer chuckled and leaned down, letting Izuku pat the top of his head a couple of times until the boy was happy with it. “Hope you're happy to be home, pup”

“Doggy” Izuku breathed out, still starstruck.
Inko stifled a laugh and turned the handle, opening the door wide and letting officer Sansa walk in first to set the wheelchair down for her to sit Izuku on it. Izuku looked around, as if in disbelief he was actually back home. His arms were too weak to wheel himself around, even if the chair was appropriate for his size, so he had to wait until Inko thanked the officers and closed the door so she could move him through the apartment.

“What do you want to do first, baby?” She asked him, crouching in front of him so he wouldn't strain his neck looking for her.

Izuku looked around the room. “Um...um, can I go to my room?”

“Of course you can sweetie, you don't need to ask” She smiled at him, standing up and kissing the top of his head as she took him there. She stopped in the middle of the room to let him decide what to do next.

Izuku stared at his room in silence, as if trying to make sure it was how he remembered it. There was his bed with the soft green blanket his grandma had gifted him when he was born, his toys tidily stored away in the see-through box in the corner; right where he'd left them. There were a couple of posters of All Might hanging on the wall next to his crayon drawings. Everything was well kept and clean, spotless despite his absence.

Inko stared at him like a hawk, ready to step in the moment he showed the first signs of distress to comfort him and hold him tightly in her arms. She waited and waited, hands twisting the edge of her sweater.

Izuku finally looked at her, face not betraying his thoughts at all. It unerved Inko to see that kind of look on her little son. “TV? Please?” He said, softly like trying not to disturb the order in the room.
Inko felt her heart clench. He was so calm. “Y-Yes, of course, honey” She stammered, turning him around and leading him to the living room. “Do you want to sit on the couch, or would you rather stay in the chair?”

Izuku hummed. “Couch? 'S softer” He said, voice way tinier than it had been that morning. Inko was getting worried now; Izuku had been scheduled for psychological therapy as well, but they still hadn't had the first appointment. She was worried Izuku was having trouble processing his return home, and most of all it bothered her how...subdued he was acting. Any other time Izuku would've cheered and maybe cried in joy at being back home after so long, like that one time they spent two weeks in Hokkaido to visit Inko's parents.

She carefully lifted him up and set him down in the middle of the couch, setting pillows around him in case he lost balance and fell sideways. “Are you cold? I can get you your blanket”

He shook his head, and said nothing more. Inko stood there a moment, awkardly looking at him before snapping back to the present and turning on the TV, tuning it to the local Hero Network that Izuku liked to watch before bed. She sighed relieved when his eyes brightened up at the sight of the heroes on screen, a show listing off new debutants and their quirks.

“Izuku, I'll be right here in the kitchen, alright? Call me if you need anything” She said, pointing to the open kitchen right behind the couch. She was a bit nervous at leaving his sight, but she wanted to check the pantry and fridge to see what she was missing for Izuku's diet.

Izuku's eyes widened a bit, mouth opening just enough to be noticeable, and he tried to turn around and see the kitchen, but he couldn't move that far and besides the back of the couch reached way above his head. He looked conflicted and his lower lip started trembling, but he just settled and looked down at his hands. “‘Kay” He said, voice quivering slightly.
Inko’s heart broke. “Would you like to sit in your high chair instead? You wouldn't be able to see the TV that well, but you can be with me in the kitchen”

Izuku seemed to consider the idea before nodding, raising his arms in the ancient ‘up’ gesture. Inko smiled relieved and picked him up, carrying him with her and setting him up where they both could see each other all the time.

It would be a bit of an extra effort to make sure Izuku was comfortable at home once more, but she would go far and beyond for him.

Toshinori had been with Naomasa in his office when he got the call.

“Hello, Chief?” He answered. He had gone silent while Tsuragamae spoke on the other side of the line, and whatever he'd said had turned Naomasa’s face from casual and professional to shocked, then angry as Toshinori had never seen him. “I understand sir, I'll see to it immediately...Yes, I'll bring him with me” He ended the call and looked at Toshinori, the furious gleam still in his eyes.

“Is something wrong?” Toshinori asked. “I can leave if you're busy--”

“You're leaving indeed” Naomasa interrupted him, snatching his coat and hat from the hanger and swiftly putting them on. “With me, right now” He marched out of the door, Toshinori scrambling to follow after him. He didn't even manage to ask what happened again when Naomasa turned around. “The Midoriya residence had a break in”
Toshinori stilled his steps, the redoubled them as he hurried to follow Naomasa out of the station. “Are they alright? Did they catch the perp?”

“The hero on patrol managed to catch them soon after they broke the door down” He explained as they got into the car. “They tried to attack Midoriya-san but she managed to keep them away with the use of her quirk, long enough for the hero to jump in and make the arrest” He turned on the siren, driving off as fast as he could.

“What about young Midoriya, Izuku?” Toshinori asked, worried about the boy being under attack so soon after leaving the hospital.

“He's fine. He was in his room so they couldn't reach him” He said. “He got woken up by the noise, so he might be startled still. It's one of the reasons I brought you; he calms down faster around you”

Toshinori pursed his lips, looking ahead towards the road. The cars were thankfully enough clearing the way for them to pass. “That can't be all; he should be comfortable enough with just his mother already. What other reason is there?”

A second passed in silence, then Naomasa sighed. “Tsuragamae has suspicions the break in might have been work of one of All for One's minions”

Toshinori stared at him, wide eyed and mouth agape, then clenched his teeth in fury. “Even from Tartarus...How low do you have to be to want a kid hurt so much?”

Naomasa pursed his lips, finally seeing the apartment complex around the corner. He turned off the siren and parked by the other police cars. “Villains, Toshi. They're heartless”
They got out and rushed upstairs as fast as they could, officer Sansa saluting them as he let them through into the apartment.

The place was a mess; picture frames and potted plants broken to pieces and scattered across the floor, decorative statuettes stuck in the walls and furniture toppled over. It got worse the further they went into the house; plates and glasses turned to sharp shards in the kitchen, the TV on the floor by the dining table, and some drops of blood staining the carpet leading to a considerable spot that, luckily, didn't manage to be big enough to be a puddle.

Tsuragamae popped his head from a room at the back, gesturing for them to come over.

It was clear on sight that it was Izuku's room, the bright colors and—Toshinori stored in the back of his mind—All Might posters decorating the room marking it as a child's territory.

Said child was cuddled up in his mother's lap, hidden from view as she wrapped her arms tight around his trembling form on the bed.

Inko's eyes screamed bloody murder as she stared at the wall, rocking her son carefully in her arms as she whispered to him, soft words clashing with the thunderous expression on her face.

She was spotless, and a shiver ran down Toshinori's back when he realized that blood out there was most likely all the villain's.

“Midoriya-san” Naomasa walked in, Toshinori hot on his heels. “Are you alright?”
“We're fine” She answered curtly, then closed her eyes and took a deep breath, letting it out slowly. Her face twisted in grief as she held Izuku closer to her. “We're fine”

She turned to look at them and seemed to just now realize Toshinori was there. She looked down at Izuku and nuzzled against his hair, nodding at the hero to come closer.

“Izuku?” He said, having a flashback to their meeting that night at the hospital. The situation was similar, but also so, so different.

Izuku peeked over his mother's arm, stil trembling in fear but maintaining eye contact all the same. Toshinori knelt in front of them, mother and son fixing their green eyes on him so intensely, he felt they were looking right through him. This time, Toshinori thought, it wasn't just about reassuring Izuku.

He reached for Inko's hand, slowly pulling it away from Izuku but keeping it in his hold. The child's breathing started picking up at part of his shield being taken away, but All Might brough his other hand up to replace it, carefully lying his palm on the boy. His hand was big enough to cover him completely, and its warmth as it rubbed his back helped calm down Izuku enough that he turned around slightly in his mother's hold to look better at the hero.

Inko's breathing seemed to be turning deeper as well, her hand clutching Toshinori's as her gaze drifted between him and her son. The adrenaline of fighting off the intruder was wearing off fast and she was left shaking, a cold sweat covering her from head to toe. She found comfort in the gentle blue eyes staring at her, reassuring her that they were safe.

“Everything's alright now” He said, softly and letting a small smile cross his face. “And you know why?”
Izuku hugged his mother's arm, lips twitching a bit. “Because you're here”

“Because I'm here” Toshinori grinned. “And your mother as well, such a brave woman, isn't she?”

Inko flushed as Izuku nodded, his little smile warming her up.

Naomasa cleared his throat, stepping closer but keeping his distance; the three of them seemed to have formed a little bubble of comfort that he didn't want to accidentally burst. “Midoriya-san, I think it would be better if you came with us to the station for the night” He glanced down at Izuku. “Both of you”

Inko shivered at the thought of leaving the room. “Is-Is that man...”

“The perpetrator has been detained. He's currently on the way to a local jail to await for trial some ways away from here” Tsuragamae spoke from the corner of the room. He'd observed patiently as the hero calmed down the little family. “The hero on patrol who caught him will be waiting for us at the station to get the full story for Detective Tsukauchi, woof”

She nodded, taking a deep breath once again to ground herself. She leaned down to talk to her son. “Izuku, do you remember Detective Tsukauchi?”

“Tsuchi” Izuku whispered, looking at said man. Toshinori covered his laugh with a cough at the nickname. So cute!
“That's right” Inko nodded. “We'll be going with Tsuchi, alright?”

Izuku whined, turning around to bury his face on his mother's chest, holding onto her with all the strength he could muster. Inko carefully extracted her hand from Toshinori's hold and ran it through the boy's hair. She stood up slowly, letting the hero keep his hand on Izuku's back as she followed the detective outside, Tsuragamae closing ranks behind them.

She was so focused on holding Izuku tightly against her, she didn't remember his wheelchair until they were halfway through the station, but Naomasa assured her they had a few spare in the office they could use, so they wouldn't be cumbered with it later on. While all the sudden energy drained from Inko and left her feeling cold and shaky, it had the effect of putting Izuku to sleep, his face hidden in Inko's neck as his breathing evened.

When they arrived, both Inko and Toshinori were equally surprised to see the police station crawling with heroes, strategically positioned all over the place to cover any blind spots the building could have; some outside the gate, some in the lobby, others crouched on the roof on the lookout. Splashes of colorful suits and flashy quirks that had Inko on the brink of waking Izuku up so he could see them. She of course decided his sleep was more important, and sat back quietly as Naomasa showed his ID to the officer watching the gates.

“Tsukauchi, what's this all about?” Toshinori asked him, getting out of the car after the detective and hurrying to open the door for Inko, helping her out and watching close behind her like a protective shadow.

“It's a security measure” Naomasa answered. “If Tsuragamae is right and that villain was one of All for One's minions, there's no telling how many there are prowling around. We called all the heroes that were off duty for the night to keep the precinct, and the Midoriyas, safe from any more attacks” He looked around at the dozens of heroes patrolling around the building, some new to the job, some well known to the public. “Somehow I feel like we'd need even more”
Once inside the building, Naomasa brought them straight to his office, closing the door and hurrying to the little closet he used to hang his coat and extra changes of clothing in, and pulled down a box from the shelf on top. He started pulling blankets and a couple of pillows from it, quickly setting them down on the couch.

“Every once in a while I get so caught up in work I spend the night here, so I tend to keep some stuff to be more comfortable when I do” He explained, making sure it looked comfortable enough. “You can set down Izuku in here, or lie down as well if you wish, Midoriya-san”

Inko nodded, a shaky but grateful smile on her face as she sat down and set Izuku down beside her, making sure he was comfortable on the pillows and warm under the covers. She felt another blanket be placed carefully over her lap, and she turned just in time to see Toshinori draping another one over her shoulders, covering her completely in a soft, warm cocoon.

“You looked cold” He explained. “Also a bit pale. Would you like something warm? I know Tsukauchi keeps hot chocolate hidden in the kitchen”

He winked conspirationaly at her, and Inko had to cover her mouth to stifle a giggle. She nodded nonetheless, watching him leave the room as Naomasa followed him with his eyes, a deadpan look on his face at the clear theft of his treats. He would've offered them anyway.

“I want you to remember that; the Symbol of Peace steals my chocolate” He said, and smiled at the actual laugh it got from her. He sat down on his chair and looked over the report that had been left on his desk. Pressing the intercom on his phone, he called for the hero on patrol to come in.

A moment later there was a knock on the door and a new person walked in, wearing a hero suit so scandalous Inko felt the need to cover Izuku's eyes despite him being deep asleep.
“Hello” The heroine smiled wide at them. “My name’s Midnight, I’m a third year student at UA. I was assigned to patrol your home tonight”

“Midnight is a hero-in-training with a provisional license” Naomasa explained, rummaging through his drawers until he pulled something out and threw it at the heroine. She caught it and pouted at him, holding it at arms length. “There’s a child present, Nemuri. Just humor me please”

The teenager huffed but complied, tugging on what Inko now recognized as an oversized sweater that reached her mid-thigh. “You’re no fun”

“Midnight, could you recount the events of tonight? Just to verify everything’s alright in the report” Naomasa asked, shuffling through the pages.

She nodded, sitting down on the chair in front of Naomasa’s desk, turning it to face both he and Inko. “I was finishing doing a quick check around the block when I heard something being slammed. I ran as fast as I could towards the building and up to the apartment; the door was broken to pieces and there was shouting coming from inside. When I made it in there was a man all dressed up in black with a ski mask on like those cliche thieves from american movies” She huffed, crossing her arms. “Midoriya-san was using her quirk to keep him at bay, walking backwards into the kitchen so the villain was in between her and the objects she wanted to pull towards herself. Very smart move on her part, I must say”

Inko flushed, bringing a hand to her face. “It was just motherly instinct, really”

“Regardless, I know pro heroes that can’t think past their muscles. You have a good head on your shoulders” She nodded emphatically. “When the villain tried to lunge at her she started using the shards of the broken pots and glass around the lobby, and the dishes from the kitchen to try to knock him out. All that happened in the couple of seconds it took me to get to them, mind you; he seemed really desperate to reach them. I used my quirk and put him to sleep as soon as I arrived, and then notified Chief Tsuragamae of the break in”
Naomasa nodded, setting the files aside. “Everything seems to be in order. Did you manage to get some information from the villain before he was taken away?”

Midnight frowned. “Once I had him cuffed and he woke up, he seemed to be very scared. He kept saying how ‘he’ was gonna kill him and how he had to get out of there. Chief Tsuragamae thought he might be referring to the villain that kidnapped Izukkun, since the attack was so soon after the rescue”

Naomasa hummed, resting his chin on his hands. “We might need to put extra protection to his cell as well then, if we want more answers”

Right then the door opened again, Toshinori walking in carrying a tray with a few steaming cups. “Ah, young Midnight, I was told you would be here” He said, handing her one of the cups.

Midnight grinned at him, glee on her face at the presence of the hero. “Thank you sir, how considerate” She winked at him, and Naomasa threw a balled up paper at the back of her head. “Ow!”

“He's like thrice your age, keep it down”

As Nemuri pouted at the man, Toshinori set down a cup on Naomasa's desk and then took the rest to the couch, sitting down next to Inko and offering her the biggest one.

“Sorry it took so long, I'm a bit useless in the kitchen” He said bashfully, rubbing the back of his head.
Inko took it with a grateful smile, and noticed there were two left on the tray. “Did you make one for Izuku too?”

“Oh, yes” He said. “In case he woke up while I was gone; didn’t want the little one to feel left out. I know he can keep down more food now so…”

“Naww, that’s so sweet” Midnight brought a hand to her chest. “You’d be such a good dad, All Might!”

Toshinori blushed, coughing into his fist. Inko smiled, picking up the cup for Izuku. “Thank you, I’m sure he’ll appreciate it” She knew the sweet smell of chocolate would eventually rouse Izuku from sleep, and sure enough the boy was shuffling under the blankets, nose twitching like a little bunny’s.

“Mama?” He said, and Midnight squealed in delight at his tiny voice.

Inko leaned down carefully and kissed his forehead, fixing his pillows so he could be sitting up comfortably. “How are you feeling, honey?”

“Tired” He mumbled, rubbing his eye with a chubby fist. “Chocolate?” He asked, still sniffing around while his eyes fought to stay open.

Midnight was going to die, right there.
“Hi sweetie” She said softly while Inko helped Izuku take a sip of the drink. Izuku looked at her over the rim of the cup, blinking curiously at the new person. “My name's Nemuri, but you can call me Midnight, nice to meet you!”

Izuku pushed the cup away, a chocolate moustache left on his lip. “You're a hero?!” He asked, momentary joy making him forget all previous events of the night.

“In training” Midnight nodded, standing up to crouch in front of him. “I'll be a hero by the end of the year. I hope you'll be cheering me on!” She said, winking at him and sticking her tongue out in a funny face, thumbs up as well.

Izuku laughed in response, clapping in excitement at meeting a new hero. It felt like the hearts of everyone in the room melted at the same time.

Naomasa looked over the scene with a smile, glad that Izuku had been pulled out of his latest scare at least. His smile dimmed as he remembered he still had some questions to ask Inko that he'd chosen to wait until they were home to discuss; he just didn't expect they'd be attacked the same night Izuku was discharged.

“Midoriya-san” He started, getting the attention of the woman as Midnight distracted Izuku with stories from her patrols. “If it were possible, I'd like to discuss some more things with you” He glanced meaninfully at Izuku. “Important things”

Inko's face fell, worry etching her features as she looked at her son, still being entertained by Midnight. She understood Tsukauchi wanted to discuss things that could be harmful for Izuku to overhear, but she didn't want her baby away from her after tonight; not out of her sight where she couldn't be there for him if he got scared again.
A hand fell on her shoulder, and her eyes found Toshinori's as she turned around.

“I could take care of him for a few minutes” He offered, smiling reassuringly. “I'd be sure to bring him back to you at the minor sign of him being uncomfortable, of course, but...ah” He rubbed the back of his neck, looking away bashfully. “He seems to be fine around me, so I thought...”

Inko bit her lip, eyes falling to her lap as she fell deep in thought. “I know he is, I mean” She let out a little laugh, brushing a strand of hair form her face. “You're his favorite hero”

She turned towards Izuku, petting his hair softly to get his attention. He looked up at her, eyes bright and chocolate 'stache twisting up along his smile.

“Honey, would you be alright being with All Might for a while?” She asked him while cleaning his face with a swipe of her thumb. His eyes widened, shining in awe at the idea. Inko decided to drop the other shoe. “You'd be away from mama for a while though...”

His face fell, fear slipping in his expression as the idea processed through his sharp mind. He started shaking his head, fists coming up to clench on his mom's skirt. Toshinori stood up, Midnight moving aside to let him take her place in front of Izuku, his face capturing the boy's attention back to him.

“Izuku, it's alright” He said, voice soft and soothing. Toshinori found he didn't really know where this careful way he had with the child came from; he'd never really interacted with kids before—other than kissing babies when he was stopped for interviews or after a fight with a lot of public. It was as if there was something about this kid pulling him in. “You haven't seen them yet, but there are a lot of heroes here right now! Don't you want to go out there and meet them? I will be with you the whole time, and I'll make personally sure you are safe and comfortable, okay?”
Izuku looked conflicted, torn between wanting to stay within the safety and comfort his mother's arms provided, and taking the chance to spend time with his favorite hero; the one who could beat any villain and save everyone with a smile.

The one who rescued him.

Izuku, face still twisted in uncertainty, raised his arms to be picked up.

Toshinori smiled brightly at him, picking him up carefully—and rejoicing internally at how much heavier he already felt compared to a week ago; he still was as light as a feather for All Might, but the difference was telling nonetheless.

Inko stood up, blankets sliding off of her and the two mugs in her hands left behind on the little side table, and held Izuku's hands in hers, leaning in to kiss his cheeks over and over again. “You're so brave baby” She cooed. “I'll be back with you as soon as I can, I promise” She held out her pinky, the most sacred promising tradition to a child like Izuku. He reached out and linked his pinky with hers, and Inko shook it up and down while promising to be as quick as possible, Izuku's frown turning into a little smile while Toshinori chuckled at the duo.

Midnight leaned against Naomasa's desk, arms crossed as she watched the scene unfolding before them. “Am I the only one thinking they look straight out of a Christmas greetings card?” She whispered to the detective, getting a snort and a tap on the arm where he could reach.

“Stop it” Naomasa said, grinning nonetheless. His eyes traveled to the trio in the middle of the room, and he couldn't help thinking they did look kind of adorable like that, even if Toshinori absolutely dwarfed the other two. It kind of added to the charm, actually.
Midnight winked at him, then pushed herself off the desk. “Izuku! I'll go with you as well!” She called out to the boy, smiling at him as he stared straight at her before nodding silently.

Toshinori walked leisurely out of the room, allowing Izuku to keep his mother on sight until the last second over his shoulder, and then the door closed behind them.

Inko sighed shakily and sat back down on the couch, grabbing one of the pillows and hugging it to her chest; the warmth and soft scent left behind by Izuku comforting her. Naomasa winced sympathetically; it wasn't as obvious since Inko was an adult and Izuku just a little child, but she was just as affected by being separated from her son as he was. Maybe even more.

He couldn't even begin to imagine how it must felt to let him out of her sight for even a few minutes when she just got him back.

During those four long months, Inko had deteriorated at an incredible speed. She couldn't sleep, couldn't eat, couldn't work or do anything without feeling horribly guilty; she couldn't forgive herself for every single second she wasn't trying to find Izuku. The deep bags under her eyes that had been ever-present the past weeks had gotten better with what little sleep and relief she'd gotten this past week, but they were still visible and Naomasa had the feeling they might very well be permanent.

“Now, Midoriya-san” Naomasa started. “I need to get some questions out of the way, if that's alright with you?”

Inko sighed, nodding and rubbing her eyes with the heel of her hands. “Of course. I'd just like to get this done as fast as possible, please”

Naomasa nodded, picking up a pen and notebook. “First of all, may I inquire about Izuku's father?”
Out of nowhere, Inko's face turned distant, a mix of harshness and sadness swirling together in her eyes. “Ah, Hisashi” She said softly. She picked up her abandoned cup of chocolate and took a long, comforting gulp of it. Naomasa didn't hurry her; it made him glad to see her enjoying a treat for once, even if it was just to steel herself for what seemed like an uncomfortable subject. She set the cup on her lap. “We got married too fast, too young. He wanted to make it far in the entertainment industry, and so he jumped at the chance when he got offered a job in a big american network”

“How long ago was this?” Naomasa asked.

Inko laughed humorlessly. “Two years ago, more or less” She looked down at her hands, a sour smile on her face. It was really unfitting on her.

Naomasa did the math in less than a second. “But...that's Izuku's--”

“Age? Yes” She nodded, rubbing her forehead in exhaustion. “I got the news I was pregnant a few weeks after Hisashi accepted the job. I was supposed to go with him, but when I told him...” She trailed off. “I never...we never really talked about it, but Hisashi didn't want to have children. He was too career oriented and didn't want any distractions” She looked up, hard eyes setting on Naomasas' shocked ones. “I told him if that was the case, then he wouldn't need me there distracting him either”

Naomasa felt a chill go down his spine.

“We fought about it for a long time, until the time came that he had to leave” She leaned back against the back of the couch, taking another sip of her drink. “I decided to stay and have my baby, and he said he couldn't deal with so much while working on his future. I said that was fair, if he didn't want to be a father he didn't have to” She shrugged. “So we got divorced and he left. I stayed here and had Izuku, raised him myself as best as I could. Hisashi at least acknowledged that he was
a responsible part in the process, and sends me a check every month to help take care of Izuku. They have never met, and never will, and we're fine like that.

Naomasa jotted everything down, making some notes on the side to try and find as much info about this man as he could, try to contact him if possible. Even if he was not related to the case, the kidnapping and rescue had made national news and there was a chance he'd known about it. It was just a routine thing, to discard every possible person related. Every blood relation of Izuku would be investigated as well, but the father was the only one no one had any information about.

“Do you think he could've been...knowledgeable about Izuku's kidnapping?” He asked her.

“I didn't tell him, and I haven't heard from him in years, so I don't think so” She said, frowning and staring out the window at the starry sky. “I honestly don't think he has anything to do with this; he's very self-centered, but he's no villain”

Naomasa nodded, finishing up his notes and jumping to the next question, eager to get Midoriya-san's mind away from these memories.

Izuku held on tight to All Might's arms around him, hiding his face in his chest as the hero walked through the building. Midnight walked next to him, chatting his ear off about everything and anything she could think of to fill the silence around Izuku.

The boy was nervous about being away from his mother, even while warm and safe in the greatest hero's arms. He couldn't help his body shaking with every step they took, knowing he was farther and farther away from her by the second.
“Izuku, it's alright” Toshinori soothed him, rubbing his back softly. “I swear, nothing bad will happen. Me and young Nemuri will be here for you every second” He leaned away to look the boy in the eyes. They were wide and scared, looking up at him with the same fear he usually saw on people he rescued from disaster zones. “Look around you, Izuku”

Izuku's lips quivered, a whine sprouting from them as he dove in to bury his face back into the hero's front, clutching at his shirt. Toshinori had stopped walking, and Midnight was no longer speaking, so the silence was deafening around them.

Truth was, it was all the blood rushing to Izuku's ears and blocking out the outside world. As the seconds passed and his heart evened out, small sounds starting making his way to him.

The first one was the chirping of crickets.

Soft grass rustled by the wind.

Careful steps of people around them.

The silence of a city deep asleep.

Izuku turned around slightly, a single green eye visible as he inspected his surroundings. The concrete wall separating the precinct from the outside world was within sight, and on the other side he could see people marching by, looking around in high alert. They wore colorful costumes dimmed by the yellow lights of the streetlights shining down on them. He turned around the other way. The precinct was behind them, the officers inside hard at work writing away and talking on the phone endlessly. He looked down.
A garden.

“How long has it been since you were outside, Izukun?” Midnight asked softly, leaning against Toshinori to get a closer look at the child's face.

Izuku remained silent.

Toshinori sat down on the grass, setting Izuku down in the craddle of his legs as he spun the boy to face away from him. Izuku's eyes locked on the grass below, the blades a dark green in the night. Izuku couldn't help thinking they looked like his hair. Like his mom's too.

He leaned down a bit, Toshinori's hands holding him to prevent him from just falling on his face. His tiny hand reached out hesitantly, stopping mere milimeters away from the ground. He could hear Midnight slowly kneeling down next to him, and he felt a boost of confidence at knowing he was surrounded by people he just felt he could trust, and finally planted his hand flat against the grass.

It was soft and cold, just the slightest bit dewey as it tickled his palm as it moved around in small circles, letting the blades brush between his fingers. Forgetting his own position, he put his other hand down as well, making Toshinori scramble to hold him properly as Izuku was now pretty much hovering just above the ground.

He didn't realize he'd nearly forgotten how grass felt like.
“Cold” He giggled, mushing his hands against the grass in bigger circles, even tearing out a bunch of it and throwing it up in the air, letting it rain down on him. The sound caught the attention of the heroes patrolling around the area, and a few walked closer to take a look at him as he played in the garden. One in particular with a cowboy hat and what looked like a metal gas mask chuckled at the boy's antics.

Izuku stopped and looked up, eyes widening at the sight of the array of heroes waving at him from a safe distance. The clashing colors of their suits and physical manifestation of some quirks had his little head spinning as he looked at one after another, just now realizing how many of them were there. He gasped, clapping his hands together and then bringing them to cover his gaping mouth.

“Do you wanna say hi?” Midnight asked him, leaning into his field of vision with a wide grin on her face. Izuku nodded immediately and raised his arms, making Nemuri squeal in joy at the boy asking her to hold him so readily. She snatched him up from Toshinori’s arms faster than the hero could blink, and brought him over to the concrete wall so he could sit there.

Izuku spent what felt like forever just asking and asking, from names to quirks to their favorite food and color; there was no end to his thirst for knowledge and these heroes were more than happy to fill him with it. They would go to him two at a time, the others keeping up watch from their strategic positions while Izuku was out in the open. All of them plus All Might standing right behind him with Midnight, large hand once again covering the kid’s back providing warmth and protection, was more than enough to make him feel so safe he completely forgot about his fear of being outside.

It wasn't until a blanket was gently wrapped around his shoulders that he startled out of his hero frenzy, turning around to see the smiling face of his mother looking at him. He immediately forgot all about the heroes around him, and shuffled to turn around and meet her halfway as she wrapped her arms around him, shifting the blanket into a tight cocoon guarding him from the night air. He hid his face against her neck and let her familiar scent soothe him.

“Did you have fun, baby?” She asked him softly turning around and walking inside once more, nodding at the heroes as they drifted off back to their work.
Izuku hummed, suddenly feeling tired all over again as the safety and warmth of Inko lulled him to sleep. His hands clenched on her sweater as she made a little hood with the blanket to cover his head with, protecting him from the chilly night air.

It had been less than an hour that they'd been separated, but it had been more than they'd been since the rescue. Inko knew that they couldn't keep clinging to each other forever, and that Izuku would have to get used once more to not have her on his sights all the time, but he was still young and she could relish on having him securely held against her chest for as long as she wanted.

Suddenly worry filled her as she walked through the doors and back into the station. Her talk with Tsukauchi had been very normal for police standards; just him asking her about people close to them and different situations she thought could provide danger to Izuku and herself. He just wanted to discard any possible threat now that there was a chance of All for One to be after them even behind bars.

When they were done, he'd remained quiet for a minute, reading over his notes as she sipped at her now cold drink. Then he looked up and spoke.

“Midoriya-san, what would you say about being part of a witness protection program?”

Inko had never thought in her life she'd hear those words directed at her.

The detective had given her the rundown of the matter: if this villain had so many lackeys around, then there was a high chance of them not being safe anywhere; not even changing their names or appearances would fool him, what with the wide array of quirks available to him—and Inko had been shook to her core, when he told her exactly who it was they were dealing with—so they wouldn't be doing any of that. Instead, they wanted to offer her and Izuku permanent residence at the only place in Japan, maybe even the world when no villains had ever managed to infiltrate.
The idea was simple. Locating them in an area surrounded by top-of-the-line security measures 24/7, where the most intelligent living being in the planet worked and lived, surrounded by the best heroes the nation had to offer and even more that were on the way to being it. Tsukauchi had also mentioned having spoken to All Might, and said that since the villain had been discovered in Musutafu, it was highly likely this was his center of operations and everything important regarding him and his crimes would be located here as well, so the number one hero would be remaining here for the nearby future.

Inko didn't know what to think. On one hand she was grateful that they would go so far out of the way just to ensure their safety, but on the other it terrified her to know that despite being part of this program, even when inside the impenetrable walls of the hero academy, All for One would still know their names, their faces, their every move and exactly where they would be living, even if there was nothing he could do about it.

She wondered what exactly had this man so concerned that he wanted to get to Izuku so much; the child was quirkless, in no way a future threat to anyone, much less a powerful villain as him.

As she finally reached Tsukauchi’s office once more, sitting down on the couch with Toshinori close behind her, she sighed deeply and nodded her assent.

“Alright” She muttered. “There’s no safer option for us at this point, I guess” Tsukauchi nodded at her, jotting something down on his notes and standing up to briefly leave the office, more than likely going to retrieve any paperwork necessary for the procedure that followed their incorporation to UA as permanent residents.
Inko slumped against back, careful to not jostle the now sleeping Izuku in her arms. She looked up, tired eyes focusing on Toshinori’s gentle ones. She smiled slightly, a weak pull on the corner of her lips as she addressed the hero.

“Please take care of us, All Might”

He huffed a laugh, grinning wide and bright as he nodded at her. “Of course. Leave it all to me”

At that same moment in a dark bedroom on the other side of the city, a young man who should not be awake at these hours of the night felt a shiver run down his spine.

“What the hell...” He thought to himself, dropping his phone on the bed as he stood up to turn on the electrical heater in his room. Although he didn't think it would do much good. Whatever that feeling had been, he was sure it had nothing to do with being cold.

Because as illogical as it sounded, Aizawa Shouta felt that something was about to come crashing into his life out of absolutely nowhere.

Chapter End Notes

idk shouta i think having a lil brother bazooka'ed into your life is pretty life changing

i like to call this chapter "Yagi Toshinori wouldn't realize he's flirting if it United-States-Of-Smashed him in the FUCKING face

i really dont know why i decided to give naomasa and nemuri that kind of big bro/lil
sis dynamic, maybe because naomasa already has a little sister? it seemed fitting

gsvfhjgsdf

special cameo from my man snipe ayyyyy

ALSO dont worry about hisashi he's not gonna appear and he's not a villain i just
wanted to make it clear toshi has the way clear to go Free Real State on the midoriyas
As Nezu walked into the police station, he only nodded to the patrolling heroes and working officers, not really looking at any of them.

As one of the first animals that developed a quirk, the circumstances of his past had turned him bitter against humanity, and even though he appreciated heroes and the work they did to lead society to a better tomorrow, he couldn’t stop seeing the faces of the scientists who held him down and did unspeakable things to him in every single one of them. He would be polite and smile neutrally at everyone, never letting any emotion betray his composure. Never letting them know of his any weakness.

When the number one hero and a local detective had contacted him to enlist his help with a case, he accepted as usual. He knew he was far smarter than any person they could come to, and his tactical abilities made him first choice in many plans the police needed help with. He was expecting the typical drug smuggling or illegal underground quirk fighting rings, maybe even a new mafia.

When he’d been given the details of the case, he felt curiosity. A kidnapped child? He was not heartless. He would help rescue a child, no doubt. But even knowing this he didn’t feel any different than he did with any other case. He lent his services readily, running mental calculations and planning patrolling routes for the heroes to investigate based on incidence of strange events or sudden rises in crime.

When they finally managed to pinpoint the location of the place and performed the rescue without a hitch, Nezu thought his job was done and he could go back to focusing full time in his school.

Until he was given a copy of the report.
In the privacy of his office, the talking mammal let his ever-present smile fall.

In a move he'd never done before, he picked up his phone and called Tsukauchi.

It was a simple thing of succession of events. All for One had been caught and arrested because, instead of making his escape, he decided to go after the kid—the kid he was holding in a cage. He hadn't given a full fight against All Might because he was too preoccupied with reaching the cage. He had wanted to kill the kid so urgently he put his own integrity on the line.

That kid was not safe.

He'd offered Tsukauchi the possibility to, if ever in need in the near future, house the Midoriya's within the walls of UA. They would enjoy permanent protection and the promise of a relatively normal and peaceful life.

He had to admit, as he walked into the detective's office, this had to be the first time in his life he was so angry at being absolutely correct.

The young woman on the couch was sound asleep, lying down comfortably on a bunch of pillows and covered in blankets as the rising sun shone through the blinds of the window. Cuddled close to her chest was a tiny lump bundled up tightly, held safely between her arms as the boy inside breathed in and out softly, the blankets rising and falling along.

The detective sitting by the desk stood up upon seeing him arrive, looking tired but not caring about having lost his napping spot to the mother/son duo.
“Principal Nezu, thank you so much for coming in such short notice” Tsukauchi said, bowing in greeting at the newcomer. Nezu liked that about the detective; he treated him with the due respect and not like some sort of weird creature like many others did.

“It's no problem at all, detective” Nezu smiled, walking around to jump on the empty chair by the desk, facing the sleeping family on the couch. “I did offer my help, after all”

“And we're so happy you did. You were right in thinking they would still not be in the clear” Tsukauchi sighed softly, looking at the Midoriyas. Inko had fallen asleep shortly after accepting the offer, and Tsukauchi had tasked himself with guarding them after All Might had to leave to settle everything down regarding leaving his agency for an indefinite amount of time since he was staying here.

As someone who had been in the end of doing Toshinori's paperwork many times before, he did not pity Sir Nighteye at all.

Nezu nodded, sharp eyes focusing on the little bundle of blankets in the woman's hold. “I'm glad they're alright. It is awfully early though, detective. Could I bother you with a pot of tea?”

Tsukauchi looked surprised for a second but then nodded, remembering how eccentric the hero was. “Of course. I’ll be right back”

When the man left the room, Nezu stepped down and walked closer to the two people on the couch. He stopped near them and smiled at them, arms resting behind his back.
“It's alright Midoriya-san, I know you're awake”

Inko's eyes snapped open, arms tightening around her son as she regarded the hero before her.

Nezu knew she'd woken up the moment he stepped into the room, her protective instincts making her react immediately to anything new in her environment. She'd remained with her eyes closed all the time, but Nezu could tell the moment her breathing pattern had turned from being calm and even to forced and synthetic.

“You really care about your son, don't you?” Nezu asked, tilting his head at her.

She hummed, not moving to sit up least she woke up her son. “Of course I do. He's my everything” She whispered softly. “You're the one who's taking us to UA, right? Principal Nezu?”

He nodded. “That's right. I've offered you the chance of a safe haven for you and your son to be at peace until we know for sure why All for One is going after him.” He turned around and sat back in his chair, paws clasped together on his lap. “I have a very high interest in the safety of your son”

“May I ask why? You run a school for heroes, and I'm sure you know this already, but Izuku is quirkless” She asked, looking down at the sleeping face of her baby. “What kind of interest could you have in him?”

“I relate to him” He said simply, smile still on his face, but Inko could tell it was a forced one, frozen in place from years of putting up appearances. “What little Izuku here just went through...I can relate”
Inko didn't need to be a super genius like the hero to understand what he meant. It was clear just from seeing him; he wasn't like officer Sansa or Chief Tsuragamae who were humans with animal characteristics; Nezu was an actual animal who had developed a quirk. His story was widely known by everyone in Japan with access to national news. She didn't have to think too hard to imagine what some messed up scientists might have done to him.

The scar over his eye pulled at his skin as he smiled wider.

Tsukauchi walked back into the office in that moment, carrying a tray and setting it down on his desk.

“Ah, Midoriya-san, you're awake” The detective noticed, and he debated on who should he give a cup first.

Nezu waved him off. “Midoriya-san looks like she needs something nice right now, please tend to her first”

Tsukauchi nodded, fixing up a cup of tea as Inko carefully moved to sit up, Izuku shuffling in his sleep but thankfully not waking up. She received the drink with a grateful smile, holding it with her free hand as the other held her son steadily.

“Principal Nezu has come to pick you up to personally take you to UA” Tsukauchi said while handing the hero his own cup. “You'll leave as soon as we get green light that everything's ready. The car that'll take you there is a very common one and you won't have any visible security measures to not call any unwanted attention, but rest assured there will be multiple heroes following you there the whole time out of sight”
Inko nodded, understanding a more flashy convoy would no doubt alert any villains to someone of interest being inside whatever vehicle they would be in. “Thank you. I normally would feel bad about all the trouble we're causing you but...” Her eyes fell on that sleepy little face once more. “I just want him to be alright...”

Nezu sipped at his tea, nodding. “It's no problem at all. We are all awfully concerned about little Izuku here”

The phone on the desk started ringing, and Naomasa hurried to pick it up. As he spoke with whoever it was on the other side, Nezu set down his cup and approached the woman again.

“Needless to say, I intend on making sure Izuku's educational needs are meet, personally” He said. “I can set up a curriculum for every year of school he will need starting when he's age appropriate, and he'd be given a spot at UA once he needs to start high school proper”

“Are...are you serious?” Inko whispered. “You'd do that for him?”

Nezu nodded once more, and Inko could somehow feel his smile, though remaining exactly the same, was now warmer and honest. “Not to toot my own horn but I'm an excellent teacher, Midoriya-san” He gestured at the sleeping boy. “And also I've been told your son is far more mentally developed than other children his age; it should be no problem for him to keep up with my lessons”

Inko was at a loss for words. She hadn't really considered through all of this how being basically secluded from everything would impact Izuku's life outside of keeping him, well, alive. The idea of his formal education had completely slipped her mind when she'd agreed to the protection program, but it lifted a huge weight from her shoulders to know someone had already planned for that.
Naomasa came back a second later, throwing on his coat and reaching for his hat. “Everything's ready to go, Midoriya-san. They're waiting for you outside”

Inko steeled herself, taking a moment to breathe deeply before standing up, jolting Izuku out of his sleep at the sudden move.

“Mama?” He said, hand rubbing his eye as he clung to her. The blanket fell and pooled around his shoulders.

“It's alright Izuku. We're just gonna go for a drive for a while” She reassured him. “Go back to sleep”

Izuku shook his head, looking around as he slowly woke up. His eyes fell on Nezu and froze there. He leaned forward, hand twitching as if wanting to reach forward the same way he did with Chief Tsuragamae, but something was stopping him.

“Good morning, Izuku!” Nezu greeted him, waving a paw up at the boy. “My name's Nezu; I'm the principal at UA”

“Hero school?” Izuku asked, reverence slipping into his voice as his eyes shone.

Tsukauchi chuckled, leading them forward out of the office. Nezu kept step with Inko as he continued his conversation with Izuku.

“That's right. And that's where we're going right now! Are you excited?”
Izuku gasped, nodding fervently. Inko could hope he would react just as well when he was told once they made it inside campus, they would never be leaving again.

The sun shone brightly down on them as they reached the doors, Izuku blinking at the sudden light surrounding him. It was warmer than he liked it and he shook the blanket off of him, letting it dangle from Inko's arm.

Nezu eyed the clothes the kid was wearing. “Do you like All Might, Izuku?”

Izuku, clad in his favorite All Might hoodie, smiled widely. “Yes! We played!”

“Ah yes, I heard about that. You had some fun last night with the other heroes too, right? Midnight was here looking over you as well”

“Mhm” Izuku nodded. “She's nice”

The car that waited for them was a simple old model, paint chipping off the doors and dirty windows half-rolled down. Officer Sansa awaited by the driver's door, quickly saluting them as they approached. When Tsukauchi opened the door, however, Inko could see the interior was as pristine as it could possibly be.

She climbed in carefully, making sure Izuku wouldn't hit his head as she sat down and scooted to the middle seat as the detective instructed her. Nezu got on next, sitting down next to her by the window as Tsukauchi walked around to climb on her other side. Sansa sat behind the wheel and
started the car, taking off at a leisurely pace.

Inko thought she could see figures moving by the buildings, blurry shapes jumping by the rooftops alongside the car. Tsukauchi noticed the concern furrowing her brow.

“That's the hero escort I told you about” He explained. “They're staying out of sight to not attract attention, but they'll be following us the whole way there, making sure nothing goes wrong”

“I see...”

Izuku was wriggling in place, trying to catch sight of the heroes the detective was talking about, but they were too fast for his eyes. “Midnight?” He asked, looking at his mother, eyes brimming with curiosity.

Nezu chuckled next to him. “Midnight is at home right now, getting ready for school I reckon” He said to the boy. “You might be able to meet her again once we arrive at UA”

Izuku smiled wide, jumping in place on his mother's lap in excitement at seeing the nice girl again.

UA was some ways away from the precinct; certainly a longer trip than between it and the Midoriya household, so the three occupants in the back seat spent a lot of time entertaining an energy-bursting Izuku, telling him tales about various heroes or making him guess some by giving him clues about their quirks. All in all Izuku spent a good time, forgetting all about the stress of the night before. His eyes drifted outside the window, however, when the looming infrastructure of the Hero Academy made its appearance around the corner.
He crawled his way out of Inko’s lap and onto Tsukauchi’s, startling the detective who could only do his best to stay stock-still to not jostle the child as Izuku looked out at the building. Inko laughed at the detective's face; Naomasa might've been good with children, but that didn't mean he had any experience handling them.

“Mama!” Izuku shouted, pointing outside. “We go here?!”

Inko nodded, smiling at him while trying to keep her worry and sadness out of her eyes. Once the car crossed the gates, there'd be no turning back for them.

The car drove around the building, tall concrete walls separating it from the outside world with what Inko could assume were hundreds of other hidden security measures. They stopped in front of an iron gate, the car stopping to let Nezu out to talk to the person guarding the entrance. After a moment he was back, a few of what looked like entry passes in his paws.

“These are the same passes students and staff must wear to not trigger UA's security system” He explained, handing one over to everyone in the car. “You must place some of you DNA in the little slot on top to have yourselves registered before you can cross the gates. A single hair or a bit of saliva will do”

The officers nodded, hurrying to pull out one of their hairs to activate the device. Inko on the other hand decided to lick the tip of her finger so Izuku could do the same, showing him how to do it himself on his own pass. As soon as it was done their pictures and information appeared on them, surprising them.

“We are linked to the government in a way; we have access to a lot of official information so we could get your passes done at the last minute without bothering you too much” Nezu answered the unspoken question. “We should be all ready to go, then!”
The hero nodded at the guard, letting them know it was all set so they could open the gate. When the car drove through, their passes lit up with a little green light, letting them know they were accepted into the campus.

As Inko saw the gate closing behind them through the rear-view mirror, she silently bid goodbye to her old life, and tried to embrace the beginning of this new one.

“I’m telling you, it was the weirdest thing” Shouta grumbled as he walked to class, Hizashi humming along as he walked next to him. “It was just this random chill at fuck-o'clock in the morning--”

“Why were you even up so late? It’s the middle of the week” Hizashi asked him, stepping ahead to open the door for his grumpy boyfriend to walk through.

Shouta mumbled a thank you before making his way to his desk. “I drank my mom's coffee by mistake instead of mine. I fell asleep like three hours ago”

“Babe”

“I don't wanna hear it”

Shouta's mom had the weirdest quirk; one that allowed her to sleep better the strongest the coffee
she drank. It was clearly labeled and yet Shouta had a bad habit of not being conscious enough when he fixed his usual cups, so this wasn’t a rare occurrence. Shouta sat down on his desk and immediately face-planted on the surface, eager to let his eyes remain closed a few more minutes.

Hizashi sat down in the place next to him, playing an imaginary drum with his fingers as he hummed along to some song permanently stuck to his head. ‘Hey, so what was it about that weird feeling you were telling me about?’

Shouta groaned, accepting his early death and kissing his last-minute nap goodbye as he sat up straight. ‘I don’t know, just this strange foreboding feeling running up and down my spine. Like a warning or something’

‘Maybe it was the coffee?’

‘Maybe’

The door slid open with a slam, a smiling Nemuri skipping her way inside, followed closely by Tensei as he made sure her move hadn’t dented the door again. She slid gracefully into her seat, swiveling around to face the zombie sitting behind her.

‘Morning!’ She greeted, way too cheerful for someone who had a night shift just a few hours ago. ‘Isn’t it a lovely day?’

‘Whatever you’re sniffing, I want it’ Shouta said, resting his head in his hand. With Nemuri here there was now absolutely no way he’d be at peace until the teacher arrived.
“I’m not high” She huffed, then smiled brightly again. “Well, I am high on something; the cutest guy I’ve ever met!”

Hizashi leaned her way, wanting to hear more of that. “What, you met someone during patrol?”

She nodded, bringing a finger to her lips. “It's a secret though, but you'll meet him later on, I'm sure”

Tensei finally joined them after making sure the room was structurally intact, taking the last place available around Shouta. “Is that why you're so happy? Must be a really special guy then”

“Oh, he's the most adorable, cutest, sweetest little honey-bun I've ever---”

The teacher making her way into the room cut her short in her sugary description, slamming her metal gauntlet on the desk to gather everyone's attention. “Alright kiddos, there's been a rescheduling for today!” She announced, a slip of paper held in her other hand. “Principal Nezu has called for a last-minute meeting for all the school, right now. Apparently there's some information concerning everyone that shall be addressed there, and then we can go back to normal class” She looked at them, her students blinking in stupefaction. “Well?! Am I speaking Greek here?! MOVE!”

Everyone scrambled to their feet, forming a line and leaving the room in as much order as you could ask of a bunch of seventeen year olds. Midnight resumed her skipping from before, jumping down the hall like a little girl going for ice cream instead of the oldest student in class that she was.

Not that anyone would dare mention that out loud, of course.
Soon enough the entire school was gathered in the courtyard, every class standing up in line—Shouta subtly trying to stand on his tiptoes to make up for the two centimeters difference that had him standing in front of Hizashi and failing miserably—and waiting for the principal to make his appearance. The teachers without a homeroom class were standing on the stage, chatting hurriedly among themselves. There were three empty chairs right behind the podium.

“What do you think this is about?” Tensei whispered, leaning forward to reach both Hizashi and Shouta. He looked worried, but not for the reason one might think. “You don't think it's about last week's food fight, right?! I swear I didn't mean to start it, I just got a piece of chicken stuck in one of my pipes and when I blew it out it hit Kinomoto in the face I swear I helped Lunch Rush clean afterwards—”

“Calm down” Shouta said, sighing as he rubbed the bridge of his nose. God he was too tired for this. “No one in this school would believe you started a food fight on purpose even if you did. Must be something else”

Hizashi nodded, resting his head on Shouta's shoulder. “And what's with those extra seats? All the teachers are where they should be already”

The general noise of the students talking simmered to silence as the principal hopped his way up the stage, a group of people no one had seen before following behind him. Shouta could hear Nemuri’s squealing all the way from her place on the other line where the girls stood.

Two of the people who took the empty chairs looked official, wearing professional clothes and keeping a rigid posture all the while. The other person was a young woman who looked like she could use a nap, her clothes a bit rumpled but overall looking pretty average. In her arms was the most surprising thing though; a little kid who was her spitting image but with a poof of hair turning his head this way and that with shiny eyes, wriggling in place on her lap.
Nezu hopped on the podium, fixing the microphone to fit his height and clearing his throat. “Good morning, my dear students” He greeted them. “I apologize for taking you from your usual schedules with this sudden meeting, but there has been a new development everyone on campus should be made aware of”

The students started chattering among themselves, whispering concerns and possible reasons for the announcement. Some were just commenting on the cute kid and waving at him as he looked their direction and waved back.

“Now, I'm sure as future heroes you have been keeping up with the news, am right?” Nezu let his silence go long enough for the students to nod their agreement. “So most of you already know of All Might's presence in our little city; and the reason he is here at all”

“The kidnapped kid?” Hizashi said, louder than he intended. He blushed when he realized he didn't moderate his volume, and grinned sheepishly at the giggles it got him from everyone around him.

Nezu nodded, unbothered by the interruption. “Indeed. All Might helped rescue a missing child and, in the same vein, managed to bring down an exceedingly powerful villain. That child--” He turned around halfway, extending a paw towards the woman and the child sitting behind him. “--is right here”

Voices erupted from the crowd, surprise and disbelief as shouts crossed the courtyard. The same students who had been waving at the kid were now gaping at him. The younger first years were talking their heads off to each other while the older ones were mostly quiet, some of them having gotten firsthand information from their tutoring heroes the past week. The sudden rush of voices all over the place had the kid cowering against his mother's figure.

“Hey!” Nemuri yelled over the crowd. “You're scaring him, idiots!”
Immediately everyone fell silent. The boy peeked back around now that the noise was gone, and his eyes met Nemuri’s.

“Midnight!” He called, waving at her with both hands and smiling.

“Izukun!” She greeted back, jumping in place to make it easier for him to see her.

Nezu cleared his throat. “Yes, thank you Kayama-san. Now” He continued. “The purpose of this meeting. This child, Midoriya Izuku, and his mother Midoriya Inko, will be joining us here at UA permanently as the first additions to a new witness protection program I have offered to initiate”

Talk started anew, more subdued this time. A hand shot up through the crowd.

“Yes, Iida-san?” Nezu gave him the go-ahead.

Tensei lowered his hand. “Sir, what's the purpose of implanting a witness protection program if you're announcing it to us so freely? Are we to assume those are their real names as well? Surely there must be some danger to this” People around him nodded, agreeing with his concerns.

“Ah, but you see” Nezu started again, smile firmly in place. “The villain responsible for this is incredibly powerful and resourceful. We are absolutely sure he already knows where the Midoriyas are, even jailed as he is” He said. “It's unnecessary to change names or keep information from you since, realistically speaking, it's nothing we can keep hidden from him. Or do you think All Might's involvement was because he just so happened to be strolling by?”
This time, everyone remained silent.

Someone bad enough that *All Might* had to be brought in had taken this kid? And he'd *survived*?

“The reason we want all this to be known to you is because Midoriya-san and her son will be living here permanently, and as such you will be seeing them around campus. The villain in question undoubtedly has lackeys all over the city; all over the country. They are. Not. Safe” Nezu emphasized, leaning forward in the podium to put weight behind his words. “There is no place in this world better for them than here, at UA, and as pro heroes and future heroes, we are sworn to protect those in need. I am confident that all of you will do everything in your power to make their stay a comfortable and uneventful one, considering everything they've already been through”

The surprised and concerned faces of the students had slowly morphed through his speech, turning determined and serious. Some were nodding along to his words, remembering all the information they'd heard about the case, about how long the kid had been lost and how ridiculously hidden the place they kept him in was. This was no laughing matter.

The man sitting next to Inko stood up, walking to the principal and tapping his shoulder to get his attention before whispering something in his ear. Nezu nodded at whatever he'd been told, and turned back to the students.

“Midoriya-san would like to address some words to you all, so I'll be giving her the podium, and I expect all of you to be quiet and respectful” He said, waiting for the woman to stand up and walk towards him. She kept her son in her arms, and Nezu adjusted the microphone for her before jumping off the podium.

The first thing everyone noticed was how the young woman was so short she could barely reach the mic, having to stand up in one of the steps the principal used to be seen properly. The second were the bags under her eyes and the way she clung to her son.
She cleared her throat, looking nervous at being the center of attention of so many people; never mind most of them were just children. “H-Hello” She started, voice soft and careful. “I'm Midoriya Inko. This is my son, Izuku” She hoisted the boy higher on her hip, his thumb stuck in his mouth as he looked around at them. “We'll be in your care from now on” She stopped for a moment to clear her throat once more, her obvious unease breaking some hearts in the crowd.

Hizashi brought a hand to his chest.

“What we've been through...it's indescribable. Izuku is only two years old” The younger students gasped, not having known that tidbit from the news. “He only knew about the protection program this morning, after we'd already made it here. He took it surprisingly well” She huffed a laugh, the sound making Izuku turn towards her with a smile around his thumb, his other hand coming to touch her cheek. The girls in the crowd sighed at the sweet gesture. “I know all this is worrying, and maybe even scary for some of you; having someone like us among you, who is likely to attract trouble in the future--”

“That's not true”

“Don't worry about us!”

“Please let us know if you need anything!”

The onslaught of encouraging words from the students almost made her take a step back in surprise, the risk of falling off the podium the main thing keeping her still. A wobbly smile split her face, tears gathering at the corner of her eyes.
“Thank you” She sniffled, wiping at her eyes with the sleeve of her sweater. “I-I only want to give my son the best life he can get. So thank you for being so understanding. I'll make sure to not be a bother to you”

Izuku stared at his mother, the hand still on her cheek brushing tears away. His thumb left his mouth and he wrapped his arms around her neck, hugging her and smooshing their cheeks together as consolation the same way she would do for him when he was sad. Inko laughed and pet her son's hair, bowing quickly at the students before turning around to step down and go back to her seat.

Before she could do so, however, Izuku leaned towards the mic. “Thank you!” He said, his sweet little voice reverberating through the courtyard.

And just like that, as the woman and her son went back to her seat, an entire campus worth of people fell in love.

“That was who you were talking about?!” Hizashi pulled on Nemuri's jacket insistently as they made their way back to the classroom. Shouta was tucked under his other arm, glaring thoughtfully at the floor.

“That was who you were talking about?!” Hizashi pulled on Nemuri's jacket insistently as they made their way back to the classroom. Shouta was tucked under his other arm, glaring thoughtfully at the floor. “I was on duty guarding their apartment last night” She grinned. “I had all the information from Detective Tsukauchi since I got involved in the case, so I knew they would be arriving today”
“Sure looked pretty happy for a kid held in a lab for four months” Hizashi wondered, letting go of her jacket to bring his hand up to his chin in thought.

“Kids deal with trauma differently” Shouta said, wrapping his arm around Hizashi's waist. “He might look normal to us because we don't know him, but to his mother he might have been completely different after the rescue. Maybe he's just dealing with it in a way he's not broadcasting”

“Oh, absolutely” Nemuri agreed, smile dimming on her face. “Last night when I met him, he looked so excited to meet me when he realized I was a hero” She sighed. “Then we had to distract him so the detective could ask Midoriya-san some delicate questions, and his whole face fell so fast...he was terrified to be apart from her”

“I'm still worried, though. I trust UA's defenses to hold up against mostly anything, but if the villains already know about them there's not much that can be done” Tensei sighed, running a hand through his hair. His concerns regarding the safety of the little family remained even through Nezu's reassurances they'd taken all the security measures possible.

Hizashi hummed. “Izuku is the same age as Tenya, isn't he?”

Tensei sighed, nodding. “I guess that's what got me so jumpy about this. I guess I can somehow put myself in Midoriya-san's shoes”

“That'd be a tight fit” Shouta said. “She's tiny”

That managed to get a surprised snort out of Tensei, and Hizashi kissed Shouta's cheek noisily as reward for taking his mind out of it.
“Izuku will be attending UA once he's of age” Nemuri added as they entered the classroom. “Who knows? Maybe they'll meet and be besties”

Tensei smiled, sitting down as the teacher started writing on the board. “That'd be nice”

“This is where you'll be staying”

Nezu gestured widely at a nice little home unit off to the side in an area of campus near the teacher's building. It looked new, one floor and simple but big enough for the two of them, with a little garden surrounding it and a cute white picket fence around to give it that cozy feeling.

“"We asked one of our teachers to build it for you. Cementoss almost insisted on taking care of it once he got the news” Nezu explained. “Once we have it confirmed that All Might will indeed be staying here, his own apartment will be built right next to yours”

Inko stared at the house in wonder. “I...I don't know what to say” She slowly walked towards the fence, her hand brushing against the top carefully, as if afraid it would crumble to dust at her touch. She pushed the door open, walking through the garden towards the door. “This is...so thoughtful of you”

Nezu waved her off. “It's the minimum we can offer. But please! Make your way inside. The door's open”
Indeed it was, as she made her way in. She absently took her and Izuku's shoes off at the genkan, fitting the little soft slippers on her son's feet even if he still couldn't walk, and some of her own. The entry hallway was short, leading almost immediately into a normal living room leading into the kitchen to the side, similar to her own apartment. There was a fireplace against the far wall, new furniture surrounding it in a comfortable semicircle of couches and side tables. On the other side of the room opened another hallway leading to five doors, which upon closer inspection led to two fully furnished bedrooms and two empty ones; most likely for her to decide what to turn into.

Izuku's room, she noticed, was exactly like his old one. Even his furniture, toys and decorations were all placed exactly in the same place.

“We thought it would be better for Izuku to retain his old space exactly as it was, to not make him add adapting to a new environment to his worries. We brought all his stuff from your apartment. Your room as well. We replaced everything from the living room and kitchen seeing how most of it got destroyed during the break-in”

Inko kept looking around in awe, slowly moving to sit down in one of the couches. Izuku leaned against her stomach, staring at the slippers in his feet as he kicked his legs up and down.

“Baby? Do you like it here?” She asked him softly, running her hand through his hair.

Izuku hummed. “Is nice”

Nezu smiled at the boy, walking around to stand in front of him. “I'm glad you like it, Izuku” He offered his hand for the boy to hold, letting him entertain himself with the soft fur and squishy beans of his paw. “There's someone else I'd like you to meet, if that's alright”
Inko tilted her head. “Someone else? Wasn't everyone at the meeting just now?”

He shook his head. “Someone was missing, she just arrived a few minutes ago and went straight to her office. She'd be vital for Izuku's physical therapy while he's living here, so I thought it'd be best for you to go see her as soon as possible” He tightened his fingers around Izuku's, holding his hand in his. “You've actually already met, as I was told. You remember Recovery Girl, don't you Izuku?”

He startled up to attention at the name, smiling. “Yes! The hospital”

“Would you like to see her again?”

Izuku nodded enthusiastically, and it was enough for them to take off.

As the principal guided them through the halls of UA, some teachers walking by stopped to greet them and introduce themselves properly. Students were already in class so it was empty aside from them, and Inko thought it would be beneficial for Izuku to meet as many heroes as his little heart desired.

“These halls seem endless” Inko wondered as they kept walking. It caught her attention how they seemed to be painted as a highway, with a segmented line in the middle; most likely to keep order as the students walked. “I hope we don't get lost when going around here on our own”

“There's nothing to worry about, everything is properly signalized. Also, you'll be given a new phone, courtesy of our support department, with a map to show you were you need to go” Nezu explained. “Besides, the students are more than willing to lend you a hand would you ever get lost”
She nodded, still looking around the halls and out the windows in search for any landmark she could use to locate herself in the future.

When they reached the end of a hallway on the third floor, they encountered the familiar figure of Recovery Girl waiting for them outside her office. Just like last time, her white doctor's coat was off and tied around her cane.

Izuku perked up immediately at seeing her. “‘Ccovery!’” He managed to get out, her hero name too long even for him to pronounce fully.

The heroine chuckled, cane tapping against the floor as she closed the distance between them. “You can call me Chiyo, Izukkun”

“Chiyo-baachan” Izuku sounded out, content with the new name he could call her by now.

“That's right” She approved. She then looked up at Inko “I'm sorry I couldn't be there when you were introduced to the school; I had some last minute business to take care of”

Inko shook her head. “Oh please, don't apologize. It's not my intention to keep you from your work” She smiled at the woman, crouching down slowly so she and Izuku could be at the same height. “Besides, Izuku wanted to see you again. It's better here where it's not so full of people”

Izuku smiled at the older woman, offering her a hand. She took it and held it carefully, smiling at the boy. Inko couldn't help but notice how Izuku seemed really eager to hold people's hands. Maybe part of his need for affection now that he had it readily available once more? She'd have to ask his therapist about it later.
“Ah, I would invite you into my office for some tea, but I'm afraid the infirmary is undergoing some last minute renovations” Recovery girl apologized.

Inko waved her hand. “Don't worry about it, we understand. Oh! But please feel free to come visit us any time; I'd love to try out our new living room to host some guests. Izuku loves tea parties, don't you baby?”

“Lots of sugar!” Izuku laughed, even more when his mother showered his face with kisses. She seemed to be doing that more and more every time he laughed.

Nezu nodded approvingly. “A soul after my own”

The sudden chiming of the bell alerted them of lunch time having started, and soon enough the sound of hundreds of feet making their way to the cafeteria echoed through the halls.

“I didn't realize we'd spent so long in the house and then coming here” Inko muttered. “Izuku has to eat about now”

“Then allow me to show you to the cafeteria. Lunch Rush has already been informed of Izuku's special diet” Nezu offered, leading the way away from the nurse's office. “I'm sure the students will be glad to see you as well”

Inko and Izuku bid their farewells to Recovery Girl before following the hero down the hall and into the main building. The multiple greeting of the kids for the Midoriyas once they were on sight
made Chiyo chuckle. They would be just fine living here.

As she unwrapped her white coat from around her syringe-shaped cane and put it back on, she slipped into the infirmary and looked at the almost finished job of replacing the white tiles of the floor for dark blue ones, and the halfway done nature paintings on the walls. Soon enough the infirmary would be colorful and warm, no sight of the old white room that could make Izuku uncomfortable should he ever need to use it. And she would also be looking into replacing her cane for a more common-looking one.

She reached her desk and sat down, sighing as she closed the report on Izuku's physical and mental health status post-rescue.

They would be just fine.

Chapter End Notes

nezu looking at izuku: oh Big Mood

no toshi this chapter D: BUT HE'LL BE BACK!!!

when i say the entire campus fell in love i mean with both izuku AND inko she's adorable are you kidding me

tensei is a whole disaster im sure

also if you wanted to see erasermic working their way to being together im afraid i aint got time for that BUT if you refer to my other story Turntables that's,,,,pretty much how it went hgfhdffs

i feel izuku wouldnt put a fuss about moving because a) since they got attacked in their home he might not relate that place with safety anymore and b) i know from personal experience that kids tend to not complain about drastic life changes if it helps take some strain away from their troubled parents (happened to me, never went away lmao im a doormat), and izuku can feel inko's worry--they're just really close

as you might've already guessed, one of the things that trigger izuku is white, sterile looking rooms like the hospital room he used to be in. recovery girl got the heads up from nezu that the midoriyas were coming so she went ahead and started fixing the
infirmary to make it look more lively so it wouldn't scare izuku.

another one is needles, and so chiyo's syringe cane is a potential problem as well; and lab coats! so chiyo killed two birds with one stone and took off her coat and wrapped it around her cane to hide both from sight, just like she did the first time she appeared in the hospital. she's gonna get a normal cane and a colorful coat once the infirmary's done.

BABYSITTING NEXT CHAPTER FUCKING FINALLY im gonna drag it for as long as i can but i also have to take the story through izuku's teens ajhasdjh

also did yall know hizashi is 2 whole centimeters taller than shouta????? GOD im gonna milk that information tiembla shouta tiembla

(spanish is my first language btw so that's why my writing style is so simple agsdffhasdf i tend to repeat words and descriptions a lot)
Chapter 6

THANK YALL FOR ALL THE COMMENTS!!!1111!!! im overwhelmed by the response this has gotten i cant think of anything to say back hjsgfdjhagsdf i love you

ANYWAY HERE GOES

“I still don't understand how Sir let me go so easily” Toshinori told Naomasa as they drove through the city. “Usually he's so stiff about my schedule; but now he practically threw me out the door when I told him!”

“Maybe he realized you need a vacation?” Naomasa wondered, eyes ahead as he drove. “I mean, not that this is a vacation; you still have to work. Maybe he wanted you to change sceneries for a while”

Toshinori hummed, looking out the window at the passing buildings. “Musutafu is a nice little city, I must say. Much quieter than Tokyo”

Despite having lived in Musutafu himself as a teenager when attending UA, Toshinori had spent most of his life in big cities where crime skyrocketed due to the denser population attracting the worst villains. He'd been stationed in Tokyo for years, and had almost forgotten the quaint little place that saw his beginnings in the world of heroics. The trees lining the streets and well loved little houses gave the place almost a fairytale look compared to the biggest cities with their lights and noise.

The couple of days he'd spent putting his business in order back at his agency had him a bit jittery. He'd received constant updates from Naomasa, and knew that the Midoriyas had made it safely to UA and had been extremely well accepted by both staff and students alike. He had no worries regarding their stay, but he was here to investigate the ties All for One had in the city. And Midoriya Izuku seemed to be in the eye of that particular storm.
“Has Nezu commented where I'll be staying?” He asked, suddenly remembering the offer the principal had made him.

Naomasa nodded. “He wants you to stay next to the Midoriyas” He said. The H shaped building of UA became visible once they turned the corner. “Cementoss should've built the place already, all you have to do is move in”

“I see”

Once they were properly identified and made their way through the gates, Naomasa parked and they left the car. It was apparently the middle of lunchtime and a lot of students were milling around campus, sitting on the grass and just enjoying being outside the stuffy classrooms. Most of them immediately noticed All Might's imposing figure and exclaimed in surprise and excitement, scrambling to stand up and crowd around him.

Toshinori, used to this kind of reaction from people, laughed and turned this way and that trying to greet everyone talking to him. But he realized the students were accumulating in excess, and soon enough any escape route he might have had was vanishing before his very eyes. He turned around to ask Naomasa for help only to see the detective walking away and into the building, abandoning him to the mercy of his fans.

Toshinori tried calling out to him, but the detective feigned not hearing him. In the last second before the door closed behind the detective, he turned around enough to flash a smug smile at the hero.

That's what he got for stealing his chocolate, Toshinori thought as he surrendered to his fate.
Naomasa meanwhile was swiftly making his way through the halls as they heard the news of All Might's presence in the school gardens. Some teachers were around making sure nothing happened with so many kids running up and down the halls, and they nodded at Naomasa as he made his way to Nezu's office.

With the amazing memory the principal had, there was no need for a secretary to remind him of his appointment, so Naomasa knew the hero was at the ready and waiting for him once he reached his door. He knocked on it as a courtesy, waiting for the go-ahead from the hero to let himself in.

“Detective! Good morning” Nezu greeted him, cup of tea ever-present in his hand and a full thermos of it in front of him on the coffee table, waiting to pass its judgement on Naomasa's bladder. “Please take a seat. I see All Might couldn't make it past the garden?”

“You could say that” Naomasa laughed, taking off his hat and coat and letting himself fall on the couch opposite the principal. “If I didn't know any better I'd think you called us here at this hour just to trap him like that”

Nezu laughed himself, smile hidden behind his cup. “I thought it would be a good idea to let the students get used to him being here, since from now on he will be a semi-permanent presence” He sipped at his drink, letting the silence hang for a moment. “I just wish it was under better circumstances”

Naomasa understood what he meant.

They were both fully aware of the secret behind Toshinori's quirk, and knew the man was on the constant look for a possible successor; he was still in peak condition, but he wouldn't be young forever, and he needed to find the perfect candidate for the responsibility One for All required in a wielder. Had this chain of events been any different, or just plainly never happened, Toshinori might've eventually ended up at UA anyway to scout for possible candidates.
Right now, however, he was here to completely dismantle everything regarding the bane of his existance, and to protect the ones responsible of him finally apprehending him.

There was a small tremor suddenly, and a loud choir of exclamations followed it. Naomasa calmly accepted the cup of tea Nezu was handing him, both ignoring the hero now landing to stand on the windowsill outside the office.

Toshinori softly knocked on the window, trying to get their attention so they could let him in after he could only think of literally leaping up and away to escape the students clamoring around him. He could've just as easily broken the window or ripped the frame of its hinges, but he was kind of scared of what Nezu would do to him as payback; especially now that they'd be on constant contact from now on.

He kept tapping the glass insistently until Naomasa got fed up and stood up, sighing in annoyance at the drama his best friend would retort to for such mundane tasks.

“Couldn't you just have jumped to the other side of the building and got in through the door like any normal person?” He berated him, slapping his arm as Toshinori walked in.

“But I was already there...” Toshinori pouted, and Naomasa could not believe this oversized child was the strongest man in the world.

“Sit down already, we have to go over your living arrangements so I can go back to work” Naomasa said, pushing the hero towards the couch.
Once Toshinori had sat down, Nezu slid a cup for him across the table. His hands were too large for the tiny porcelain and he had trouble picking it up.

Naomasa felt Nezu was making fun of him on purpose.

“So, as I'm sure you already were informed, you will be staying in your own place next to Midoriya-san and Izuku” Nezu started saying. “The building is ready, but we left it empty in case you wanted to choose your own furnishing”

'You got money' Nezu was truly trying to say. 'Don't make me waste my school's budget on your shit'

“I've also talked this in depth with Midoriya-san and we both agreed it would be best if you had a copy of the key to her house” He continued.


Nezu took a little keychain with UA's logo and threw it at Toshinori, who had to scramble to both catch it and not drop the cup in his hand. God knew if a single drop of tea fell, the next spill in the room would be his blood by Nezu's squishy little paws.

He managed to not drop any.

“Seeing how part of your stay is about making sure they're safe, it's only logical you could have access to them 24/7” Nezu answered. “You know, just in case”
“Also if you just want to stop by and play with Zuku” Naomasa added.

Toshinori snapped his head to look at him, ears reddening. “W-What's that supposed to mean?!”

“Oh please, like you didn't take a shining to him back at the station” He said, pulling out his phone and thumbing through the apps to look for something. “I know you can't see your own face, but Midnight and her camera sure can”

He turned the screen towards Toshinori, letting him see whatever he'd been looking for.

The picture, taken exactly from the angle Midnight had been standing next to them that night they took Izuku out to the garden, showed Toshinori sitting on the ground, holding Izuku so he could lean forward and play with the grass. His grip on the child was delicate but firm, sure to not let him fall but also avoiding any spot that might make the boy uncomfortable. His face, as Naomasa had said, was absolutely smitten with the wonder on the little kid's face. He was smiling, brows relaxed from their usual firm and proud position. Blue eyes alert to their surrounding but softening at the corners as he saw Izuku leave his own fear behind.

Naomasa swiped to the next pic, this one of Izuku sitting on the wall and surrounded by other heroes talking to him. This time Toshinori was standing behind him, his broad figure managing to surround the kid by all sides except the front while at the same time giving him enough space to not feel overwhelmed. This picture was extremely funny for Naomasa and extremely embarrassing for Toshinori because, in contrast to the soft expression he had in the previous one, here he was pursing his lips and narrowing his eyes at the heroes taking Izuku's attention from him.

Toshinori turned around, crossing his arms and pouting as he refused to look at either of them. He didn't need to know both the detective and the principal were just as taken with the boy as he was; they liked having their fun at his expense anyway.
Naomasa chuckled as he stood up, sliding his phone back into his pocket and picking up his hat and coat. “I’ll send you the photos, you big baby”

Toshinori kept pouting, but the corners of his mouth raised a bit.

“Principal Nezu” Naomasa tipped his hat at the hero. “A pleasure to see you again. Feel free to call me if you need help wrangling this guy”

“Oh, I’ll have it in mind” The principal smiled at him, standing up to accompany to the door. “And you as well, feel free to come visit anytime”

Naomasa smiled. “With this guy here now? You might as well build me my own house”

Izuku looked around in wonder, his feet taking careful steps forward while his mother held his hands. She was walking behind him, his arms up in the air so she could reach them while helping him take his first slow, wobbly steps in months.

They stepped through the walkway across the campus’ gardens, the firm concrete helping Izuku keep his balance as he decided how and where to take the next step. It was calm around them, most students busy in class in the surrounding buildings; but Inko could see and hear some of them plus their teachers watching them through the windows, some recording or taking pictures of Izuku’s progress.
“That's great baby, you're doing so well” Inko cooed down at him, keeping track of how many steps he took before he got tired.

She couldn't help think how sad it was he had to learn to walk again, when he had just learned to do so for the first time a little over a year ago.

Izuku, at least, didn't seem to think this was weird. He was fascinated by the trees and birds surrounding him, looking up to see the clouds float by. He was walking mostly by instinct, trusting his mother to make sure he didn't fall.

They'd been living as permanent resident at the academy for a couple of days, and most of the time they spent going around the fields, learning the way around to not get lost in the future. The students and teachers would always stop by to chat with them, ask how their day was going and if they could do something for them, maybe bother Lunch Rush with a snack for Izuku? Inko couldn't express in words how grateful she was they treated her and her son how they would treat any other person, and not the targets of an evil maniac.

The time they spend indoors they would work on Izuku's physical therapy, training moving his arms and legs. He was mostly in good condition now, only having to make sure Izuku didn't fall asleep while sitting so he wouldn't get a crick in the neck. One of his favorite exercises was to lie down on his back on the couch and raise both legs in the air, kicking them back and forth as if swimming while he watched the hero news on TV.

“Mama, look!” He suddenly exclaimed, snapping Inko back to the present. His hand was trying to break free from her grasp to point at a nearby butterfly fluttering over a flowery bush.

“Careful love, don't let go of me” Inko warned him, smiling once he stopped. “Do you know what that is?”
“Butterfly!” He said tilting his head back to grin at her. “Eats flowers!”

“They eat nectar” She corrected him. “It's inside the flowers”

Izuku nodded, looking very serious at the new information. “Nec-tar” He sounded out. "Not flowers. Got it” He nodded at the butterfly as well, as if saluting it before looking forward and starting to walk again.

Inko gradually lightened her hold on his hands, never letting go but letting Izuku carry most of his weight on his own. He stumbled a bit, stopping to ground himself and remember how to properly lift his legs without his mother holding him up completely. Then he kept going.

It seemed he'd gotten into a good rhythm after a while, almost not needing to stop at all unless he needed to catch his breath. He understood that these walks would be necessary to help him get by on his own again, the same way he understood he should stop eating when he felt full even if he still wanted more so he wouldn't upset his tummy.

The next time he stopped, looking curiously at a snail dragging itself in front of him, Inko leaned down lower to be in his field of vision.

“Izuku” She said. “Would you like to try it on your own?”

The reaction was instantaneous.
Izuku's head snapped back, looking up at her with such a scared expression Inko almost fell to her knees to hug him, but doing so would cause Izuku to fall. His knees buckled anyway, and Inko used her quirk to pull him up into her arms.

He buried his face into her neck, arms locking tightly around her as he shivered. As she had realized was now his custom, he did not cry.

“I did bad?” Izuku whispered, voice wavy with fear and laced with the tears he apparently could no longer shed.

“No no no, baby” Inko shushed him, running her hand down his back comfortingly. “You did great, I'm not leaving you alone”

“Won't leave?” He asked her, leaning back a bit to lock eyes with her.

“I will never leave” She reassured him, kissing his forehead and cheeks in turn. “Mama will never leave”

Inko was scared.

It wasn't just that Izuku seemed unable to have her out of his sight; it was her as well who couldn't stand the idea of leaving him alone. Even if she was the one who suggested him to try walking on his own, she didn't even hesitate to hold him when he showed the minimal sign of distress.

She knew Izuku was just a baby and needed to be around her all the time anyway, but before the
kidnapping he would run around the house and stay in his room or the living room on his own while she was busy with work or house chores. He had been as independant as a two year old could be.

Had Izuku not been taken, he would've been allowed to hang around the local park on his own with other children his age in merely a year more. At this rate, though, it would be years before he would be able to willingly let go of Inko's hand.

She needed help

Shouta choked when the collar of his shirt dug into his windpipe.

He whirled around, coughing as he rubbed his sore throat and glared at Hizashi as his boyfriend let go of his jacket from where he'd pulled him back.

Hizashi had stopped walking in front of the announcements board, eyes skimming over the flyers tacked to it.

“What the hell 'Zashi” Shouta said, punching his arm. “I almost died”

“Babe shut up a second please” Hizashi said back, holding up a finger right in Shouta's face, making him go cross-eyed from how close it was. “I'm reading”
Shouta huffed, walking behind him and standing on his toes to see over his shoulder at whatever had caught his attention. “Tap dance lessons?”

“No!” Hizashi shouted. Then he considered and ripped the flyer out. “Well, maybe. But no, this one!” He pointed at one lower down, and Shouta had to actually push Hizashi out of the way to be able to read it.

“Babysitting? Are you for real?” Shouta grinned, half-expecting Hizashi to tell him he was joking and he was actually looking at the one next to it about braiding for dogs.

Hizashi didn't look like was joking.

Shouta's face fell.

Before he even realized it, his hand had been grabbed and he had been dragged to the principal's office as fast as if Tensei himself had given him a piggyback ride. Hizashi didn't even bother knocking before he just kicked open the door, launching himself in and pulling Shouta along behind him.

“WHERE’S THE BABIES!” Hizashi yelled as he marched in, thankfully using his normal voice, to the tranquility of the school's budgeting team.

Those windows were expensive.
“Good evening, Yamada-san” Nezu greeted him, unfazed as always by anything that happened in the world. “Aizawa-san”

“Hi. Babies”

Shouta walked up to stand next to him, letting their hands remain locked. “I didn't have time to stop him”

“I don't believe you would've been able to, anyway” Nezu laughed, standing up to walk up to them. “So I gather you saw the flyer?”

“You mean this one?” Hizashi showed the slip of paper, hastily ripped off the board to make sure no one else saw it.

Nezu nodded. “You like kids, don't you Yamada-san? I saw in your file you have a lot of siblings”

“Oldest of five” He answered, puffing his chest proudly. “I've helped my parents take care of them all their lives, since I...uh...kinda left them deaf when I was born and they can't hear them calling” He muttered the last part, scratching his cheek self-consciously. He perked up soon enough. “But enough of that! Baby?”

“Is it Midoriya?” Shouta asked blankly, getting a bewildered look from Hizashi. “What? He's literally the only baby here; it's the only logical conclusion”

“Indeed. Midoriya-san asked me for help regarding Izuku's socializacion issues” Nezu said,
gesturing for them to follow him. He pulled a drawer of his desk open and pulled out a little notepad. “Would you like some tea in the meantime?”

“If I drink a single more drop of caffeine my heart will stop” Shouta said.

“No thank you!” Hizashi grinned. They both sat down when the principal took his own seat opposite them.

He hummed, going through the notebook slowly. “Ah, here it is” He cleared his throat. “Midoriya-san is concerned she and Izuku might grow too dependant on each other's presence in the future. While she doesn't want to leave him alone just now, she considers it would be a good idea to have someone else around Izuku to help getting both of them used to being around other people”

“Wait, both of them?” Shouta tilted his head. “I thought it was just about the kid”

“In part, yes” Nezu continued. “The idea is that whoever volunteers will spend study hall hours at the Midoriya residence, playing and interacting with Izuku while Midoriya-san is around doing her own thing”

“Oooh, like a supervised playdate?” Hizashi clapped his hands. “I've done a lot of those! The supervising I mean”

Nezu hummed, writing something down. “If you are interested in taking part on this, you will be given the credits due to study hall automatically; think of it as some sort of voluntary hero work” He then looked at Shouta. “When he's at home, Izuku has meal times, play times, nap time--”
“I'll do it” Shouta said at the mention of nap time. “A kid can't be that different from a cat, right?”

There was a peculiar glint to Nezu's smile at that. “I wouldn't be able to tell. I try not to spend too much time around cats, you see” He set his notebook down. “In the vein of me being a mouse and all that”

Hizashi leaned in to whisper to Shouta. “So that's what he is after all?”

Shouta shrugged.

“Well, then, if you're interested I'm sure Midoriya-san wouldn't mind giving you two a test try for a couple of days. You could start tomorrow”

“We only have study hall three days a week though” Shouta pointed out. “Would that be enough?”

Nezu nodded. “It's a start. Izuku will also be interacting with students and teachers while living here; this is mostly about him being used to being alone with people other than his mother”

Shouta and Hizashi looked at each other, then back to Nezu, and nodded in unison.

The following few minutes were spent with Nezu confirming their contact information from their files, what experience they might have that could help with kids—while Hizashi had experience with actual children and Shouta had only taken care of cats, Shouta also was certified in first aid
and CPR, which Nezu thought was a huge bonus. They also were encouraged to take mental notes of whatever Izuku did or say that could be important for his therapy that Inko or Recovery Girl would need to know as well.

By the time everything was settled, they had missed half their current period and Shouta was ready to murder Hizashi for making him miss class instead of waiting to the end of the day like a normal person.

Luckily, Hizashi knew exactly what spot behind his ear he should kiss to get instant forgiveness.

Inko had just finished placing Izuku in his high chair for lunch when there was a knock on the door.

“Izuku, I’m going to the door just here, okay?” She told him slowly, pointing in the direction she would go. Izuku looked at the door, nodding after deciding it was within his sight.

She nodded back, kissing his cheek before going to open it.

She'd gotten a visit from Nezu the day before, telling her there had been a couple volunteers for their little idea. He told her everything she needed to know about them—good students, one of them had a useful quirk in case they needed protection, the other had experience with kids and, most important of all, trustful.

She came face to face with a tired looking boy and an extremely sunny one, and the contrast was
enough to make her stop for a second before she smiled widely at them.

“Hello! You must be Yamada-kun and Aizawa-kun? Nezu told me you’d be coming”

Hizashi nodded. “Please ma’am, call me Hizashi” He said, stepping inside after she moved aside to let them through.

As he was taking off his shoes, Shouta looked down, thinking for a moment before nodding the tiniest bit to himself. “I’m Shouta” He copied Hizashi, moving to swap his own shoes for slippers after Hizashi was done and had made his way into the living room.

Inko closed the door, walking back into the kitchen. Izuku was trying to see who had come in, hands on the little table hauling him up.

Inko rushed to make him sit back down. “No sweetie, you might fall”

“Who’s that?” Izuku asked, feeling bolder and leaning even more forward with his mother holding the chair still. “Visit?”

Hizashi was making a face that told Shouta he must’ve been making some sort of high pitched noise that must’ve slipped into ultrasound.

“They’re students Izuku” Inko explained to him, making sure he was safely sitting down before going to the fridge to pull out his food. “They’re in the hero course”
Izuku gasped, eyes shining in awe as he looked at the teens who walked closer to avoid Izuku trying to lift himself out of the chair again. “Heroes? Like Midnight?!”

Hizashi leaned down. “That’s right! You know Midnight, Izuku?” He asked, smiling at the boy.

Izuku nodded, tapping around his own face before doing the same to Hizashi’s, touching his specs. “Glasses, like her”

Hizashi took off his frames, the orange tinted glass casting shadows on his face. Izuku was entranced by the spiral shape of his irises “You wanna try them on?”

The boy nodded frantically, making grabby hands at him. Hizashi chuckled and set them carefully on Izuku’s face. The legs didn't quite hold on his ears and the bridge slipped down his tiny nose, but Hizashi kept them in place with a finger.

Izuku laughed as Hizashi snapped a pic of him with his phone, showing the child how he looked with them on. Inko had moved to stand by Shouta as Izuku's lunch warmed up. Both were watching them interact with twin fond smiles on their faces.

“He seems to have it under control” She commented, bringing a hand to her cheek.

Shouta hummed in agreement. “He's used to it. When he saw the flyer, he literally dragged me to the principal's office”
“Oh?” Inko said. “Are you okay being here after all, Shouta-kun?” She looked worried. “I wouldn’t want you to feel obligated to do something you don’t want to”

He stared at Hizashi’s grin as he let Izuku ruffle his hair, fascinated by the style. “Nah, I’m good” The microwave beeped then, pulling Inko fro their conversation as she took out the bowl and made sure it was not too hot so Izuku wouldn't burn his mouth; he was quite the ravenous eater now that he could stomach a bit more.

When the smell of food reached him, Izuku turned away from Hizashi, looking at his mother with surprised eyes; the newcomers were so interesting he had forgotten what time it was. Then he started making impatient little noses, hitting his palms quickly on the table as she approached with his lunch.

Hizashi moved to the side, letting her set the bowl down. It looked like pureed carrots with shredded bits of chicken in between, and it was a really small portion for a kid his size.

“Izuku knows when he's eaten enough” Inko answere the unspoken question, scooping a bit of it and blowing on it for good measure before bringing it to Izuku's waiting mouth. She did little noises as she fed him, imitating the opening and closing of his mouth. “If he's still hungry, he can always ask for more”

Hizashi nodded, taking mental notes of the amount and way she fed him for future reference. He felt Shouta's chin hook over his shoulder to watch as well, despite it being much easier to just stand by his side.

Sap.

“Is that his meal plan?” Shouta pointed out a slip of paper stuck to the fridge. It was held in place
by a cute parrot shaped magnet.

Inko nodded, waiting for Izuku to finish his most recent spoonful. “It changes by the week as we work our way to real solids” She gave him the next scoop. “Izuku is very strict with following it, so he can finally be well enough to eat his favorite, right honey?” She cooed at him.

Izuku swallowed exaggeratedly, the way kids liked to do. “Katsudon!” He raised his arms as he shouted, opening his mouth like a baby bird for the next spoonful.

They remained quiet after that, Hizashi looking around the room while Inko was busy with Izuku, taking note of all the places he could suggest babyproofing later on. Shouta had stayed, wanting to further analyze the way Inko fed her son, noting the amount of food she scooped each time, the speed at which she brought it to him, the angle--

“Would you like to try, Shouta-kun?”

Her voice directed at him made him jump, bringing him out of his thoughts. He blinked at her, looking between her and the child who was also looking at him, expectant of his answer so he could go back to his food.

Inko trust the spoon in his direction, waiting for him to hesitantly take it before turning to stand next to Izuku, leaving the front of the chair open for him.

Shouta got closer, setting a hand on the bowl so it wouldn't topple over as he picked up some of the mash. He carefully blew on it like he'd seen her do and offered the spoon to Izuku.
The baby opened wide and snapped his head forward like a hungry hippo, mouth closing and dragging the food into his mouth so suddenly that it almost took the spoon with him out of Shouta's hand.

Inko chuckled at the expression on Shouta's face, his eyes wide and mouth slightly open in surprise. “Stronger than he looks, isn't he?”

While Shouta did indeed agree with that statement, what truly had gone through his mind at that moment couldn't be more different.

Because as he saw Izuku's eyes bright with joy and staring hopefully at him, a bit of carrot on his chin and a smile full of trust directed at him on his chubby freckled cheeks, Shouta felt a repeat of the chill he'd felt so late that one night. An unknown warmth and a need to protect this kid from whatever would hurt him out in this world.

And as he went to give the kid the next bit, he told himself to later take Hizashi to his favorite café, as thanks for dragging him all the way here.

Chapter End Notes

edit: bc yall cant let the pollen be jdhgfjsjhsd

oh toshi, you daft mf, how can you still wonder why nighteye let you go so easily? dont you realize he not only saw izuku's reunion with inko, but also ALL her future life???? wonder what he saw that'd make him want to let you go to her huh, HUH?! lmao it's right there in the tags who am i kidding

i love having tsukauchi and nezu making fun of toshi he's just a perfect target kdhfkasd

also random fact of the day: did you know wataru hatano, shinsou's VA, is the same one who sings You Only Live Once from yuri on ice??? be boi was i fuckdt up when i knew now i listen to that song on loop imagining shinsou on a stage with kaminari as
backup vocals asgfhad let him join the band horikoshi

as a chilean the concept of study hall is completely foreign to me, far as i know it's just an empty period you're given to catch up with homework and study?? or smth???? i know it doesn't have credits but for plot's sake let's say UA does

also regarding timeline, i decided that this story is set somewhere around late november/early december. at first i wanted it to be in october so we could have shouta's bday but then i realized that would mean izuku spent his own bday at the lab and i'm not THAT cruel so he was kidnapped late july, rescued mid november and now this chapter is around 10 days after the rescue.

that also means no sports festival because that must be set around april/may since japan's school year starts in april, and these losers are in their third year D:
“Come here Zuzu, you can do it” Hizashi cheered him on, sitting cross-legged on the floor of the flat.

Izuku looked at him from the other side of the room, sitting on his own in front of Shouta who was also sitting as Hizashi was. Izuku looked at them both, turning this way and that so many times one couldn't believe not so long ago he couldn't even lift his head. The soft sound of Inko's humming floated through the room from the kitchen.

Izuku fumbled in place, holding himself straight with the grip he had on Shouta's knees. He managed to twist his legs under his body and fell into all fours. His All Might onesie protected his knees and feet from rubbing on the carpet as he crawled his way through the floor, the hood covering his head giving Inko two bright yellow plush bangs to signal his position.

Izuku was well on his way to giving his first steps on his own, but Hizashi had suggested he first try crawling to work his muscles before he tried it, and Recovery Girl had agreed.

“Look at you go!” Hizashi said, phone out and recording as he made his way towards him. The camera was at the perfect angle to also catch a nice view of Shouta's fond smile as he followed Izuku's progress.

Izuku smiled at the praise, giggling as he sped up. His tiny hands slammed down as he pushed forward, letting a final, triumphant laugh as he practically jumped into Hizashi's arms. Hizashi whooped and fell back, picking him up and keeping him up in the air above him.

Shouta followed Izuku's example and crawled his way over in a couple of leaps, flopping down
next to Hizashi to smile up at the child.

That's how they were when there were knocks at the door.

“I'll get that” Inko announced, dropping the knife she was using in the sink and wiping her hands on her apron as she bounded for the door. Hizashi and Shouta, feeling at home on the floor after their first couple of visits, remained where they were.

Inko opened the door a crack, blinking in surprise and letting it open fully at the sight of Toshinori on the other side.

“Ah, good morning” He greeted, doing a little awkward wave as he noticed the four pairs of eyes staring at him.

Izuku immediately started wriggling, almost making Hizashi drop him if not for his well trained reflexes on holding over-excited babies. He was set down gently, and as if fueled by will alone, Izuku shot through the room, crawling at the speed of sound towards the door.

Inko managed to catch him with her quirk before he fell down the step of the genkan on his way to All Might, and held him up carefully.

“Hi!” Izuku waved, looking up at the looming figure of the hero in front of him. He let his hand stay up after he was done waving, looking at Toshinori expectantly.

Toshinori stared at the kid, looking confused and, to the two teenagers slowly approaching the
reunion, infuriatingly taken by the sight of the kid's smile directed at him. Inko just smiled, glancing meaningfully between Izuku's hand, Toshinori, and Toshinori's hand.

It finally dropped on him. “Oh!” He grabbed Izuku's hand carefully between his thumb and index, slowly shaking the little hand in greeting. “Hello to you as well, young Midoriya!”

Izuku shrieked with laughter, jumping on the seat of his mother's arm in excitement, making the hood of his onesie fall back from his head. The movement caught Toshinori's attention and made him realize what exactly the boy was wearing.

Hizashi and Shouta would still have heated arguments the following years about whether Inko or Toshinori blushed the hardest in that moment.

“He's a big fan...” Inko answered the unspoken question, half-hiding her face on Izuku's poof of hair.

“I-I see”

There was a moment where they just stood there, trying way harder than necessary to not look at each other with Izuku blissfully unaware of everything and still jumping up and down in place.

Shouta soon had enough. “Well, are you going to just stand there or ask to come in?” He addressed the hero, smiling smugly when he startled at his words.

“O-Of course” Toshinori cleared his throat, then bowed at the woman in front of him. “Midoriya-
“Ah, yes. Please come in” Inko said, stepping back to allow him to sit down and take off his shoes, and it was truly a sight how his broad shoulders almost didn't fit in the frame of the hall. Inko cleared her throat and looked away, hoping the heat on her cheeks could pass off as leftover from the little moment a second ago.

Once he was done and they were standing on the same floor level, the height difference that was already huge with All Might standing on the door became utterly ridiculous.

He was strolling into the house at a leisurely pace, looking around the room and hunching over himself a bit, as if feeling if he stood up he'd crack a hole into the ceiling or if he moved too fast he'd crash into a wall. Inko sat down on the armchair, settling Izuku on her lap as Toshinori sat down on the couch on the spot closest to her.

Hizashi and Shouta fell down on the free spots next to the hero, glaring at him like over-trained guard dogs.

Toshinori would not admit he felt a little scared.

He cleared his throat, sitting straight up but leaning slightly towards the woman. “So, how have you been since moving in? Is everything to your liking here?”

Inko nodded, bouncing her leg to entertain Izuku. “Oh yes, it's all really nice” She pushed Izuku's hair back from his face and held it there, leaving his forehead exposed and making his eyes seem even larger. “We take walks around campus as often as we can. It's a truly beautiful place for a school”
“Students with plant based quirks are allowed to go wild on school grounds” Shouta added from the side. “Lots of bees though”

Hizashi shivered. “Ugh, bees”

Izuku grunted, shaking his mother's hands from his hair and pushing on her arms around him. Inko was surprised that he was so keen on her letting go of him, but considering what they had been working towards for the last few days to make him less dependant on her, it seemed better to just comply. She carefully opened her arms and Izuku struggled to turn around, letting his legs dangle from her lap as he held onto her knees for support.

He let himself drop, to the surprise and concern of his caretakers, but he didn't utter more sound than a little grunt as his legs didn't hold and he ended up sitting on the floor. He shook the shock off and turned to look at Toshinori.

The hero was wide-eyed, arms raised as if ready to jump into action the second the boy started crying, but it never came. Instead, Izuku went back to all fours and crawled over to him, holding on tight to his pant leg and slowly hoisting himself up.

As slowly as Hizashi brought his phone up to record everything.

It took him a while, ignoring the silence around him as his legs trembled, but Izuku finally managed to stand up on his own, still holding onto Toshinori's jeans as he stared up at the hero, huffing and puffing from the effort.
He yanked on the fabric twice. “Up”

Toshinori didn't have to be told twice.

“Oh god” Hizashi whispered, silently swapping from recorder to camera and snapping as many pictures per second as he could.

The bell chose to ring at that time, signaling the change of periods and the inevitable time for Hizashi and Shouta to leave for their next class. They took turns to shake Izuku's hand and say goodbye to Inko before leaving. Hizashi did say goodbye to All Might, though Shouta merely nodded at him before leaving.

Izuku followed them with his eyes until they walked out of the door, waving bye all the while. When the door finally closed, he fixed his big green eyes on Toshinori and smiled wide.

Toshinori chuckled, being careful as he ruffled the boy's hair, pushing it back like his mother had done to better see that round little face—and wasn't he just extremely happy to see those cheeks chubby and plump unlike the first time he met him.

When the silence stretched on, he looked at Inko, surprised to see her staring at Izuku, smiling with a mix of joy and surprise on her face. Her eyes traveled up to meet Toshinori’s, and he was taken back at seeing some tears run down her face.

“That's the first time he's stood up on his own” She murmured, drying her cheeks with her sleeve, laughing. “Last time I tried he almost broke down”
It was a luck he was sitting down, or Toshinori would have dropped the baby from how much that simple statement weighted on him. Izuku seemed content just sitting there on the hero's lap, pulling up his hood and touching the yellow plush bangs that imitated All Might's as he stared up at the real things.

He rubbed the kid's back softly, the same way he'd done when taking him out that night at the police station. He checked him quickly to make sure what he was wearing was warm enough and then addressed Inko.

“Would you like to go on a walk?”

All the way through campus, Izuku refused to let go of Toshinori's shirt, and so the hero opted to simply carry him in his arms. They traversed the green plains of campus at a leisurely pace, Inko walking beside Toshinori, a bag slung over her shoulder with everything Izuku could need on the way. Izuku was clutching All Might's shirt with one hand, the thumb of the other stuck in his mouth as he let his awed gaze wander around everything.

“So, Nezu tells me he's already planning Izuku's first grade's curriculum” Toshinori said, smiling at the boy laying against him. Izuku was looking up at him, having turned at the mention of his name, and was smooshing his cheek against the hero's chest. "Seems he's excited to start teaching him; he didn't even wait until Izuku is of proper school age”

“Yes, he took into account the time Izuku might need off for therapy in the future if he needs it, and also thought he could be ready to start early, maybe when he turns five or so” Inko nodded, smiling at her son as he followed a flock of birds flying in formation on the sky. “Izuku has always been very curious, wants to know everything about anything all the time”

“That's a great trait to have” He pushed the boy's hood back to run his hand through his hair. He seemed almost clinically concerned with Izuku's general well being; making sure he was gaining weight, that his hair was no longer the dirty and matted mess it was after the rescue, that he could
hold himself up with no problem and, most importantly, how he seemed to have no problem being around people.

He must have been so lonely down there.

“Wanna write” Izuku said out of nowhere, taking his thumb out of his mouth to make a hand gesture similar to writing, twisting his wrist back and forth.

“You want to write? What about?” Toshinori asked, genuinely interested in whatever he had to say. He'd never known of a kid so young who wanted to learn so early.

“Heroes!” Izuku raised his arms, making Toshinori scramble to fix his hold on him.

Inko laughed, laying her hand on Toshinori's arm before she realized what she was doing. She subtly retrieved it before the hero realized she'd done it. “Izuku was starting to get interested in heroes before...the incident, and after he was saved by all of you I imagine it must've left an even bigger impression” She sighed, smiling at her son as he imitated the hero fights he'd seen on TV and punched and kicked the air in front of him. “I'm sure he'll have a lot of fun with so many heroes in training here”

“There are a lot of practical classes from the hero course you can join if you want to watch”

“We can?!" Izuku shouted, his voice carrying up and reaching the classrooms nearby. Some students peeped through the windows, snickering. “Mama, can we?!”"
Inko hummed, bringing a hand to her cheek. “Well, we could always ask”

Izuku cheered at her answer, even if it was just a possibility and not a certainty. He was just so excited about any kind of hero.

The air was starting to heat up from the merciless way the sun beat down on them, and Inko pulled out a juice pouch from her bag, stabbing the straw through before handing to Izuku, who took it carefully to not drop anything on him or All Might.

“So how long will you be staying here? A hero of your caliber, I'm sure you're much more needed in bigger cities” Inko asked him, pulling out a little green cap to place on Izuku's head to protect his face from the sun. It popped up a bit from how thick his hair was.

Toshinori scratched his cheek, his one hand more than enough to hold Izuku on its own. “I don't really now. I'm still involved in the investigation and we don't know how much there is yet to find. Might be a while” He stopped at a cross between walkways, choosing to turn right towards a patch of garden that had a peculiar bunch of bushes in bloom. Inko followed him wordlessly. “And even if I left soon, I'd still be back at some point or another, most likely”

“Oh? How come?”

“Well, I can't really go into detail” He said. “But for, ah, personal reasons I might take a more personal involvement with UA in the future” He stopped in front of the bushes, checking to make sure there were no wild animals or sharp thorns before kneeling on the grass and setting Izuku down as well, the boy looking in wonder at the colorful flowers around him as he sipped at his juice. “Who knows? I might even become a teacher”

He laughed at his own words, shaking his head as if it was a funny joke. Inko tilted her head. “Really? You'd teach here?”
She'd sitten down on a boulder covered in vines, keeping an eye on Izuku as well as Toshinori. He suddenly felt at a loss for words. “Well, I'm not sure I could really do it; my experience is mostly practical, I wouldn't know how to put it in words” He smiled as Izuku set down his now empty juice pouch, crawling to one of the bushes and picking a red flower with curly petals to bring back to his mother. “But the way I see it, everyone has something to teach”

Inko thanked Izuku for the flower, placing it in her half-bun to make sure it would be visible to him she was wearing it and where it wouldn't fall off easily. She followed him with her eyes as he started fiddling with the vines on the boulder, tangling and untangling them over and over again. “Everyone, you say?”

Toshinori hummed. “We all have different knowledge we can pass on. It's just a matter of finding the right time and place”

Inko remained quiet, and both adults spent the rest of the evening watching Izuku play around the garden.

“A home economics class?” Nezu asked, regarding the woman in front of him curiously.

Inko nodded, Izuku fast asleep on her lap. “I keep thinking about how much you're doing for us, and I can't help feeling like I should be thanking you somehow”

“Nonsense. It's my pleasure to have you safe” He waved her off, taking her empty cup to refill it
with more tea from his ever-present, seemingly unending thermos. “You can just focus on doing what you want to make your life here as comfortable as possible”

She shook her head. “But that's exactly it. I would feel much more comfortable if I knew I was giving something back to the school. Everyone here has been so wonderful to us...”

Nezu hummed.

This idea Inko was bringing him, that of her trying out teaching a Home Econ class since she had the knowledge as a mother and previous housewife; he couldn't help rationalize the pros and cons of it.

Cons: the only available hours currently were study halls. Most students actually used that time to catch up on homework or study for tests and, in some cases, sleep. They might not be happy to have that time cut off and replaced with even more class. And if they were to implant this class to hero course, the only way to fit everyone would be to have classes 1-A and 1-B share a period, which was complicated with the eternal rivalries those two classes seemed to have generation after generation.

Luckily the Management course students were perfectionists enough they most definitely already knew everything this kind of class could offer, so that was one class less to worry about.

Pros: Nezu has seen personally how pro heroes lived.

If the public knew he'd seen up and close how the number one hero used a dirty shirt as a napkin there would be riots on the streets.
And heavens knew when was the last time any of the Support students ate and actual fruit.

It was a wonder none of them had died of scurvy yet.

“Tell you what, Midoriya-san” He set the cup down on the table. “Let's give it a try. Winter vacations are coming soon and the students will come back a bit more relaxed; we could do a test run of Home Econ with the time they have left before the school year ends in March”

Inko's face split with a hopeful smile. “Really? That sounds perfect!”

Nezu smiled at her enthusiasm. He might have a personal reason for his soft spot for Izuku, but this woman had easily made her way into his heart as well. “It's worth a shot” His smiled dimmed a bit. “However, you might have to figure out what to do with Izuku in the meantime”

Her smile fell. She hadn't thought of that.

“Ah, well, Shouta-kun and Hizashi-kun...I guess they would be taking the class as well, so they wouldn't be able to look after him” She brought her thumb to her mouth, biting her nail. “And a kitchen with so many burners and knives is a danger to a child his age...”

“Well, there's still a couple of weeks until classes are over for Christmas. We can figure it out, I'm sure” He reassured her, flashing her one of his rare genuinely warm smiles. “Every problem has a solution, or else it wouldn't be a problem”
Inko smiled at his words, nodding in agreement. “We'll work it out”

Nezu didn't expect the 'problem' would work itself out just a couple of hours later.

“Yamada-san, I'll have to ask you to stop kicking my door open” He said calmly as the loud teenager barged into his office, Aizawa marching in behind him.

Both looked equally determined, to his surprise.

“We're not gonna stop babysitting Izuku. New class or not” Hizahsi said, a no-nonsense tone to his words. Shouta nodded along.

“You said babysitting would give us our credits for the hours we missed. Why not keep that up for Home Econ?” Shouta added, Hizashi nodding his agreement this time.

Nezu tapped his fingers on his desk. “You seriously are not interested in partaking in this class?”

“I have been helping my parents with everything in the house since my first sister was born. There's little more I could learn” Hizashi answered.

“You could teach me to prepare a wedding banquet and I'd still live off of coffee and instant noodles. It's a futile effort” Shouta added.
Nezu hummed, paws clasped in front of his mouth. He considered the two students in front of him. They'd come of their own volition to talk to him, most likely immediately after getting the news from Inko. Shouta was even risking being late to class again for this.

They were the real deal.

“Alright” He said. “I'll allow it”

“You can't force us to—! Wait what?” Hizashi stopped himself from his rant, blinking in surprise at the principal.

Nezu smiled at them. “You two might very well be the most hard-headed students currently in this school. And I know adding Izuku into the mix will just make it harder to convince you otherwise, so I'll just cut the chase short and let you have this”

Shouta sighed relieved, grasping Hizashi’s hand to calm himself. He was way more nervous than he'd like to showcase; he'd gotten way too attached to Izuku in the few days they'd spent with him for it to just be over so soon.
“However” Nezu continued. “Know that this means you have until class starts again after winter break to convince Izuku to be alone with you two, without his mother”

Well, the couple thought, that was another hurdle to jump.

“We can work it out” Hizashi assured him. “I've been talking to Recovery Girl about Izuku's rehab when waiting for Shouta to wake up when he gets knocked out in heroics”

“TMI” Shouta grumbled, pulling at his hand but not letting go.

Hizashi continued. “Plus we can come in during break, no biggie”

Nezu looked at Shouta, who nodded to confirm his words. “My parents have no problem with me being wherever for Christmas and New Years. I've spent it with Hizashi the last couple of years anyway”

“And my family can survive without me for a few days. The house won't crumble if I'm not there” Hizashi grinned, then gave it a second thought. “I think”

“Alright, I guess that's settled then” Nezu said, clapping his hands. “I'll leave it to you. I'm sure you can make Izuku happy with what limited time you have”

There was something threatening hiding in that sentence, but none of them could identify it. It only made it more terrifying.
For the next three weeks they not only spent their usual allotted time with Izuku, but also and hour or so after class every day as well. It came to the point where Inko would just make them lunch so they could also spend that hour with her son, seeing how they tried to stretch the time they had as much as possible.

It was good to see Izuku so distracted, eagerly awaiting for them to arrive day after day. He'd somehow learned to tell what time it was and would go sit by the door on his own a few minutes before they actually knocked, and would jump on his seat as he waited for his mother to open the door. Sometimes All Might would be there as well, joining the students in their visit so he wouldn't feel so imposing on his own. During those times he had to withstand the glares of the teenagers, since Izuku's attention was solely focused on him and Inko.

Don't get it wrong, they were forever thankful to him for having rescued the boy, but god.

They had started working on Izuku's walking, having found nothing else to work on regarding crawling that would advance his therapy. They would take turns, kneeling in front of him and holding his hands, moving back with every step Izuku took forward. They found out Izuku would always walk faster and easier if they positioned themselves in such a way it made him walk towards Inko. He could follow an easy rhythm of a couple of steps before he had to stop and regain his footing, sometimes overdoing it and falling to his knees. He didn't cry, just huffed and waited until his legs could respond again to stand up with his babysitters’ help.

And sometimes some more people helped too.

It had been just the beginning of the second week when a quick and persistent knocking on the door made everyone in the house jump. School had let out merely twenty minutes ago and Hizashi was in the middle of a serious doodling competition with Izuku—Shouta was the impartial judge, which meant he automatically decided Izuku won every single time—when the noise startled them.
“Who could that be? Nezu and Toshinori never come at this hour” Inko mumbled to herself, cup of coffee left on the table as she went to the door.

Shouta and Hizashi couldn't see who it was from their angle, but the shrill laugh that left Inko had them on their feet as fast as if it had been a screaming civilian during a villain attack.

The intruder, they found out, was none other than their own classmate. Nemuri was hugging the woman like someone would a friend they haven't seen in forever, Inko hugging her back and laughing at her enthusiasm.

“Nemuri, can you find a hobby other than scaring me to death?!” Hizashi shouted at her, pointing at her with a red crayon.

“You don't get to talk to me!” She yelled right back. “Didn't even let me know about spending time with Izukkun like the hoarder you are!”

“Please let's not make a scene” A placating voice came from behind her, and just now did Shouta and Hizashi realize Tensei had come as well.

Nemuri pouted, but then grinned and pulled him further in. “Midoriya-san, this is Iida Tensei. He might be around as much as me, so I brought him to meet you!”

She planted him firmly in front of the woman to let him introduce himself, and then let herself into the house. She made a beeline for Izuku, pushing Shouta out of the way and into the couch. Izuku noticed her before she reached him.
He gasped, kneeling and raising his arms to be picked up. “Midnight!”

“Izukkuuuun!” She swooped him in her arms, twirling around as he giggled hysterically. “I missed you so muuuuch”

“Be careful, he just ate” Shouta warned her, hands raised as if wanting to snatch him out of her arms.

She stuck her tongue out at him, Izuku imitating her and managing to make it look downright illegally cute. “You too, traitor. I was wondering why you two had been disappearing during lunch hour” She said. “I thought it was something more spicy, but I guess you two are too vanilla for that”

“All three of her classmates called out, Hizashi moving to cover Izuku's ears as his own turned a deep red.

“Shouta don't like spicy food” Izuku said casually, not bothered by Hizashi's hands around his head.

“Because he's an old man” Nemuri nodded, eyes closed as if preaching some hard truths.

“You're older than us, woman!”
Inko walked back to her seat, chuckling at the antics of the kids in her living room. She loved the noise they were making, the way Izuku's eyes drifted from one to another, how lively they made the room seem.

They all ended up sitting in a circle on the floor, Nemuri joining the doodle battle against Hizashi while Izuku made his way onto the cradle of Tensei's legs, ready to make a new friend. Tensei had been understandably nervous about interacting with the child after knowing all his story, but was delighted to find Izuku reached for him first. He was really curious about his eyebrows and his quirk, looking at the pipes in awe as Tensei brought them closer for him to explore at his own pace.

“Can you fly?!?” Izuku asked, moving his arms up and down in a cartoonish flying motion.

Tensei laughed. “I mean, I can propel myself up in one spot, or spin around” He did a twirling motion with his finger. “Mostly I use them to run faster. My little brother has the same engines in his legs”

“You have a brother, Iida-kun?” Inko asked, listening to get to know the teen better as well.

Tensei nodded. “His name's Tenya. He's Izuku's age”

Inko hummed, taking a sip of her coffee. “I see” She said, guessing he felt he could get along with her son from his own experience with his brother. The same way Hizashi did, and he and Izuku were thick as thieves in such a short time.

Shouta had been more of a case of affection at first sight, but he was doing a great job nonetheless.
Inko got up, walking to the kitchen. “I'll bring you some snacks. Izuku, what would you like?”

“Oh Jelly!”

She nodded, moving around the kitchen as she heard them interact with her son. Nemuri was loudly announcing her victory over Hizashi in the drawing competition, claiming the only one with the skills to beat her was Izuku. The kid giggled, followed by the sound of rustling paper as he joined the battle, loudly describing what every line and color was supposed to be.

To no one's surprise, he was drawing All Might.

Chapter End Notes

me? a sucker for couples with marked height difference? it's more likely than you think

izuku: *wears all might merch*
all might: *softly but with feeling* oh my goodness

i figured out the perfect erasermic interaction is :
-Shouta: *says some emo bs*
-Hizashi: babe
-Shouta: hush

also mfw i realised stain is the same age as the four losers but since he dropped out of hero school i cant have izuku change his mind now D'OH

the world is not ready to know the mess toshinori lives in in private (inko's gonna marie kondo his ass lmao)

im planning bringing nemuri and tensei along with hizashi and shouta for xmas so tenya can meet izuku and he can have some interaction with someone his age my poor babu
also an extra of what was happening in that classroom when inko and toshi were walking through the garden:
-teacher: i know that baby is the best thing to happen to this school since Cake Thursdays but IF YOU DONT GET BACK TO YOUR SEATS I'LL EXPELL ALL OF YOU

-shouta: teachers can't do that, it's an abuse of power
-hizashi: are you googling the requirements to become a teacher rn

-shouta, absolutely doing just that: of course not don't be ridiculous
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

i saw httyd 3 yesterday and i've been internally, externally and eternally SCREAMING since then

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Naomasa let the folder drop back down on his desk, sighing in frustration.

This had to be the first time in his admittedly short career that a case had so much information, yet so little at the same time.

The amount of people that had been arrested during the raid in All for One's lab was staggering; including the main man himself. Yet, the information they'd been able to recover was minimal, and there was no way of recovering it since most hard drives had been melted to the ground by the time they'd gotten to them.

It was a curious thing, how despite having interrogated every person who'd been working at the lab, none of them said anything; not out of loyalty to the villain or stubbornness, but because they genuinely seemed to have no idea what they'd been doing there, nor how they'd gotten there. Almost as if they'd had their memories wiped the moment they'd been taken into the precinct.

One of the man's many quirks, no doubt.

The only people who could tell proper information about what had been going on in there were the villain himself and, to Naomasa's increasing headache, Izuku.

The kid had been in a cage, locked away from the world for months, not knowing what was going on; yet he still had witnessed more than any of the officers could extract from the scientists minds with whatever interrogation technique or memory recovering quirk they had at hand. Like for example, what had been in those empty cages surrounding Izuku's? What experiments were they conducting? What did they need from Izuku that they'd taken so much blood from him to the point he'd been bordering on fatal anemia by the time they'd rescued him, the puncture wounds on his arms forever scarred on his skin?
Asking him, however, was another thing altogether.

Izuku had panic attacks triggered by certain environments or sounds that reminded him of his captivity, still had nightmares and needed a bright night light to sleep according to Inko, and there was the chance his mind had blocked most of the traumatic events to protect itself. He was seeing a therapist once a week to try and pry as much as they could from him, but the therapist preferred to go slow and let Izuku talk and play during these sessions, trying to sneak key words in their conversations to try and force some useful information out of what Izuku would answer subconsciously. They wouldn't try to force any memories out of him until he was old enough to deal with them properly, even with the therapist's Mind Mapping quirk.

The only thing they could somewhat use out of that lab had been a mechanical chair designed to strap whoever was sitting down on it tight enough to prevent all movement, with attachments of glass bulbs made to hook up to whoever was in the chair; most definitely to administer and collect fluids to and from the subjects. Izuku's DNA had been found everywhere in that chair, among what had to be hundreds of other sets of people who were now confirmed to be the other people kidnapped by the same black goo.

All of them missing.

A knock on his door brought him back to reality, giving them the go-ahead to come in. Toshinori's face appeared through the door, followed by the rest of him along with the most beautiful sight Naomasa had seen all day: Two humongous, steaming cups of coffee.

“Where do you want our wedding to be?” He said in lieu of a greeting, practically inhaling the coffee as soon as he was handed it.

Toshinori laughed. “If you keep proposing to me each time I bring you caffeine I might just take you up on that, you know”

Naomasa hummed from behind his cup, sighing contently when it burned his tongue. “I'm not dying my hair green though” He muttered.

“What?”

“Nothing” The detective wheeled his chair around, getting up to put back the file on the shelf behind him. “Any new leads on the case?”
Toshinori frowned. “We've caught a couple of lesser villains who seem to have heard of the lab, but nothing more about it” He shook his head. “Seems everyone involved has already been caught, but we can't be too sure; All for One didn't keep records of who he brainwashed to work for him so we can't be sure if there's anyone else out there”

Naomasa walked around to the front of his desk, leaning against it. “And there's still the matter of the fate of the other kidnappees”

Considering what they'd easily done to a two year old child, Naomasa almost felt guilty hoping they were gone for good and not somewhere else, having even more gruesome experiments done on them.

“How long have you been working now? Did you get any sleep at all last night?” Toshinori asked him, eyeing the amount of used coffee filters and chocolate envelopes in the trash can.

“I think I passed out for a couple of seconds when I sneezed” Naomasa grinned, the smile not quite reaching the bags under his eyes. He sighed at the look Toshinori sent him. “Alright, I guess I can take a break. Distract me, or something”

“You're too young to be working so much” Toshinori mumbled, thinking how fast Naomasa had rose through the police ranks at the mere age of twenty-three. He was gonna look older than Toshinori himself if he kept it up. “Well, I went to visit the Midoriyas the other day”

“Oh?”

“Yeah. Izuku managed to stand up on his own” He said, a smile on his face as he remembered the moment, and how much joy had flooded his chest at the words of Inko about it being the first time he did it. “He looks so much better every passing day. His mother too, seems to have found a bit of peace in UA”

Naomasa remembered the warm welcome they'd gotten from the students when they'd been introduced, and Nezu's frequent updates on their situation; including a specific group of third years who had taken a personal interest in the family. Midnight would even pop into his office to say hi during her patrols and gush about Izuku like she got paid for it.

It helped him feel better to know at least this one person rescued had been living his best life after
going through so much.

“Well” Toshinori stood up, downing the last of his own cup in one go and tossing it into the trash bin. “I better go. I promised Izuku I would accompany them to see some practical classes up close”

“Midoriya-san is going too?” Naomasa asked, raising an eyebrow.

Toshinori nodded, his trademark grin splitting his face. “They both love heroes, it will be a good distraction for them to see some in action”

Naomasa hummed, nodding at the hero as he left the office with a skip on his step. He shook his head, sitting back down to keep working. “Absolutely clueless, I swear”

Izuku didn't know where to look at. Everywhere he turned there were amazing battle moves and quirks being thrown around with a grace he didn't know was possible.

He was particularly interested in the battles where his friends were involved, laughing when Nemuri’s quirk sent down not only her opponent but everyone else around her. Gasping when Shouta accidentally got tangled in his own capture weapon while erasing the others’ quirk. Yelling in amazement at the speed Tensei reached and how he practically flew through the field. Giggling when the aftershock of Hizashi’s scream made the stands tremble.

He was, once again, sitting on All Might's lap. His mother sat next to the hero, just as immersed in the training exercise as her son. Toshinori found it adorable how their expressions mirrored each other as they 'awwed' and 'ooh'ed'; Inko was as much of a fan as Izuku, it seemed.

“Go Shouta!” Izuku yelled, raising his arms when Shouta finally managed to send his scarf to wrap around his opponent to immovilize him. “Win!”

“They sure are good at this” Inko commented, eyes scanning over the gym. “I can already see them out in the streets for the real thing”
“All of them already have their provisional licenses, so they've had quite the amount of real-life experience” Toshinori agreed, his hold on Izuku careful as he leaned forward. “They'll be great heroes, I know”

There was a moment of quiet during a partner swap, Hizashi going against Nemuri while Shouta stood in front of another girl, this one with massive horns protruding through her hair, her body perfectly trained so her neck muscles could hold the extra weight. When the exercise started anew, Shouta started dodging left and right and only using his capture weapon, never once activating his quirk as she charged against him.

“She's really fast” Inko wondered, trying to guess how much those horns must weight and the strain they must put on her.

Toshinori nodded. “One wouldn't think that just looking at her quirk at first glance, right? All quirks have limitations and negative secondary effects, the best heroes are those that learn to work with them despite it”

“You as well?” Inko asked tesingly, nudging him slightly.

He laughed, scratching his cheek. “Well, I wouldn't be the number one hero if I revealed any weakness I might or might not have, would I?”

Inko hummed, not really expecting an answer. To her and to everyone else looking at All Might his quirk was perfect; never a lost battle, never a serious wound, always jumping from one villain to the next without a second thought. It was hard to imagine the man to have any weaknesses.

The battles kept going for a while, with Izuku much quieter than at the beginning. He'd only gasp or clap when something really interesting happened, but didn't really speak much. Inko assumed it was because he was tired, but Izuku had fallen asleep in Toshinori’s arms a couple of times already with no problem, so she didn't want to bother him with taking him away from the action and back home. If he wanted to sleep he would just lay back and close his eyes.

The class was wrapping up now, Cementoss checking the damage in the training grounds while the homeroom teacher decided which students could just go change and who needed a visit to Recovery Girl. Luckily all four of Izuku's friends were in good condition and could just go back for lunch. Inko called them over to the stands, telling them all to come to her place to eat after they were done changing. Nemuri immediately accepted in name of all of them and dragged them off
with her.

Izuku hadn't fallen asleep like Inko had thought. He had remained in Toshinori's arms all the way back home, but he still was really quiet. He was picking at his clothes, pulling at his sleeves and overall just looking completely lost in his own thoughts. He didn't even realize he was being put down until he sunk in the soft cushions of the couch, snapping his head up in surprise as he noticed where they were.

He didn't hear what his mother had said to him, but as she turned the TV on to some colorful cartoon, he assumed she must've asked him to sit there for a bit, since she then kissed his forehead and made her way to the kitchen to presumably make lunch. All Might ruffled his hair and followed Inko, insisting on helping her. Izuku still wasn't all that there but he giggled when his mother looked at the hero sharply, asking him if he was sure he wanted to help; one 'yes' later and he was decked in Inko's most fabulous yellow apron, too small for him and completely missing any coverage that would make wearing an apron practical.

She also had him put on a bandana to keep his bangs out of the way, and it was like that how the four teenagers found him peeling potatoes once they arrived.

“Oh my god” Tensei muttered, drowned by the hysterical laugh of Nemuri, Shouta blatantly pulling out his phone to record the incriminating evidence against the hero.

“Welcome back!” Inko greeted them, showing her matching green apron/bandana combo as she leaned into view of the teens. “We'll be done in a few minutes, please sit down wherever you want”

Nemuri went to plop down next to Izuku, letting Hizashi and Shouta wrestle each other on who got to sit on the boy's other side while Tensei went the peaceful route and chose the armchair. Shouta finally won with a well placed lock on Hizashi's arm, leaving him no other option than the floor as he pouted and crossed his arms after his defeat.

“Izukkuuuun, did you see me fight today?” Nemuri asked, leaning forward to rest her arms on her knees and be at level with Izuku. “I was better than these dummies, wasn't I?”

“Can you call it a fight if you put everyone to sleep without lifting a finger?” Hizashi scoffed, scooting forward to drop his chin on the couch, smiling when Izuku started playing with his hair now that he was closer.
“You're just mad you were no match for me”

“Well she's right” Tensei interfered. “Regardless of the method, if your quirk can help bring villains down and save people it counts as a victory”

Shouta raised a hand towards them, eyes focused on Izuku. “Guys can you keep quiet for a moment”

The other three looked at him in surprise. Usually Shouta just left them talk a mile a minute while he hummed or nodded or just straight up fell asleep, but this was the first time he actively told them to shut up. They followed his gaze and landed on Izuku.

The kid looked constipated, hands clutching his pants and mouth twisted into a painful frown. He was shaking.

“Izukun?” Nemuri asked softly, running a thumb over his cheek but finding no tears to wipe. “Are you feeling alright honey?”

Tensei had gone to fetch Inko and Toshinori, both worriedly hurrying to stand in front of the boy. Inko knelt in front of Izuku, pulling his hands away from the death-grip they had on his clothes to squeeze them in her own.

“Baby, what's wrong?” She asked, touching his forehead to check if he was feverish. “Does your tummy hurt?”

Izuku opened his mouth, but nothing came out. He closed it and opened it over and over again, little half-choked noises filling the silence of the room as he tried to speak through the lump in his throat. “Can-” He finally got out. “Can I?”

“Can you what, Izuku?” Toshinori asked him softly, placing a hand on Inko's shoulder as he leaned down as well to better hear the thread of a voice the kid could manage to let out.

Izuku looked at him, and it seemed it somehow made it worse. Something in his eyes looked on the brink of shattering. “Can I...be a hero too?”
Inko almost reared back as if slapped, but held herself firm. It would do Izuku no good to see her react like that. “Baby...”

“What do you mean Zuzu? Of course you can!” Hizashi said, brows furrowed in confusion.

“But I don't” Izuku said, stopping halfway to swallow. “Don't have one”

Inko let out a shaky breath, her hands trembling but she refused to let go of her son. Shouta looked at her and then at Izuku, easily putting two and two together just from context and their reactions.

“You don't have a quirk?” He asked softly. Izuku turned to look at him, lip trembling as he shook his head.

Tensei frowned. “But you're still too young, you couldn't possibly know--”

“The doctors confirmed it” Inko interrupted him. “They...they figured it out while Izuku was—while he was gone” She clenched her teeth, trying to keep her anger in check at remembering how sad her baby had been when he first told them. “He's quirkless”

Izuku whimpered, trying to shrink in on himself to hide from everyone. He'd been so tired still from the hospital that, after the clinical confirmation, it just never occurred to him to bring it up again. Not until he saw the practical classes today and All Might and his mother had started talking about how great heroes they would be with their quirks.

It was every child's dream to become a hero, but without a quirk...

“That's dumb”

Everyone turned to look at Shouta, the tired teen frowning as he stared back only at Izuku, the boy blinking at him with surprise in his green eyes.

“I didn't think you could be a dummy, Izuku” Shouta continued, ignoring Hizashi hissing his name in warning.
Izuku stayed still for a second, then shook his head. “Not a dummy”

Shouta shook his head as well. “No, you're not. That's why I can't understand why you'd even ask something like that” He said. “Of course you can be a hero without a quirk”

Inko, who had been ready to stop him right there, was left speechless with her mouth open, words ready to make it out but never doing so.

“Did you see me fight today?” Shouta asked Izuku, waiting for the boy to nod. “Do you know what my quirk is? What it does?”

“It, um, takes quirks away” Izuku mumbled.

“It erases them” Shouta nodded. “I can erase quirks I come across as long as I'm looking at the person who owns it. Now, did you see when I fought a girl with big horns?”

“Yes...”

“Did I use my quirk on her?”

Izuku thought for a moment, then shook his head. He’d noticed Shouta's quirk turned his eyes red and made his hair float. He didn't do that at all during that match.

“I knew you were smart” Shouta grinned, ruffling the boy's head and making him giggle, making everyone around let out a sigh of relief at hearing that twinkling laugh again. “I didn't use my quirk on her because she has a mutant type quirk. She can't activate or deactivate it; it's just how she is all the time” He continued. “My quirk doesn't let me erase mutant quirks, so when I fight someone like that, I'm as good as quirkless”

Izuku's head snapped up, looking at him with newfound awe. He carefully slipped his hands away from his mother's and turned around to crawl over to Shouta, sitting on his lap and clutching his uniform's jacket tightly as he stared up at the teen.
Shouta waited until he was settled down to keep going. “Having a quirk is a huge advantage, yes, and it’s true there has never been a quirkless hero; but having a quirk doesn't automatically make you a great fighter or give you a proper sense of justice. A true hero works from the heart, not their quirks”

His voice had turned unbearably soft towards the end, his words directed solely to Izuku as the boy looked at him like he'd hung the moon.

Shouta smiled at him, a tender look on his face as he ran his fingers through Izuku's hair. “I think you'd make a great hero”

He looked up then, glancing meaningfully at Inko and making Izuku look at her as well, his shining eyes paralizing her to her spot.

She smiled too, wiping a single stray tear from her cheek. “Of course” She agreed. “Of course you can be a hero, Izuku”

This time it was Izuku's turn to smile, and it was as blinding as ever.

Hizashi offered to finish whatever Inko and Toshinori had been cooking before they got distracted, knowing after the emotional meltdown they just had Izuku would want his mother with him—and he didn't particularly feel like sharing a tiny kitchen with the hulk of All Might. Izuku started interrogating Shouta as soon as he'd calmed back down, asking him absolutely everything regarding his quirk and how it worked, and most importantly how he did it to fight around that flaw with mutant type quirks. He was also interested in the scarf he wore in battle, and how he controlled it.

That one not even Shouta could explain.

“It's a support item that helps me capture villains” He explained. “I'm still learning how to use it, since it's an experimental item and didn't came with instructions. I also have to do a lot of physical training to keep up with stronger enemies”

“So fast” Izuku breathed out, remembering how Shouta could jump around the place like nobody's business. “Like a ninja”
Shouta blushed at the comparison, lamenting not being allowed to wear his scarf with his uniform to have somewhere to hide. He'd have to invest in something that could allow him an easy escape in the future, like a sleeping bag or something. “I could teach you when you're older, you know”

Izuku jumped, standing on Shouta's knees. “Really?! To be fast?!”

“Fast and strong” Shouta said, after looking at Inko for confirmation and waiting for her approving nod. “But not now, maybe after you start school. It's when most kids start training anyway”

“Aaaand heroes need to eat well to be big and strong” Hizashi sing-songed as he popped back in, a tray in his hands holding a little bowl and two plates.

He'd already set the table and moved Izuku's high chair to the head of it, and waited for Shouta to pick up the child and set him on his chair before setting down the bowl in front of him. Looked like mashed potatoes and scrambled egg for him today. He gestured for Inko and Shouta to sit down as well, and set down the other two plates in front of them, pecking Shouta's cheek before skipping away to pick his own food. Shouta grumbled and flushed, but Hizashi couldn't help himself after seeing that little sweet moment he'd had with Izuku just a while ago.

Nemuri, Tensei and Toshinori looked at Hizashi expectantly, standing around like waiting baby birds.

Hizashi raised an eyebrow at them, walking past to sit next to Shouta. “Y'all broke your hands or something?”

“Rude!” Nemuri huffed, stomping to the kitchen with the other two defeated men in tow.

And when Izuku kept glancing at him with those wide eyes of his between the bites his mother fed him, Shouta felt like getting Izuku used to being alone with them would be easier than they thought.
“That's it sweetie, just put it right at the top”

Izuku's tongue poked out of his mouth as he tried to drop the star on top of the tree while his mother held him up.

Inko's family has never been one to celebrate Christmas with much fanfare, and Hisashi had always been working during the holidays so it wasn't like she had to worry about putting up decorations or such. Last year Izuku had been too young to really understand what was happening during that date, only caring about the shining lights decorating the trees around town and the chiming of bells being carried by the wind.

This year, however, would be a Christmas Izuku would remember, his first one, and while it wasn't a required holiday for them to celebrate she'd been asked by all of Izuku's friends if they could pop by on Christmas Eve to spend the day with them and bring Izuku some presents. Inko couldn't tell them no.

The decorations were sparse and generic, provided last minute by Nezu once Inko casually mentioned it in passing conversation that same day—and he even apologized at how simple they were, despite having managed to somehow get them in a day where no store should have any in stock--, but they were enough to bring color and light to the house. Her favorite part had been cooking, however. She really enjoyed the mechanic movements and focus the process required of her, and how it made time fly while Izuku sat on his chair on the other side of the kitchen counter, drawing on his notebook with the warmth of the lit fireplace keeping them cozy.

Izuku finally dropped the star and it fell on the tree, missing the tip and stumbling down to catch on a branch a couple of levels below. “Owie...”

Inko huffed a laugh, bringing Izuku down on a tight hug. “That looks perfect baby. It's a special and unique star, just like you” She said, bopping his nose and making him giggle.

There was a knock on the door and she hurried to open it, Izuku making little 'hup hup' noises with every step she took.

Toshinori stood outside, decked in a light sweater since he quite literally lived just next door. He was carrying a huge store-bought cake in his hands and an equally large plastic bag hung from his elbow.
“All Might!” Izuku shouted, as if seeing the hero for the first time instead of their almost every day encounters.

“Hello Izuku” He grinned at the boy in lieu of his usual hair-ruffling greeting since his hands were busy. He turned a gentler smile at Inko. “Good evening Midoriya-san”

“Come in, come in” She hurried him, laughing when he almost stumbled on his way in. “And I told you already to call me just Inko, Toshinori”

“Ah, yes” He conceded, setting the cake down on the kitchen and fishing something out of the plastic bag. “It just feels so personal…”

“I've been calling you by your name for a while now” She waved him off, sitting Izuku down by the Christmas tree where he'd busied himself trying to detangle some extra lights they didn't hang. “I think it's time for you to do so as well, neighbour”

Toshinori could never get over how this small, young woman whom he'd met crying her heart out looking for her missing son had somehow been hiding this playful side of her that she liked to use to tease him during nearly all his visits. It was refreshing to be treated like just another acquaintance, another friend by someone. “I'll do my best then, Inko”

She grinned at him, nodding as she snatched the cake and put it in the fridge for later. Toshinori had grabbed a hold of what he'd been looking for and took it out of the bag, walking towards the tree Izuku was sitting by.

“Izuku” He called the boy, kneeling down next to him once he had his attention. He showed him the wrapped gift box he'd taken out. “I brought you this for Christmas, but you have to wait until midnight to open it, alright?”

Izuku looked at the present in awe, the bright red and white wrapping paper illuminated by the flickering lights. He nodded frantically while Toshinori set it down under the tree, and then giggled when the hero took out a second, slightly smaller but equally beautiful gift and set it next to the other.

“And this is for your mother, but shhh, don't tell her yet” He brought a finger to his lips, winking at the boy. Izuku covered his smile with both hands, nodding at the request.
“Toshinori, could you help me set the table? The kids will be here soon” Inko called from the kitchen.

He pinched Izuku's cheek gently before standing back up to do what Inko had asked him. “Let's see, it should be six places plus Izuku's chair, right?” He wondered as he went where Inko pointed him to fetch plates and cutlery.

She shook her head. “Eight places, actually. Tensei said he'd bring his little brother, so he and Izuku will seat together. Nezu got me a couple of seat boosters for them” She said, pointing at the table.

There were indeed two chairs with booster seats strapped in, one blue and one green, that Toshinori hadn't noticed. “I see. Is he around Izuku's age, then?”

“Just a month younger, apparently” Inko said, following after him with a tray of glasses. “Since they're a family of heroes they need to be extra careful with their children in case any villains want to get at them, so he's been a bit sheltered and Tensei thought Izuku could do with a friend his age as well”

He hummed, letting her set the tray down on the table to help her place them properly. Izuku gave a shout of victory from behind them as he detangled his first knot from the lights. “If he's anything like young Iida, then Izuku could be looking forward to a very good friend”

“That's what I thought too!”

A new knocking at the door interrupted their conversation, and Toshinori offered to go this time. This way he witnessed first-hand how Hizashi's smile fell and Shouta's neutral expression turned to a frown when they saw it was him and not Inko welcoming them. Nemuri pushed them aside and walked in first, patting All Might's arm as she went past him.

“Merry Christmas!” She greeted loudly, swiping Izuku up in her arms. “And here I have the best present under the tree all for myself!”

Izuku let the lights fall from his hands, hugging Nemuri tight in return. “Midnight! Open present now?” He said, looking over Nemuri's shoulder at Toshinori.
The hero couldn't believe Izuku was trying to play him like that. “Not that kind of midnight, Izuku”

“Awe…”

A new tiny voice made itself known from behind Shouta and Hizashi as they walked in as well, right by Tensei's side. “It's not Christmas yet, you have to wait to open the presents!”

Izuku turned to look for the new person speaking to him, but he couldn't see them. Tensei laughed and stepped forward so his little brother could be within sight of him.

“Izuku, this is my brother Tenya” He introduced him, holding the boy's hand.

The boy was a carbon copy of Tensei, just with more average looking eyebrows and wearing extremely baggy pants. He looked up curiously at Izuku in Nemuri's arms.

“I'll set you down by the couch. Can you stand if you hold yourself up on it?” Nemuri asked Izuku, getting a nod from the boy. “Alright”

She let him down on his feet, giving him time to grasp the arm of the couch firmly with one hand before letting go of him. Izuku swayed a bit in place, but held himself up easily enough.

“Go on, say hi” Tensei told his brother, letting go of his hand.

Tenya walked, or more like marched, towards Izuku in movements too precise for a two year old, and offered a hand to Izuku in a motion that reminded him of his toy robot. Tenya was a bit taller than him too, despite being younger, but Izuku didn't need to know that yet.

“Hello, I'm Iida Tenya” He said once Izuku had grabbed his hand, shaking it in such a grown up way it made Hizashi choke on the juice Inko had offered him.

Tensei sighed, wondering if his friends would try to blame him for his brother being so obsessed with acting like a pre-programmed robot for some unknown reason.
“Hi! I'm Izuku!” He introduced himself as well, grinning wide at the newcomer and shaking his hand faster, like how most kids would actually do. “Want to play?”

Tenya found out Izuku's smile was contagious, and his entire posture seemed to relax as he nodded. Izuku walked around the couch, using his grip on it as a guide to his steps until he reached the space between it and the TV where he'd left some of his toys that evening before he and his mom started decorating. He carefully let himself down to sit on the floor, followed by Tenya sitting in front of him.

Tensei had told Tenya of Izuku's situation, leaving out the more, ah, unsavory parts and keeping it PG for his brother. The gist of it was that Tenya knew Izuku had trouble moving on his own other than crawling around, and he didn't comment on it.

Izuku let Tenya pick an action figure first, and then picked one himself to launch into a made-up hero story with a sock puppet as the villain. “My hero’s name is All Might Junior! What's yours?” He said, not noticing Toshinori hiding his face in his hands as his ears turned red.

Tenya glanced at his brother. “He's Ingenium...”

Izuku seemed to love the name. “Okay!”

The sounds of their play fights and the high-pitched voices of their pretend heroes let everyone in the room know they were doing alright.

Tensei smiled as he looked at them, glad to see Tenya lose the typical stifness he carried himself with and just be a normal kid with Izuku. At home he tried his best to spend time with his brother to let him experience the childhood he deserved, since Tensei had gone through the same during his own younger years but without the advantage of a sibling to play with him. But still Tenya had it very ingrained the importance of the Iida name and was set on being a proper hero in the future, so he tended to act more adult than he should.

“I bet you were as cute as him at his age” Inko commented casually, walking up to Tensei.

He laughed, scratching the back of his neck. “Mom would agree with you”

While the kids entertained each other, the newcomers produced their own presents to put under the
tree, Tensei being the only one to place an extra one for Tenya, even if his brother knew his own presents would be back home waiting for him. Inko had wanted to get something for everyone as well, but they insisted having them over was more than enough and threatened with burying the house in gifts after winter break if she even thought about it.

They crowded around the kitchen counter since the living room was currently a battlefield between Izuku and Tenya's heros versus the Evil Sock Monster, going at the snacks Inko had set out like starved animals.

They were high school students after all, lord knew they were always hungry. Tensei was the only one with a hint of manners, pacing himself on a dango. Shouta tried to maintain a semblance of dignity but that went away as soon as he noticed the plate of mochi off to the side, which he'd snatched and closed off everyone else in the crook of his arm.

Inko laughed, still taking more food out of who knows where and replacing the rapidly emptying plates. “If everything goes well I will be teaching the students how to make all this next year”

“Oh right, the Home Econ class” Tensei said. “Shouta and Hizashi mentioned it a while ago”

Nemuri grabbed a glass of juice that might've been Shouta's and downed it in one go to clear her throat. “Are we gonna get some of those before graduation? I like to think I can take care of myself but you know, just in case”

Inko nodded, refilling her glass and sliding a new one to Shouta to get him to stop glaring daggers at Nemuri. “You'd be the test class, see if it goes well to implement it officially next year. I can't cram that much information in the three months you have left but you should leave knowing the basics of cooking, cleaning and home repairs at least”

“Wait, you know home repairs? Like plumbing and stuff?” Toshinori asked surprised. He tried to hammer a nail to a wall once to hang a picture at his place, and he'd ended up with no picture, no nail, and no wall.

Inko scoffed, throwing a dish towel at him. “Of course I do. I can't exactly raise my son on my own if I can't handle a home by myself, you know? I can run finances and know a bit of electrical work and carpentry as well”

Hizashi and Shouta, being regulars in the house, already knew this bit of the story, as well as
Nemuri since she had access to Tsukauchi's files on the case. Tensei however leaned forward to be heard with how soft his voice had gone to not be heard by the kids. “Midoriya-san, you're a single mother?” He asked her, brows furrowing in concern.

Inko waved him off casually. “It's nothing to worry yourself with, Tensei. I had a lot of time to learn how to do things by myself before Izuku was born. My ex-husband supports us financially though, so it lightens the workload, even though I work from home as well” She tapped her finger on her chin. “Or rather, I used to. I had to submit my resignation after we were sent into witness protection”

“You seem awfully calm about it” Shouta said.

Inko shrugged, smiling at him tiredly and letting a bit of her exhaustion show in her eyes. The change in her expression during that single second she let her facade slip was jarring. “If I don't cover up my worries, Izuku might try to carry them for me in the future. He doesn't deserve more on his platter”

“Neither do you” Toshinori said softly, placing a hand on her back comfortably. Inko smiled up at him, her hand coming up to the part of his arm she could reach as silent thanks.

The egg-shaped timer by the oven started ringing at that moment. Inko hurried to take the chicken out while Toshinori went to fetch the kids.

“Boys, time for dinner” He called out, feeling a bit bad at interrupting their game but forgetting it at seeing how excited they got at the mention of food. He made to take Izuku up from the floor. “Come on Izuku, I'll take you there”

“Um, actually” Tenya interrupted him, tapping his fingers together nervously. He looked at Izuku sitting down in front of him, staring back at him curiously. “Could I...could I help?”

Izuku seemed like he didn't understand what Tenya was talking about, looking to All Might for an explanation. But when he turned at the hero and saw him frozen in position, ready to help Izuku up, he understood.

In a move no one had seen him do, nor believed he was capable of, Izuku turned away, completely ignoring All Might and reaching his hands out to his new friend.
Tenya looked delighted at being given the chance, carefully standing up first and holding Izuku's hands firmly. “I'll pull you up, okay? One, Two--” At the count of three he pulled, leaning back while Izuku pushed himself off the floor. Tenya being a bit taller helped them maintain their balance once Izuku was on his feet, their hands never letting go of each other as Tenya took careful steps back, head turning every few seconds to make sure his path was clear while he guided Izuku to the table.

Inko watched all this unfold with both hands covering her mouth, tears welling at the corner of her eyes as she saw how gentle Tenya was with her son, how the boy wasn't that much stronger than her baby so Izuku might as well be taking his first solo steps on his own thanks to his friend. Tensei huffed out a laugh, pride gleaming in his eyes as he witnessed the live confirmation of just what kind of person his little brother was.

Once they reached the table Izuku stumbled a bit as he swapped to holding onto the chair's leg, grinning up at his mother at having made it there. Tenya looked really happy too, hovering behind Izuku as if eager to help in anything else the boy might need.

Tensei walked up to them, ruffling Tenya's hair with a huge grin before helping him up to his seat, then turning and lifting Izuku up on his chair to make sure he would be strapped in properly while Tenya did his own himself, used to it already since he insisted on sitting at the Big Table back home since he could speak.

Dinner went surprisingly as normal as it could go with the variety of people sitting at the table while attacking everything on sight, with Toshinori being the biggest offender as he ate like he hadn't had a real homecooked meal in decades. Tenya kept going off at the importance of eating a proper and balanced meal every day while Izuku nodded at everything he said, until Tensei pointed out the green peppers Tenya had been pushing to the edge of his plate, making his brother flush red and stare at the veggies with poorly-concealed disgust as he forced himself to eat them to not make Izuku think he didn't follow his own preaching.

“I might have to bring you here more often if that's how we can get you to eat those” Tensei teased, laughing as his brother crossed his arms and pouted. Tensei chuckled and dropped more chicken on Tenya's plate to make him smile again. “Did you tell Izuku about your quirk?”

Izuku gasped, setting his fork down before he dropped it by accident. “You have a quirk already?”

Tenya nodded, reaching down and rolling up his pant leg to show off some tiny pairs of pipes protruding from the back of his calves. “They're engines, like my brother's” He poked at the pipes self-consciously. “They're too small though”
“They're so cool!” Izuku exclaimed, smooshing his own cheeks in excitement. “They make you fast too?”

“Just a little” Tenya said. “I keep tripping when I try”

“That's what training is for, kid” Shouta added from across the table. Tenya looked at him, surprised. “You were lucky enough to be born with it, so you have even more time to practice. You are young though, don't push it”

“Aw Shouta, that was so sweet” Nemuri cooed. “Dump Hizashi and date me instead”

Shouta snorted. “After all the trouble I went through to make him like me? No thanks”

Tensei derailed the conversation back to the kids before Nemuri and Hizashi started another one of their fake-wars for Shouta's hand. “Why don't you show Izuku how your engines work? You know we grown ups like to stay at the table talking about boring stuff”

Tenya nodded, excusing himself as he slid down to the floor. Inko helped Izuku down and waited for Tenya to offer to help him once more.

When Tenya went to hold Izuku's hands again, Izuku shook his head to everyone's surprise. “I...I want to...” He mumbled, looking down at his feet meaningfully.

Tenya let his arms drop to his sides, giving him space while Izuku collected himself. He remained within reaching distance just in case, but didn't touch him. The ones sitting on the other side of the table stood up, their chairs screeching against the floor as they stared at the kids with impatient anticipation.

Izuku stepped in place for a while, trying out his footing as he held onto the chair with both hands. He stomped his little feet with more and more force each time, getting his legs used to the work. He let one of his hands go, then the other to stand up still on his own. Then he lifted a foot and took a step forward.

And another.
And another.

By the third step he tripped with his other foot and Tenya caught him before he fell, but only righted him up before letting go again. Izuku smiled at him and then kept going, making his way across the room.

The silence was so thick it made the scene feel like it lasted forever, each of Izuku's steps an event of its own. But in reality the distance was no longer than ten of his little steps, and before they realized he was already by the living room, reaching for the couch to hold onto. His face was red from the effort and he was panting, letting himself fall to sit on the floor.

Inko was openly crying, sobbing as she rushed from her seat to kneel next to her son, hugging the life out of him as words failed her but still trying to convey just how happy she was, how proud of those few steps Izuku had managed all on his own.

“Please tell me you got that too” Nemuri said to Hizashi, whose phone was still up and recording everything that had just happened.

“Of course I did” He choked out, not showing any signs of wanting to stop recording any time soon, despite his own tears fogging up his glasses.

Izuku didn't really understand why his mom was crying, and he didn't want her to be sad so he used the best medicine he knew for sadness and hugged her back as tight as he could. Inko laughed through her tears, kissing his face and repeating over and over how proud she was and how happy he'd made her.

“This is the best Christmas present I've ever gotten, baby” She said, chuckling when Izuku wiped her tears away with the sleeves of his sweater now that he knew she wasn't sad.

Nemuri jumped up, phone in her hand. “Oh! Speaking of presents, it's been four minutes since midnight already!” She walked towards the tree to fumble through the wrapped boxes. “Time for gifts!”

They all insisted Izuku opened his first, and soon enough he was surrounded by the new pair of red sneakers from Inko, the winter scarf from Shouta, the matching handmade hat from Hizashi, the picture book from both Iidas, the action figure from Nemuri and the giant white bunny-shaped pillow from Toshinori that was so big he could actually lie down on it. Toshinori also handed him
a box of hot chocolate Naomasa had sent him since he couldn't make it due to work.

Inko's presents varied from home decorations to make the new flat seem warmer and cozier, to a bottle of perfume, to a set of hair brooches, to the very expensive looking and extremely comfortable sweater Toshinori had gotten her.

“It matched Izuku's bunny” He offered as explanation as the woman slipped into the snow white garment, marveling at how soft and warm it was.

“I love it! Thank you so much Toshinori” She smiled excitedly, already knowing this would be her new favorite piece of clothing.

“You can thank him again, you know” Nemuri cackled, pointing up at the ceiling above where they were standing.

“Oh my, I don't remember hanging that there” Inko said, staring at the decidedly not-there-before sprig of mistletoe hastily stuck to the ceiling with masking tape. “But since it's tradition...”

Toshinori was so shocked by the development of the little bundle of leaves and berries that he went down easily when Inko pulled at his sweater, and could do little more than sputter when she planted a quick kiss on his cheek before letting go.

“Naw, I think All Might just got the best present tonight” Hizashi snickered. Then he grabbed Shouta's arm and pulled him forward. “Now's our turn!”

And with Shouta turning the tables around and dipping Hizashi under the mistletoe, surrounded by the laughter of everyone around them and the warm fire crackling from the fireplace, Izuku sunk into his brand new pillow and dozed off with a smile on his face.
naomas'a gag is chocolate and making fun of how clueless toshi is about everything

originally izuku's first steps were gonna be with shouta and hizashi but then i thought
them being with tenya, who is the newest person in his life atm, would be more
meaningful of him finally letting go of the dependance he has on inko? something like
that????

starting from the next chapter things will go much faster aka i hope to fit all the
necessary time skip in the next chapter to make it to izuku starting high school the
chapter after that, since you guys got to remember that, as much as i love babyzuku,
this story actually has a plot and i need to get to it lmao

i genuinely am picturing toshinori asking nighteye or naomasa to help him whenever
he needed help with some faulty fixture at his house since other than hero work he's
Useless TM rip

ALSO i didn't double space this chapter i wanted to see if it was easier to read or smth
since double spacing is like my Brand
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

all of you have so many questions!!!! wonderful questions!!!! very valid questions!!!! that i can't answer!!!! jasfhgasd no but fr keep asking your questions and voicing your ideas for the story, even if i can't include them i love hearing what yall think, love you I want yall to know all my normal chapters have been 15 pages long. this one is 29. don't read it if it's night where you are and have school or work tomorrow. don't read it in class. don't read it at work. or if you do, take a break somewhere please hasgdfahsdf

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After Izuku managed to walk again, it was as if time had been in slow motion, only for it to start at normal speed once more.

The introduction of Tenya in Izuku's life revealed to be fundamental to the mental development of the boy. Having been surrounded only by adults his whole life made Izuku dependent on the bigger, stronger figures to get around on the world; Tenya was, literally and symbolically, his first steps into the real world where he could learn how to be a kid.

The first day Izuku would be left alone with Shouta and Hizashi while Inko had her first class was a day Tensei brought his brother along to make Izuku company. Izuku had been apprehensive about his mother being out without him, but the promise of his babysitters spending the hours with him quelled his worries a little. It was the other boy's presence at the front door that completed the picture and convinced him to stay put.

Since Izuku was so fascinated by Tenya's quirk he would show how it worked, running the length of the room in short bursts at moderate speeds. Izuku would hobble after him, trying to reach him as fast as possible so Tenya could go again and he could see the quirk in action once more. It also tired Tenya to use his engines, so it was just after a few minutes that both boys were sprawled on the floor, exhausted from the exercise while Shouta fanned them with one of his books and Hizashi brought them orange juice—Tensei insisted it was the best fuel for his family's engine, for some reason, and indeed Tenya chugged it like he'd turn into a raisin otherwise.

Hizashi was having the time of his life as the de facto Boss Babysitter. Since Inko was no longer in the picture it meant they had to take care of everything she did regarding Izuku's care, which included cooking, cleaning and the dreaded diaper change.
Dreaded for Shouta of course, Hizashi could do it with one hand and both eyes closed.

“You have to learn to do it too, what if one day I break both my hands? What are you gonna do then?” Hizashi insisted. “Just imagine it’s a cat or something, they wear nappies too sometimes if they’re too old”

“Recovery Girl would fix your hands in five seconds” Shouta retorted.

He learned anyway.

When the day finally came that Izuku could go back to eating solids, it was a day where Inko wasn't teaching and she'd invited the gang over for lunch. Izuku was almost out of his mind waiting for his food, banging his little fists on his chair as he witnessed the process of making katsudon. Shouta opted to place his own hands under Izuku's so he would be in the receiving end of the slamming least Izuku hurt his hands with how excited he was.

Inko had to feed him each bite after Izuku practically dunked his face in the bowl when it was placed in front of him.

Another thing they had to learn to take care of was Izuku's arms. He no longer needed the bandages since his wounds had scarred over, but he still felt uncomfortable wearing short sleeved shirts that exposed them to the world. Shouta started bringing over an ointment that he himself used for his battle wounds that, while not getting rid of the scars, helped even the skin and made them much less visible. It was delicate work and it seemed to put Izuku in a sort of trance when Shouta would apply it in soft circles up and down his arms, over and over again before wrapping it in gauze to help it absorb faster.

“I know you don't like them” He said softly one day, finishing up the first arm before going for the other. “But you have to look at them in a new light now. They're proof you're safe, that you're healing. You have to look at them and remember they show the world how strong you are. They will be with you forever, so you might as well start seeing them as your allies instead of your enemies” He would finish by placing a kiss on his forehead as consolation once both arms were properly wrapped.

Izuku would sniffl, rubbing at his eyes as he glared at the ugly marks on his skin. He never let these kind of feelings show in front of his mother, but there was something about his caretakers, about Shouta specifically that made him feel safe with being vulnerable. Maybe it was because Shouta had an air of wisdom to him, maybe it was the no-nonsense way he saw the world, or maybe it was how Izuku identified himself with the teen since their talk about being quirkless.
Leaving behind his dependence to Inko also meant Izuku was more and more open to people other than her and All Might, and they found out soon enough he was a glutton for physical contact.

Now that his legs could carry him around, he would tackle Hizashi and Shouta as they walked into the house, latching onto their legs like a koala and not letting go until he was swapped to their arms. This turned into Hizashi's new favorite development since it meant Shouta would go about his stuff with Izuku secured to his chest, whether it was reading a book or catching up on homework or watching TV, Izuku would be right there with his head tucked under Shouta's chin.

The warmth and weight of the kid soon became so natural for Shouta that he would sometimes just lie down on the couch or the floor, Izuku's bunny pillow resting under his head as Izuku lay sprawled on his chest. They would fall asleep like that, Shouta's arms an immovable security net around him as Izuku drooled on his shirt.

Hizashi might have had an entire photo album dedicated to those particular scenes alone.

Nemuri and Tensei would show up during their free time, bringing Izuku and Inko sweets and gifts they'd made from what they'd learned on Inko's classes.

“I still can't get them as good as yours” Nemuri cried, even if Inko gushed about how talented she was and Izuku tried to fit as many of her sweets into his mouth in one go.

As time flew, it became closer and closer to the day they would be graduating from school, and it was a constant nagging thought in the back of their heads how they would break the news to Izuku that they would no longer be taking care of him once they started working as heroes proper. The whole point of their little babysitting extracurricular had been to get Izuku and Inko used to being separated, and they'd successfully managed it; now even if they were still together most days they would no longer fret what the other was doing all the time.

Izuku was still too small to be brought with Inko to her classroom, so that was not an option once classes started again in April. Nezu was always a viable option, since the principal was often found in his office and could keep an eye on Izuku during those times, and there was also the possibility of Toshinori taking a few hours out of his week from hero work and investigating the All for One case to take care of him.

All in all it wasn't that they were out of options; it was how Izuku would take it.
Soon they couldn't hide it any longer, and so the four teens had gathered at Inko's house during a Saturday to be honest with the boy before it was too late.

They decided to just give it to him straight, not wanting to try and make it a great, fun day for him only to bring him down with the news later.

Inko brought them to where Izuku was belly-down on the floor, notebooks and pencils strewn around him as he drew everything he'd seen that day during their walk through the school. He noticed them coming and scrambled to his feet, running up to them to be picked up by Hizashi.

“Hey little listener” He said softly, and Izuku looked at him curiously from the unusual lack of enthusiasm and loud words Hizashi based his entire life around.

“Come to play?” Izuku asked them, not having expected them to come today. They would show up some weekends of their own volition, but since Inko was there it was not something that happened weekly enough for him to be waiting for.

“Not today, Bunny” Nemuri answered. “We're here to do all that boring adult talk”

“Oh” Izuku looked down. “Tenya?” He asked, looking hopefully at Tensei.

Tensei smiled at him sadly, shaking his head. “Sorry Izuku, I couldn't bring him today. Not for this”

Izuku frowned, his eyes jumping from one person to another until they settled on his mother. The mood in the room was too heavy and serious and it was making him nervous. He reached for Inko, wanting to be in her arms to calm the weird feeling in his gut.

Inko carefully took him from Hizashi's arms and went to sit down, waiting for the others to follow and sit around them. Since as always one of them was left with no place on the couch, Shouta opted to sit on the floor in front of Izuku.

“Baby, I called them over” Inko told Izuku, making him look up at her even with Shouta holding his hands and rubbing his thumb over them soothingly. “The truth is there's something you need to
Izuku looked both confused and scared. He still didn't understand what was going on, so his mind defaulted to the worst option. “Is... is it me? I did something wrong?” His voice went thin and cracked at the last word, his lip wobbling as he tensed.

“No honey, nothing like that. You're the best boy anyone could ask for” Inko reassured him, kissing the crown of his head. “It's not you, I promise”

“Actually, it's us” Tensei finished the line of thought.

Hizashi continued. “Izuku, you know we're studying to become heroes, right?”

He nodded.

“And you know we're third years already” Nemuri added.

Izuku looked at her, nodding slower this time.

“Izuku” Shouta called the boy, dragging his attention to himself. “We'll only be students here for the next three months. After that, we'll leave”

Izuku tilted his head, not understanding. “But you'll come play?”

“There’s... there's the chance we might come every once in a while when we have free time” Hizashi conceded. “But Zuzu, we won't be taking care of you anymore after that. We can't come back to look after you once we graduate” He dropped the other shoe, waiting for Izuku's reaction.

Izuku looked lost, like he was processing the information but just couldn't understand it.

Until it finally sunk in.
“No” He whispered, eyes broadcasting the exact moment his little heart was breaking. “No!”

Inko felt something warm and wet fall on her hand, and she felt like an electric shock had gone through her body in that instant.

“No!” Izuku cried, fat tears collecting on his eyes and running down his cheeks as he yelled, his face and eyes turning red. “No, no, no, NO!”

No matter how sad, how scared, how overwhelmed and hurt Izuku had been, he had never once cried since the rescue.

This seemed to have been the tipping point.

“Oh Izuku” Inko felt her own tears ready to burst, almost unable to overcome the lump on her throat as Izuku continued crying loudly, the child slapping away Shouta and Hizashi's hands when they tried to hold him or touch him to calm him down.

Suddenly a rustle came from the door, the metallic sound of keys trying to slot into the lock alerting them of a new presence outside the house. Izuku was taken by surprise by the noise and it managed to cut his cries short, but the tears couldn't stop and he kept sobbing as finally the lock turned and the door swung open, somehow without slamming into the wall.

Toshinori stood there, quickly making his way inside and looking as if he was ready to fight a horde of villains by himself. Instead he found the group of teenagers and the mother/son duo staring at him, the surprise on their faces not enough to mask the general sorrowful atmosphere in the room.

“I heard screaming, is everything alright?” He asked, putting away the copy of the house keys Nezu had given him a while ago. He never actually thought he'd end up using them.

“Well, as fine as we can be” Inko said, looking down at Izuku.

The boy only snuggled further into his mother, tears leaving an ever-growing wet spot on her blouse as he looked at All Might with poorly concealed anguish.
“You too?” He asked the hero, voice wavy and fearful. “You're leaving too?”

Toshinori looked for an answer to the heartbreaking question, until Nemuri sighed and stood up to walk towards him.

“We just told Izuku we'd be leaving after graduation” She murmured just low enough for him to hear so Izuku wouldn't get more upset. “He didn't take it well, as we feared”

Toshinori nodded slowly, putting the pieces together as to just how upset this would make Izuku. He made his way to the spot Nemuri had freed and sat down next to Inko, sighing at how Izuku flinched once he made eye contact.

He opened his arms invitingly, trying to smile through the sadness to quell Izuku's worries. The boy stared at him over his mother's elbow, assessing the situation in a way only he could do it. He finally let himself relax just the tiniest bit, but enough for Inko to feel it. She let her arms drop from around him and Izuku slowly and carefully crawled his way over to Toshinori.

Sitting on his lap and looking up at the hero with red-rimmed eyes, sniffling still as tears fell passively down his cheeks, Izuku asked again. “Are you leaving too?”

“Of course not” Toshinori hurried to answer, pulling out a handkerchief that thankfully wasn't All Might themed to dry Izuku's tears. “I live right next door, remember? And even if I can't see you every day, I'll always be here when you need me to, okay?” He reassured the boy, his voice calm and slow.

Izuku seemed reluctant to believe it, humming in acceptance anyway. Toshinori huffed a laugh and pet the boy's hair softly.

“And besides, your friends leaving isn't really bad; they're going to become great heroes!” Toshinori exclaimed, tickling Izuku's stomach. “Aren't you excited to see them save people once they get out there?”

Izuku giggled, trying to push the hands away. “Yes...but they won't come anymore”

“Now, that's not true little listener” Hizashi came through, appearing from thin air to lean on the back of the couch to be face to face with Izuku. “We will be swamped with work for sure, but I
promise I'll spend my every free day coming to spend it with you, even if it's not very often”

Shouta stood next to him, nodding along. “Besides, you're crazy if you think I'm missing your birthdays. I'll be right there to push your face into your cake”

“Shouta”

“It's tradition, 'Zashi”

“I was gonna say I wanted to do that” Hizashi laughed, draping his arm around Shouta's shoulders.

Izuku was still sad, but he fared better knowing that at least they weren't leaving him alone permanently after all. Still, the short time he'd spent with them had been some of the best days of his life and he would miss them.

Nemuri decided that now was a good moment to try and uplift Izuku, and pulled everyone into a game of pretend where Izuku was the hero and the others the villains he had to protect Inko, the civilian, from. They'd drop dramatically one by one, claiming him to be the strongest hero they'd ever fought so vehemently that it sent Izuku into a giggling fit by the end of it.

They stayed until sunset, when they had to bid their goodbyes for the day and go back home to their parents. They would be back in the week for the usual babysitting hours as it was barely the start of the year and they still had some time leftover.

One week in particular the hero course went off in a training camp and Izuku wouldn't see them until they came back, and that left him a bit down for the time being, but Toshinori didn't fail to approach Inko before it turned too bad.

“There's a fireworks festival being held by the lake this weekend” He informed her, pulling out a pamphlet from his pocket and handing it over to the curious woman. “It's not far away, and the fireworks can be seen from here if you find the correct spot to watch them from”

“And I'm guessing you know exactly which spot it is?” She smiled at him, turning the paper around to check the photographs it showed. “Maybe from some unruly high school years of yours?”
Toshinori flushed, tapping his fingers together sheepishly. “Ah, well, technically we weren’t supposed to be in school grounds after hours so I might’ve sneaked in a few times...”

Inko laughed loudly at the sight of the man trying to shrink on himself at the confession, acting as if he’d committed the greatest crime of his life just to see some fireworks. Izuku giggled from where he sat at the table with his dessert since he took a bit longer than them with lunch.

Asking Nezu was no problem for him, even if the knowing glint in his eye at the mention of Toshinori knowing exactly where to go chilled him to the bone. The principal agreed that having All Might was protection enough for something as harmless as watching the sky, so he gave him the green light readily.

The night in question found them crusading the deserted gardens of UA, both adults walking side to side as Izuku ran around them, tripping a few times but getting back up immediately as he jumped on mounds of snow piled all around them, completely bundled up as he made snow angels. The sky was clear and the stars twinkled around the moon.

All in all it was the perfect night.

Toshinori called Izuku over, picking him up and handing him to Inko. “You might want to hold on for this”

“Hold on for wha--”

Inko’s question was cut short when Toshinori bent down to pick her up in a princess carry as she held Izuku, and shot up into the sky. The sudden speed swallowed her surprised yelp but did nothing to stop Izuku’s yell of delight at the ticklish feeling of his stomach fluttering from the height he found himself in out of nowhere.

He landed with practiced ease on the roof of the building, setting Inko down carefully next to a spot that had been already cleared from snow and prepared with pillows and blankets to sit down, along with a picnic basket.

Inko barely managed to hold herself upright on shaky legs, her hold on Izuku like iron. “T-That could’ve come with a little more warning...”
Toshinori smiled sheepishly and guided them to the little nest he’d set up with a hand on her back. The roof was closed off by high fences so it was no problem to let Izuku run around and see the view of the surrounding city over the treetops.

“Since we can't really see the festival properly I brought us here with a few minutes to spare before the fireworks. They should going up soon” Toshinori said, sitting down after Inko.

She started riffling though the basket curiously, fishing out a pouch of jelly for Izuku. “I can't remember the last time I even went to a festival; must've been back then when I was dating Hisashi. Since his quirk is fire breath he would just make the fireworks himself sometimes”

Ah yes, Izuku's estranged father. According to what Inko had told him in quiet conversation during Izuku's naps, the boy didn't even know of his existence. He'd never asked where or who his father was, and that thus far had been a blessing to Inko, who didn't think she could keep herself together if she had to explain to Izuku how Hisashi basically bailed because he didn't want him.

Now, Toshinori wasn't who to judge people's actions outside of villainy; he knew it was objectively a better choice to ultimately have the man out of the picture, better for Izuku to not be exposed to someone who would show him no affection, and at least he still supported Inko economically.

He'd been ultimately updated about the situation, and he'd actually shown concern about how Izuku and Inko had been faring, but had been assured they would be safe under the protection of pro heroes 24/7, and had backed off once more. Not like there was anything he could do without making the situation worse; he couldn't just show up without raising all kinds of questions on Izuku. Questions the kid could do without the answers to.

A sudden bang in the distance rippled the quiet of the night and had Izuku running towards his mother, falling on her lap as he looked around, trying to find the origin of the noise.

“Look baby, up there” She righted Izuku to sit in the correct direction. “It's starting!”

At first Izuku didn't understand what was going on, squinting up at the sky. He thought maybe his mother was confused and was talking about the stars, but then a single bright light started threading up high.

Then it exploded.
“Woah!” Izuku shouted, hanging tight onto his mother's arms as he looked at the bright lights suddenly covering the sky, brighter than any star and noisier than Hizashi's quirk. More followed the first, one after another, all different sizes and colors. Some even took the shape of animals or flowers as they burst, making Izuku fall back in awe as he could think of nothing else to do but just stare at the fireworks.

Toshinori was glad he was enjoying himself, even if at the start he'd been afraid the loud noise would scare Izuku, but seemed having been exposed to Hizashi's quirk had made him more able to stand sound of that caliber. A sudden weight on his arm interrupted his line of thought and he turned to see Inko was leaning against him, just as focused on the lights as Izuku was, but her face showed a peaceful, grateful expression as a small smile graced her lips. She glanced at Toshinori's face and her smile grew wider, eyes crinkling at the corners as multicolored lights shone down on her.

There was a thumping in his chest Toshinori could not attribute to the banging of the fireworks.

When it was all over and he'd walked them to their door, Toshinori pulled out his phone and called the only person he could trust with these kind of things.

In another part of the city, Tsukauchi Naomasa was woken up from the first real sleep he had in a week by the ringtone he'd designated Toshinori with—a clown honk.

He blindly reached for it and unlocked the call, bringing it up to his ear. “I'm?” He managed to say, his eyes refusing to open.

“I think I'm dying?” Was the only thing Toshinori said in greeting.

“Wha'” Now, Naomasa knew Toshinori would never call him if he was actually dying, he'd just straight up show on his door and turn to ash all over his brand new shoes because that's definitely how he would top being the biggest thorn on Naomasa's side. This must've been one of his over-exaggerations over something he'd never experienced before.

“I think I developed an allergy to Inko” Oh, first name basis? Interesting. “My chest started feeling funny out of nowhere just a while ago when I was out with her and Izuku”

Naomasa managed to open his eyes enough to glare at the picture of his best friend grinning at him.
from his phone caller ID. “Oh my god” Was all he said before hanging up and throwing the phone away, trying to go back to sleep.

It was the next morning, at an hour Naomasa was actually supposed to be awake that he called Toshinori to give him the Talk.

Because despite having been all over the world, met uncountable people, been in close contact with the most charming and beautiful celebrities on the planet, it was the first time in his life Yagi Toshinori had ever gotten a crush on anyone and had no idea what was even happening.

It was also terribly embarrassing for Naomasa, who was barely in his twenties and also had never had any kind of relationship.

If only Nana was still here, she was an expert on romanticism and feelings.

Ultimately Toshinori opted to ask the only people he knew to be in a relationship.

“You gotta be kidding me” Shouta deadpanned.

“I don't know who else to talk to about this; heroes aren't exactly known for having, ah, relationships”

Hizashi finished stirring his coffee and pointed the spoon at him. “And you're serious about this?”

Toshinori looked at the table of the little cafe he'd invited them over to talk. He tried to ignore the people crowding the window outside trying to look at him. “Well, I just realized it? I don't...have any experience, so I wanted to see if you could tell me what to do next”

Hizashi snorted. “Well don't look at me; our thing was all Shouta”

Shouta hummed, tapping his glass. The noise of the people outside was starting to make him mad; at least All Might had reserved the entire cafe to keep them out. “I wouldn't recommend doing what I did, though. Throwing yourself at Inko might not work as well as it worked me with 'Zashi”
Hizashi flushed, and Toshinori thought he might as well avoid any advice from them that might be in that vein. “Well, do you have any ideas I could use at least?”

“Yes, but first” Hizashi slammed his hands on the table, nearly toppling over their drinks. “Are you serious about her?”

“I mean, I want to be, that's the whole idea”

Shouta hummed. “And what about Izuku?”

Toshinori blinked at him, confused. “What...?”

“They're a package deal. If you want to date Inko, you have to be serious about Izuku too” Shouta continued. “She already broke off a stable relationship over his well-being. She won't even look your way if you don't accept Izuku as part of the relationship”

He was quiet for a moment, and then the boisterous laugh that came out of him was enough to send the crowd outside wild. “Oh, you scared me for a second there!” He wiped away an imaginary tear from his eye. “Of course I'd take Izuku into consideration, it didn't even occur to me that he would be alien to this!”

That seemed more than enough to placate the teens, if the extremely strange smiles they sent the hero's way was anything to go by.

After that Toshinori went back on his day with a newfound purpose. The advice they'd given him was basic, but practical. Spend time with her, create situations to form bonds, show her how good you are with her son, bring her gifts or do favors for her occasionally; and then when he felt ready for it, ask her on an actual first date.

Seemed easy enough.

And, surprisingly, it was.

He spend the week working with Naomasa on the case and doing his regular hero work, and on the
days she was giving her class he would pop in and join with the excuse he'd never had anything like that during his school days and wanting to witness it first-hand. Inko would be delighted, making him her personal assistant and having him help her with showing the students how everything was done. The only ones not in complete awe at the sight of All Might in an apron were Tensei and Nemuri, who more often than not were fighting back tears from how much they wanted to laugh at his obvious attempts at getting closer to her.

So maybe Shouta was a bit of a gossip, sue him.

He also offered to help her keep house the days she and Izuku stayed together, and he'd help her cook, watch in amazement how she build a desk from scratch with leftover wood from the support department, and help keep Izuku entertained when she needed some alone time.

On the weekends they'd spend the days outside, enjoying the last days of snow before spring rolled in and melted it all away. They'd have snowmen building competitions that Inko would win each and every time by simply piling snow as high as she could and then carving at it with her quirk, pulling bits of it away until she got what she wanted. One day in particular she decided to make one of Toshinori in his typical hero pose, and he conceded defeat immediately.

As spring approached, so did the day school would let out and Izuku would be left without his friends, and it showed how much it was affecting him.

Despite having accepted it in the end, it didn't mean he wasn't scared. The fear of being abandoned was making his nightmares pick up and not even cuddling up to his mother at night could keep them at bay. It came to a point where Izuku simply stopped sleeping, and that left Inko with a self-imposed insomnia as well, since she spent the nights consoling her son. They were both tired and would spend the day napping to make up for it, the sunlight getting in through the window chasing Izuku's worries away momentarily.

It was when Inko burned her hand while on class that Toshinori decided to step up and offer his help in a new way.

Even if he though she was his biggest protection blanket, Izuku knew his mother was small and fragile just like him, and could not be able to protect him if the Man from his nightmares came back for him. But when All Might walked into his house one night before bedtime, clad in comfortable gym clothes and telling him they were having a sleepover, it was as if he was seeing that day again, the one when All Might saved him from the Man and put him away for good.

Fashioning a sort of camp in the living room with every mattress, blanket and pillow in the house
served to distract Izuku of the fact he was expected to fall asleep despite the possibility of his nightmares coming back. With All Might and his mother comfortably settled around him, all of them cuddled up and tiring him out with stories and games, Izuku didn't even realize the moment he fell into a dreamless sleep for the first time in days.

Toshinori didn't even have time to cover the boy properly with the blanket before Inko sighed relieved, passing out from exhaustion the next second at the sight of her son peacefully asleep. He tucked her in as well, softly brushing away a strand of her long hair that had fallen on her face. He smiled at the sight of the two before letting himself relax as well.

One sleepover turned into two, then five, then two weeks and before they knew it, it was as if Toshinori had practically moved in, always around, always there to bid Izuku goodnight. Since his presence had become so constant in the house, Izuku had finally been able to go back to sleep in his own room, knowing All Might would take care of anyone who would try to harm them. Toshinori had intended to just stay on the couch for the time being, but Inko immediately pushed him into one of the empty rooms and told him to bring his stuff over any time; that was his room now.

“Wow” Hizashi said once they were being updated on the situation. “You skipped the entire program and went straight to living with them. Talk about speed-running it”

Finally the dreaded day came that the students were graduating, and Nezu had allowed Izuku and Inko to be seated first row to see the ceremony. As sad as he still was to see them leave, Izuku was equal parts excited to see them walk up in their hero costumes one by one—Nemuri's original design thankfully modified now that she knew Izuku would be watching her work on TV all the time, and had to protect his innocent little mind. Everyone had a good laugh when Nezu called over All Might to help him deliver the diplomas, a move the hero had clearly not been informed of if his surprised face and lack of any preparation was of any indication. He'd nearly tripped walking up to the stage and the four who knew him more personally thanked him by bopping their diplomas on his nose.

After the formal part was done, Inko told Izuku they'd be waiting a while so that they could go to their families first and then they'd track them down to greet them properly. The wait only lasted a few minutes, however, because the four turned the plan around and went straight to her and Izuku, Tensei being dragged by Tenya so he could see his friend already.

“Oh, we were going to look for you after you'd finished talking to your parents” Inko greeted them, letting Izuku run off to play chase with Tenya around them.

Shouta shrugged. “We see them all the time, they can wait until we saw you guys first”
“Inkoooooo!” Nemuri cried, throwing herself at the woman to hug her tightly, almost lifting her off the ground. “I'm gonna miss you so muuuuuch! I don't want to leave my best girl behind”

Inko returned the hug as best as she could since she was being held with such strength. “Now, now, you can come back any time you want to see us, you know that”

Her statement was apparently supported by Izuku, considering how the boy decided it was enough play time and he'd launched himself at Shouta's back, making use of the new hero's loose clothes to climb up to sit on his shoulders, hugging his head and snuggling into his hair. The cherry blossoms were just starting to bloom but there were just enough petals flying by that a few had caught on Shouta's hair to tickle Izuku's nose.

Inko pulled a little notebook from her bag and handed it to Nemuri since she was closest. “Izuku drew this when you had that joint practice with the other class, in your costumes”

Nemuri flipped through the pages, dying inside a little at the many drawings there were of them in battle poses, with pink mist, yellow or blue lines surrounding them to show their quirks as they wore the same suits they had on at the moment. There were many for each of the four, but Shouta had an obscene amount about him.

“Can we take those?” Hizashi asked Izuku, getting a nod from the boy who was still stuck to Shouta like a little koala.

When Toshinori finally managed to dodge the crowd long enough to find them, Hizashi gave him his phone so he could take a group photo of them. Toshinori laughed and agreed, but it was painfully obvious how he wanted to be in the shot too, so Shouta rolled his eyes and snatch ed the phone away, using his capture weapon to hold it from afar as an impromptu selfie stick. Tensei lifted Tenya to sit on his shoulders like Izuku was doing so they could be together, and with Inko and Toshinori standing in front and behind Shouta and Izuku respectively, the image of their little group was finally made a permanent record.

When the time came for them to leave, Izuku was hiding his face in Shouta's hair, hanging on tight and not wanting to let go even if Inko tried to pry him off. Tremors shook the boy's frame and Shouta could feel him cry, trying to hide his face so they wouldn't worry, but the finality of the situation making it impossible for him to keep inside.

Shouta managed to get him down by wrapping his scarf around him and using his hands to make Izuku let go of his hold on him. When the kid was in front of him, his eyes were red and his lip wobbled while tears streamed steadily down his cheeks.
“You don't have to hold it in, you know” He said softly, hugging him close and patting his back comfortingly. “You know we'll be back whenever we can, but if you're sad now you can let it out. It's good for you”

Izuku sniffled, letting a shaky sob as he rubbed at his eyes with both hands. Hizashi joined the hug first, followed by Nemuri and Tensei until Izuku was completely enveloped on all sides by them, and he let himself loose, letting all the tears and frustration he'd been building up go out in a wail not unlike the one from when he'd been told they would be leaving.

Hours later Inko would find him asleep on the table, new drawings of his friends surrounding him.

As the months went by everyone was focusing on Izuku's mental recovery. Having taken the big step back to independence was a signal to his therapist that he was ready for a bit more, but never directly from Izuku least they wanted him to relapse. Inko would take careful note of his night terrors and tell her about them in as much detail as Izuku could describe, and from that they had managed to list a few things that was better for him to avoid: they already knew from personal experience that Izuku was scared of the dark, of white and sterile rooms that resembled labs, and of needles. The theory they initially had about him being afraid of people in lab coats was confirmed as well, when he kept mentioning 'men in white', and also anything resembling a cage or including bars, from an incident when one of the practical classes included trapping the defeated in little fake jails and Izuku threw a fit the moment he saw it on the field.

He also had an aversion to pink colored liquids like juice or paint, for some reason.

Since classes had started back again and Inko found herself busy, they put in motion the plan of leaving Izuku with either Nezu or Toshinori during those hours. When with Nezu, Izuku would mostly run around his office or bring his toys and pencils to draw, with occasional input from Nezu on how to paint inside the lines. With Toshinori, he liked to be outside, chasing frogs and crickets under the watchful eye of the hero. As it was a new year and there were new students milling about, Toshinori more often than not found himself surrounded by the first years asking him a million questions a minute and asking him for pictures with them, and he never had any problem with that.

Except the one time someone asked him since when did he have a son, and he'd bailed with Izuku still on his arms, leaving a trail of dust on his wake.

During the first few months of the school year, Shouta and the others would call Izuku whenever possible to catch up with him, with Tensei being the only one able to actually show up often enough since he had an entire agency working with him and could take a couple days off a month.
He'd bring Tenya with him every time and deliver little gifts the others had sent with him.

It wasn't until summer when Shouta and Hizashi finally made their appearance once more, looking tired and with a noticeable slouch to their backs, but as soon as Izuku caught sight of them across the yard during his morning walk with his mother he screamed, launching into a run and jumping into Shouta's arms as he crouched down to catch the little ball of energy.

The rest of the day Izuku refused to be put down, jumping from Shouta to Hizashi and back and not letting them go as they caught up with what they'd been doing—especially Shouta since, as an underground hero, he didn't work as a sidekick nor with any agency, and didn't appear in TV as much as the others. They commented on how big Izuku was getting, despite the boy pouting and pointing out to the marks on the wall, where it showed how his height wasn't changing at all with the passing months. Hizashi assured him he was going to get a growth spurt soon in the future, and that he was probably going to be even taller than All Might if he ate all his veggies and went to bed in time.

For Izuku's third birthday the four of them showed up, having saved the date to be completely off limits from work, and they also took the chance to celebrate Inko's birthday since it had been just a couple of weeks before. Seeing the amount of drawings Izuku was making on the daily, his presents consisted mostly of piles of new notebooks and coloring pencils, that most likely wouldn't last long with how much joy had filled Izuku's face at the sight of them.

On the other hand, it was fast approaching the date when Izuku had been kidnapped the year before, and Inko was growing restless as she subconsciously connected the date with danger and pain and sorrow. She was reluctant to let Izuku out of her sight and would call Toshinori and Nezu constantly when they were taking care of him to get updates.

Toshinori decided it was a good time as any to step up.

Even though summer had begun, their houses were right underneath a canopy of trees that chilled the area and brought down the temperature inside very quickly. The fireplace was a godsend in those chilly nights, coupled with Inko's favorite sweater and the never ending flow of hot drinks.

Despite having his own room in the house, completely furnished and open to him any and every day, Toshinori didn't 'officially' live there, but he might as well since he spent more nights there than at his own place. He had started sleeping over more often as well, since now the one who needed reassurance was Inko instead of Izuku.

On the night of the anniversary of Izuku's kidnapping, Toshinori had settled Inko down in front of
the fireplace, sitting on a huge beanie bag he'd brought from his room. Izuku was fast asleep on her lap and both of them were covered with Izuku's favorite blanket; an object of comfort for both of them. Inko stared apprehensively into the fire, letting the dancing flames steal her focus and let her mind wander. She felt if she stayed up long enough to see midnight come and go, to see the day end and a new one start...It might be cleansing, in a way.

“Here you go” Toshinori said, carefully handing her a mug of steaming tea. He sat down on the floor next to her, leaning into the bag as he cradled his own cup.

The fire crackled, breaking the silence. The mug burned Inko's hands but she felt it to be comforting, as if in a way it could equate the pain her son had gone through exactly a year ago. Izuku's weight settled her soul, reminding her he was him with her and they would have to go over her to lay their hands on him again, for whatever reason it was they were after him in the first place.

“Inko” Toshinori's voice broke through her thoughts, bringing her back to the present. “I know this isn't...That is not the best day for you but, there was something I wanted to ask”

She smiled softly, setting the cup to the side to place a hand on his arm. “Thank you for worrying, but it's fine. You can tell me anything”

He bit his lip, looking down at Izuku's sleeping face. There was a string of drool falling from his mouth as his cheek was pressed against Inko's stomach. Toshinori smiled at the sight, feeling that warmth that was so familiar to him at this point, the one he felt every time he was in private with the duo.

“Well, this is something I've put a lot of thought on, for a long time now” He started, clearing his throat halfway through. “I mean, it's never happened to me before so I'm not sure how to go about it and I've asked for help to people more experienced, but also I wanted it to be authentic! But I'm really bad at this so it might come out wrong and I--”

“Toshi” She cut him off. She laughed and patted his wrist. “You're mumbling” Her tired eyes settled him down, crinkled with a smile even through her exhaustion. “It's alright”

Toshinori stared at her, mind going blank and completely forgetting all the advice he'd been given, all the things he'd investigated, all the cheap dramas he'd watched in his spare time. He opened his mouth and blurted it out. “Would you go out with me?”
Inko's eyes were wide, mouth hanging open. If she'd been standing, she would've dropped Izuku in surprise. Her face started steadily flushing all the way from the tip of her ears to get lost way past her neck. “W...What...?”

“I-I'm just” Toshinori jumped back on track, hands gesturing wildly as if trying to catch his words out of thin air to form a coherent sentence. “We've grown so close these past months and, and I've never felt this way with anyone before and” He could feel himself blushing in turn. “and I know...today is an important day and I kinda, wanted to try and give this date a different reason to be remembered, a better one...if you'd even want to, that is”

She was covering her mouth in shock at his words, and Toshinori started panicking when her eyes turned shinier with unshed tears. Fuck, did he mess it up? Stupid, he'd assumed he could turn this into a good day to keep in memory, but it was incredibly selfish of him to think she would just accept so easily. He'd stopped to think about her and her feelings hundred, thousands of times, but he would never really know until he asked! Now he'd gone and ruined whatever chance he had with her and she'd never want to see him again and oh god he'd never see Izuku again he'd messed up he'd messed up he'd--

“I” Inko broke the silence, pushing back a strand of hair behind her ear. No tears were falling and she didn't look upset. Had Toshinori not messed up that badly after all?. “I can't...”

Ah, there it was. Rejection. Toshinori sighed and was ready to stand up and take his leave after apologizing.

Until she grabbed his hand.

“I can't believe you'd ask me that” She said softly, looking at him with stars on her eyes. The light from the fireplace set her face on yellow and orange tones, making it shine. “How could I ever...be worthy of someone...someone like you?”

Now it was Toshinori’s turn to be confused. Hadn't he been on the other side of that exact same thought just a second ago?

“You'd be the only person in the world wondering that, I'm sure” He said, feeling his heart settle down but also speed up all at once. He leaned closer to the bean bag again. “You're like, the whole package”
“Me? A single mother running from a villain, secluded from the outside world?” She huffed a little, sarcastic laugh. “I can't see what's the appeal”

“A dedicated mother who would do and give everything for her son, smart, diligent, strong” He pointed out one by one. “Not scared of putting people in place when needed be, skilled at pretty much anything you set out to do, a heart as big as the sun” He trailed off, cheeks turning pink as he stared off to the side. “Really easy on the eyes...”

She covered her entire face with her hands, a high pitched sound coming out of her. “Stop...”

The silence that flowed was somehow a comfortable one, despite how awkward the conversation might have been a moment ago. Inko let her hands fall as she re-positioned herself to sit up straighter, Izuku mumbling in his sleep as his pillow moved. She picked up her mug again, sipping at it absentmindedly as she stared into the fire.

“I wouldn't oppose the idea” She said, almost a whisper in the silence of the room. “Trying, I mean”

Toshinori looked at her like she had hung the moon. “I'd like that”

And 'try' they did. Casually, at first, simple walks around campus at night or on weekends, when the campus was bare of students. Nothing different from their previous ones except the unmistakable energy charging the air around them, much more casual touching, a soft hand latched on the crook of a strong elbow, a powerful hand carefully settled on a delicate shoulder. Way too many side glances and nervous smiles.

Izuku would just march on, unaware of his mother and his favorite hero being emotional wrecks behind him.

When a couple of weeks had passed—with plenty of handmade gifts and homemade meals and movie nights—they broke the news to Izuku.

“What's 'dating’?” He asked, confused about the new word but eager as always to learn. And if it was something his mom and All Might did, it had to be something good, right?

“Well, you know how Shouta and Hizashi like each other very very much?” Inko started to explain,
deciding an example he knew first-hand would be better than trying with a definition. Izuku nodded frantically, smiling at the mention of them. “How they're always together, and hold hands and...and k-kiss?”

Izuku nodded. Then stopped. Then gasped as loud as his little lungs could allow. “You kiss All Might!?”

Inko's face turned tomato red. “I-Izuku!”

Toshinori tried to step in. “N-No, not...not yet?” He looked at Inko, face as red as hers. She hid her face in her hands. Seemed the talk was between the boys now. “I-It's really too soon for anything of the sort...”

But it was too late, Izuku was jumping in place, stars in his eyes as it finally dawned on him what it all meant. They had to make him understand to keep it a secret for the meantime, since All Might was a very important person and Inko and Izuku were still hiding, so it would be dangerous if anyone knew that wasn't trustful.

They did tell the others, though.

And whatever it was that they told Toshinori after they dragged him off behind locked doors, looking at his pale face and bangs hanging limp around his face out of sheer terror, Inko didn't want to know.

And time went on.

When Izuku turned four, Aizawa started taking one day off per week to start training him like he'd promised. Said 'training' consisted mostly of jogging and stretching, and they had enough in their plate with trying to make Izuku touch his toes.

The Midoriyas presence in UA had become public knowledge due to some loose-lipped new heroes who couldn't help gushing about having met them before graduating. Nezu reassured that it didn't change their situation since, like he'd said at the beginning, All for One already knew where they were, and every other villain was considerably weaker than him, especially with All Might on watch near 24/7.
Due to this, a lot of the new students would look around during the entrance ceremony, trying to find them. Of course, by this point Inko and Izuku felt so at home in UA they usually were somewhere else, but occasionally they'd show up to see the first years. Izuku loved to try to guess their quirks, and had no qualms pointing at each one and loudly voicing his opinions in true Present Mic fashion.

The most surprising thing was how accurate his guesses were most of the time.

When Izuku turned five, Nezu pulled him into his office one day and told him it was time to start teaching him.

Izuku, who had shown a thirst for knowledge far greater than any book could quench, was delighted at the amount of books and notebooks Nezu had set on the table for him.

“Well have to teach you to read and write first, of course” He'd started, wheeling in a whiteboard and jumping on a moving platform to reach it. “Then the true fun will begin”

Despite his increasingly busy schedule, Izuku still had to make time for his visits to the therapist, who was slowly but surely making progress on releasing the worries and fears he kept hidden out of an unconscious sense of self-preservation. One of the ways she did this was play therapy, offering him an assortment of toys and letting him have a go at them. She noticed Izuku never touched the ones that were completely black, or the ones with yellow or orange button eyes. He didn't even look at them, even going as far as kicking them away from the other ones. She didn't think he realized he was doing that.

Izuku had also started showing signs of the so awaited growth spurt. First he was finally making new, taller marks on the wall as he started growing a few inches. Then he started getting growing pains, and at first it scared him to feel this throbbing ache in his bones, something he hadn't felt before but close enough to the muscle strains he felt during his time captured.

Inko explained that it was normal, that it just meant he was going to be taller with time and that they would go away soon. That seemed to help him cope better, but they left him grumpy and he'd hide in his room until they passed.

It was adorable, really.

When Izuku turned six, he asked if he could have a bookshelf in his room. Seeing the steadily increasing amount of notebooks he was filling, Toshinori launched himself to the task.
Quite literally, actually.

Apparently you could get from UA to the nearest store in one leap, who knew?

There were at least three notebooks dedicated to Present Mic, Midnight and Ingenium each, and way more about Eraserhead; no one could explain where Izuku got so much information about him to fill them so thoroughly, considering Shouta was never on TV unlike the others.

“Ah, he added a new type of sole to his shoes for easier gliding” Tenya said one day as he and Izuku had a sleepover. Izuku nodded and jotted the new information down on Ingenium's page. “But it's also made of a material that has an extra strong grip so he doesn't slip”

“Amazing” Izuku breathed out. “That a material like that could be produced where it fulfills two different and conflicting purposes at the same time, maybe a quirk that allows the fusion of two different materials while maintaining the functionality of both? But the again it wouldn't explain how it would keep them from conflicting-- ah! Unless it has to do with the way the shape is laid out? Maybe if both materials are set in opposite directions--”

Tenya hid a laugh behind his hand, already used to this new habit Izuku had about mumbling endlessly about anything that crossed his mind, even as he wrote everything down furiously in his still messy calligraphy.

Tenya was growing like a bamboo shot, already a head taller than Izuku and starting to show the constant training he did with his quirk. He could cross the entire training field of UA in seconds, and Izuku insisted on racing him every time, despite the fact Izuku was not even near the halfway point by the time Tenya had already made his way back.

“You boys alright there?” Toshinori asked as he walked past, a towel around his neck as he made his way to the fridge for a water bottle after his own workout.

“Aha” Izuku said, still not done writing down everything he wanted to add. He snapped his head up suddenly. “Can I have a pudding cup?”

“Not before lunch” Toshinori shook his head. “Your mother said you have to wait after she comes back from class”
“Aw” Izuku pouted, laying on the table dejectedly.

It had come as a shock for Tenya when Tensei came home that one night and told the rest of his family—all trustworthy people, and with Inko and Toshinori’s permission, of course—that they were dating. It was a bit surprising to be remembered that All Might was still a person, and so had a private life that the media didn't show.

Now, a couple of years down the road, it had become so normal for them to fall into the average family role that it was hard to think there was ever a time they weren't all together like this.

It only took until Toshinori was done showering for Inko to arrive, humming as she kicked her shoes off in a practiced move and skipped into the house. “Hello Tenya, haven't seen you in a while!”

“Good evening, Midoriya-san” Tenya stood up to greet her properly, slipping into his square attitude as he always did with people he considered important. “Thank you for having me over for tonight. I promise I won't be a bother”

“Oh please don't say that” She waved off. “You're never a bother”

She made her way to Izuku, kissing the crown of his head as he was still deep in his writing, and went deeper into the house to her room to change. She came across Toshinori in the hall, and they bumped when they tried to walk around each other. Inko laughed, holding his chin to bring him down and kiss him softly in greeting.

They could hear Izuku's giggling from the living room as he always did when they were affectionate in front of him, and it only made them grin as well. Toshinori went a step further and lifted her up, turning around to gently deposit her on the other side of the hall.

“There we go” He said, chuckling at the yelp his girlfriend—and oh boy did he like that word—made when he lifted her, as if he didn't do it every single time this happened.

Inko slapped his arm playfully, huffing a laugh of her own as she turned to go finish cleaning up.
When Izuku turned seven, well, that was a **very** eventful year.

Following his previous idea of turning the dreaded kidnapping date into a good memory by asking Inko out the same day, Toshinori decided it was a good idea as any to pop the question the same day.

He'd recruited everyone he knew that could offer any insight on hot to go about it, and it ended with Shouta, Hizashi, Nemuri, Tensei, and Naomasa stuck in a private room in a random restaurant Toshinori frequented if only for how tight-lipped they were about his regular presence there.

“How much exactly did you pay off our agencies to have us all together at the same time?” Nemuri asked, going to town on the meat roasting on the grill in front of them.

“That's not important” Toshinori said, with the nonchalance of someone who'd been the Number One hero so long he didn't know what to do with all that money. “What's important is I have no idea what to do and I'm panicking”

“You look pretty calm” Shouta added, slapping Nemuri's hand away as it inched towards the meat on his plate now that she'd ravaged hers.

“Haha! I'm crumbling to pieces on the inside” Toshinori grinned, his words betraying his usual heroic presence, but Naomasa could see the panic on his eyes.

“Alright, let's go through this step by step” Naomasa started, pulling out a notebook from his coat pocket. “Do you have anything planned already?”

“Only the date I want to do it” He tapped his fingers together. “I know if she said yes, it'd have to be in UA, so everything would have to be to be done there. Also, it'd have to be small, since only a very select group of people could know, including all of you”

Naomasa nodded, writing down ideas as Toshinori spoke. “You're not as lost as I thought. You're right in that it'd have to be small. But hey, it's Inko we're talking about, you could do it in her classroom with just you two and Izuku and she'd be happy as long as all three of you are together”

“She's so cute, I wish I was dating her” Nemuri whined, kicking her legs under the table.
“Get a girlfriend on your spare time, we're helping the biggest human disaster in the world get a wife right now” Hizashi said. He stood up and slammed his hands on the table, pointing a finger directly at Toshinori's face. “We're going to do this and we're gonna do it right, you hear me?”

“Y-Yes, of course” Toshinori said, leaning back away from the accusing finger. “You're awfully enthusiastic about this”

Hizashi sat back down. “Well of course, Inko and Izuku are like, my favorite people in the world after Shouta, I want them to be happy” He hooked his arm with his boyfriend as he spoke, Shouta unbothered by it as he drank from his beer. “Besides, that way you can owe me a favor for when I need help with our own wedding”

Shouta spit everything he was drinking.

Hizashi huffed, patting Shouta's back. “Oh please, don't act like you don't know I'm not letting you go”

They brainstormed for what felt like hours afterwards. That meeting turned into another, and another, and another. By the time they had everything planned out it was a couple of months until July, and Toshinori was being eating alive by his own nerves.

The plan was simple; the four heroes would coordinate to be all in UA the night in question, keeping Izuku busy while Toshinori and Inko went on a 'date'. He'd take her stargazing to the same spot he'd taken them when watching the fireworks that night he realized how he felt about her, and then he'd deliver a little speech about how despite the circumstances of their meeting, she—and Izuku by extension—were the best thing that had ever happened to him. How he wanted them to be part of his life permanently, and if she'd accept him into their lives as well. Then he'd pull out the little blue box from his pocket and ask the question.

“I swear if you mess it up I'll come for your unborn children” Shouta threatened a week before the date. “And by that I mean I'll chop off your--”

“He knows what you mean” Tensei cut in, pulling him back.

Surprisingly enough, everything went according to plan.
When they came back, Izuku was asleep and Inko was shaking so bad Toshinori had to carry her, which was ridiculously easy with how small she was and how easily she fit in his arms. She was covering her face, the glint of the new ring on her finger glaringly obvious as if illuminated by a thousand lights.

They went wild, or as wild as they could with Izuku in his room without waking him up. They ripped Inko from his hold and took turns hugging her so tight it was hard to tell if there was a moment her feet were touching the ground.

Though no one was more excited about the news than Izuku when he was told the next day.

At first it seemed his brain had disconnected from his body, his face stuck in an expression of open-mouthed awe and wide eyes. They were afraid he'd stopped breathing.

Then he lost it.

“Married?! You're gonna get married?!” He shouted, jumping up and down the room around them. “A-All Might is gonna marry my mom?! Oh gosh oh gosh oh gosh” He went off in a litany of excited noises and questions he didn't expect the answer to. Then he halted dead in his tracks, realization filling his face. “You're gonna be my dad...?”

Toshinori had to cover the wobbly smile that split his face at the hopeful voice of the boy. “I'd like to, if you'd let me”

And in true Midoriya fashion, Izuku started bawling.

“You're gonna be my dad! All Might is gonna be my dad!” He cried out, hugging Toshinori's legs as the tears flowed without sign of stopping.

Izuku had been told about Hisashi when Inko thought he was old enough to know, and he'd taken it surprisingly well, not showing any signs of caring about a man that had no presence in his life. He'd never asked anything more about him, never wondering about details of his life or relationship with his mother. It seemed that, as far as Izuku was concerned, that man didn't exist, nor did he matter.
Looking at him now, clinging to Toshinori as the man hugged him back, both absolute disasters sitting on the floor, it was clear Izuku never really accepted the abandonment of his biological father; he just refused to deal with it.

The only people who assisted to the wedding were the aforementioned five impromptu planners, Tenya, Nezu, who would also be officiating, Recovery Girl and Cementoss, who not only was the oldest standing teacher at UA and a huge fan of All Might, but also the person who'd given them all new homes and even took it upon himself to build the site the wedding took place. It was the bare minimum they could do for everything he'd done for them.

And of course, the first person Toshinori had called to give the news; Nighteye.

“About time” Was his first response, which baffled Toshinori, to say the least. Then a soft laugh from his sidekick, and a new, softer voice full of pride and affection. “I'm glad. You deserve to be this happy”

Toshinori didn't know what he did to deserve him.

If you asked the people present, it was difficult to tell who had been the center of attention more; Inko with her glowing presence and beautiful white dress, Toshinori trying and failing to hold back his own tears, or Izuku with his serious face trying to not mess up his job of ring bearer in the cutest little suit they'd ever seen.

The funniest part of the day, however, was definitely Shouta pushing Nemuri to the floor to catch the bouquet, then winking at an increasingly red Hizashi as he held it tight so she wouldn't steal it. The closest contender was Nighteye's Best Man Speech at the party.

He'd done the typical clinking to call everyone's attention, standing up to his full considerable height as he cleared his throat and pulled out a stack of neatly folded papers from his pocket.

Which he proceeded to rip to pieces.

“Five years” He started. “Five years I have been writing this speech. Over and over, reading it and practicing it to exhaustion. I know every word by heart and I could keep reciting it long after I lose my voice. But I know no one likes long, boring speeches, so I'll be brief” He turned to Toshinori. “For years I have been your sidekick, working side by side every case, every villain you've caught” He brought his hand up...and rubbed the bridge of his nose, pulling his glasses up as he did. “And
after all this time, you still couldn't tell I knew this was going to happen?"

Hizashi’s loud 'Ha!' threw everyone into a fit, trying to keep their composure as Toshinori started sinking into his chair.

Nighteye continued. “Since the moment I met Inko, since the moment I first used my quirk on her and saw this exact day come I have been waiting. I have to say, at first I thought it would take you longer to make a move; lord knows you're as clueless as a puppy when it comes to relationships. And yet here you are” He swirled his glass, focused on the wine inside. “Married to a wonderful woman, the new father to a wonderful boy. You've gotten quite lucky, I must say” He smiled, raising the glass in the typical toasting position. “Keep up the good work, friend. I wish you the best in life. Cheers”

And with his last word echoed by everyone, the party went on.

It was by far the most joyful day most of them have ever seen, with Toshinori cementing his place as the new member of the family by joining the waterworks with Inko and Izuku after the ceremony was done. It went all without a hitch, everything perfect and in its place. Not a single cloud in the sky. They happiness from that day lasted and lasted, for weeks on end afterwards.

It was almost enough to last them to the day All for One broke out of jail.

After Naomasa gave them the news, panting from how fast he made it there as soon as he was told himself, Inko grabbed Izuku and locked herself in the house, holing herself in Izuku's room.

“He can't get to him. He won't touch him. Not even over my dead body” She claimed between gritted teeth when Naomasa talked to her after Izuku had fallen asleep.

The man that had broken into their house the night they were moved into UA had been found dead in his cell, not a single sign of anyone ever being in his cell nor having touched him, as if his heart had just stopped beating of his own volition. Everyone knew it was just a warning, a way to convey a message to the world: All for One was back out there, and he was tying loose ends.

Toshinori jumped into action immediately, stretching himself thin as he tried with all his might to get the clue on the bastard, to follow him up to his dirty little lair and finish the job he should’ve ended years ago. He also had to be present for his family, be there to comfort Inko and reassure Izuku that, as long as he lived, that man would never touch them.
Seeing his father so focused and his mother so afraid, Izuku swallowed his own fear and, in his next training session, asked Shouta to be serious with him, to train him for real now.

“I'm gonna be a hero” He claimed, brow furrowed as he tried to mask his worry. “Quirk or no quirk, I gotta be strong for everyone”

Shouta hummed, crossing his arms as he stared down at the boy. “You want to be strong?” Izuku nodded. “You want to protect people?” Another nod. “You want to be strong to protect your mother?”

A moment of silence. Then. “Yes”

Shouta stepped up to him, crouching to be on his level. “Alright. I'll train you harder, the way I trained when I was your age. But there's something we have to take care of first” He grabbed Izuku's hand, pulling at the sleeves of his shirt. “You still don't want to look at your scars”

Izuku looked away.

Shouta sighed. “Look, I understand. I've never been in your shoes, so I can't tell how you feel about them. I understand you never want to see them again, that you'd take them out of your skin one by one if you could. But you can't”

“But I can cover them. I can keep them out of my sight. I don't want them to be a reminder” Izuku countered. “I don't want them to be a weakness”

“Then turn them into a strength” Shouta said. “Turn them into something that you can look at and be proud of”

Izuku looked down at his arms, feeling without seeing the rough texture of his skin, the raised spots that were his only leftover of that horrible time in his life. “I don't know how to...”

“I can give you an idea, if you'll let me” Shouta smiled. “When we were helping your dad plan how to propose to your mother, he told us he wanted to do it the same day he asked her out. The same day you were taken”
Izuku looked away, frown deeper.

“His idea” Shouta continued. “Was to replace a bad memory with a good one. Two good ones, in fact. And it worked, as far as I’m concerned. Now when the date approaches, they’ll be much more concerned with their double anniversary than anything bad that happened. But that doesn’t make it disappear, because it still happened. Izuku” He shook him a bit, bringing his attention back to him. “You can’t erase your scars, you can’t deny what happened. But you can turn it into something else, something good”

“How can I turn these” Izuku ripped his hands out of Shouta's hold, pulling his sleeves back. “Into something good?!” They were still visible despite how long he’d applied the treatment Shouta had taught him, and popping out like hundreds of mosquito bites that just wouldn't go away.

Shouta stood up as Izuku pulled his sleeves back down. “I know a person that can help you, if you'd let her. I could bring her over and have her explain her quirk to you personally, since I know you'd like to interrogate her about it”

“...Really?”

“Really”

A week later, with permission from Nezu and Izuku's parents, along with a deep background check, Shouta arrived at UA followed by a young woman with the most punk look anyone had ever seen, pink hair in short ponytails as every inch of visible skin below the chin was covered in intricate tattoos.

“My quirk allows me to create images on skin with a trace of my fingers” She explained once she was sat down with Izuku. “Basically, I can make tattoos without the use of needles. The process is just as long though, since I have to be careful. To this day I haven't found a way to erase the ink”

She showed him the first one she ever made as proof, a little flower with uneven lines and clashing colors all over the place.

With his parents’ permission and the help of the woman, Izuku soon agreed to the idea and chose what he wanted to cover his scars with.
“A green parrot” He said, wearing a short sleeved shirt for the first time in years as he extended his right arm on the station she'd prepared for the job in the house. “For my mom. And a forest with eight trees on the other arm”

She smiled, rubbing a cotton ball soaked in alcohol up and down his arm carefully. “For your parents? That's great” She didn't seem that interested in the idea of All Might being his dad, and Shouta assured them he trusted her to not divulge the secret. Naomasa had even interrogated her beforehand and had declared her honest.

It took a few weeks to get done, but by the time it was finished Izuku could no longer see the scars, and the vibrant pictures made him smile every time he saw them.

“They match your hair” Nezu complimented them on one of their lessons. Izuku was sporting a brand new wardrobe, showing off his new tattoos to everyone. “They're very nice”

He smiled wide. “Thank you”

Tenya had agreed when he saw them, smiling through Izuku's concern that his friend wouldn't like them.

“You don't think they make me look bad, don't you? Like a yakuza?”

Tenya shook his head, grinning as he traced the pictures with his finger. “They're beautiful, Izuku. Anyone who thinks otherwise, send them my way, I'll give them a stern talking to about properly keeping their mouths shut!”

“Tenya!”

When Izuku turned nine, his father ended up in the hospital.

The fight had not been broadcast in TV, so they didn't know until Naomasa called, telling them that Toshinori had finally found a legit lead to All for One, and had gone to confront him personally. He didn't know the details, but apparently the fight was so brutal both hero and villain were found almost dead, Toshinori missing a good chunk of organs and All for One's face destroyed beyond repair.
Toshinori was currently undergoing surgery to save what was left of his lungs and to fix him up since his stomach was completely gone. All for One had disappeared in thin air, no clue of his destination left behind.

Inko was sick with worry, pacing around Nezu's office as they awaited further news from the hospital. Izuku sat on the couch, looking at his feet as he remained silent.

Nezu was at his desk, paws clasped in front of his face. He was staring intensely at Izuku while Recovery Girl tried to reassure Inko the doctors seeing to All Might's health were the best he could get. “Izuku” The principal called out suddenly, getting the attention of everyone in the room. “Stop that”

Izuku didn't understand. “Stop what? I'm not--”

“Stop blaming yourself”

Izuku sat up as if electrocuted, freezing in place.

“Izuku?” Inko said, approaching her son slowly. “Baby, are you alright?”

“I...” He started, but the words wouldn't come out. His left arm was frozen in place halfway up, the trees drawn in shaking. “It's...”

“It's not your fault” Nezu said, walking towards him. He held Izuku's hand, dragging his paw up and down the tattoo representing Toshinori. “This didn't happen because of you. All Might was going to end up in a fight like this sooner or later. If you'd asked him, I'm sure he'd say he's glad it was sooner; this man” His tone turned firmer. “is a menace to society as a whole, and he had to be fought. Don't think for a second this is about you, Izuku Midoriya. You've been through a lot, and I don't wish your hardships on anyone, but you're not the only person in the world”

It was harsh, but it seemed to be exactly what Izuku needed to hear. His barrier broke and the tears flew unbound. Nezu brought him into his arms as well as he could hug a child that was now taller than him, and Inko soon joined Izuku's side, running her hand through his hair and mumbling words of comfort for him.
Recovery Girl was called to the hospital a few hours later, and when she came back she brought the news that the surgery had been successful, and that he'd have to stay in the hospital for some time while he healed.

“I offered him to stay in the infirmary, I know they would lend us the equipment he needs. But he insisted on staying; he didn't want you to see him like that” She explained.

And it was a good decision, after all. The sight of him bound by beeping machines and hooked to life support equipment would have brought back very bad memories for Inko and Izuku and he didn't want them to worry or add to their nightmares.

He would call them every day, his voice soft and hoarse, riddled with coughs, but the fact he was well enough to speak was enough to keep them from just bursting out of the school grounds and into the hospital with worry.

By the time he was finally deemed well enough to go back home, he had lost a lot of muscle mass and his cheeks were sunken in, his eyes tired and had to walk with a cane. He still kept his distinctive figure, so the public wouldn't know just how bad his condition was.

“Howl love” He said when Inko rushed out of the door as he was being helped down from the car by Naomasa. She ran up to him, hands frozen as she tried to decide what to do now that she had him in front of her. She finally hugged him, slowly and carefully wrapping her arms around him and settling against his chest. She could hear his heart beating, and it suddenly became the most beautiful sound in the world.

Izuku wasn't as considerate, launching himself at his legs and almost making him topple over if it wasn't for Naomasa's foresight as he held Toshinori up.

That night Toshinori waited until Izuku had gone to sleep—which was really hard, since the boy refused to leave his father's side—to sit down with Inko, the fireplace warming his aching bones as he let himself be honest with her.

“I wanted to kill him” He admitted, hands clasping his wife's firmly. “I wanted to get rid of him at least, to end this stupid fight that has lasted so long. But I wasn't strong enough. Now he's who knows where again, and I'm weaker now”

Inko let him speak, let him voice her own thoughts through his words. She also wished he'd have
killed that man, bring an end to this madness that had them trapped between four walls. But there was nothing they could do now, but wait for the man to remain hidden forever, or appear once more to be finally disposed of.

When Shouta and the others came visit the next day, there was none of that playful animosity they had with Toshinori, but more of a solemn respect that was, honestly, getting on his nerves.

“I'm not going to be offended if you make fun of me, you know” He said when Hizashi averted his eyes when handing him his 'get well soon' present. “All this is just really cold, come on, tell me something funny!”

They looked at each other, trying to decide what to do, until Shouta sighed and stepped forward, flopping down to sit next to him. “So, I heard hospital food is even worse this days. Did you get some or did they hire a personal chef for your royal ass?”

That made Toshinori bark a laugh, stopping to cough halfway through, a string of blood dripping down his chin. Shouta looked alarmed and ready to apologize when Toshinori waved him off. “Don't worry about it, the doctors told me it's normal with my condition” He said. “Just please, don't treat me like an old man yet”

The air was much lighter after that, and Toshinori even encouraged Izuku to sit with him, that he would be more than alright with a hug from his son.

With time, love, and a fuckton of medicine, Toshinori was finally well enough to go back to hero work.

If only he could walk out the door with his wife and son holding onto his arms and legs and holding him back.

“No! Stay home, dad!” Izuku shouted, lying on the floor as he tried to prevent him from taking another step.

“Come on, you could use some more rest, no need to go back out there so soon!” Inko agreed, trying with all her might to hold him back.

Even with his rapidly thinning body, Toshinori was still tall and strong enough to simply shake
them off and go on, but he found their attempts so adorable he couldn't bring himself to do it. “I have to go back to work. I can't let the villains know All Might has been out of commission for a while”

“Shouta can pick up the slack! And Hizashi! And Nemuri and Tensei!” Izuku replied. “Don't gooooo”

Finally he agreed to stay one day more, but insisted he absolutely would go back to work tomorrow.

Even if he had to quietly get out of bed and leave before the sun was even up.

Inko was soooo mad when he came back that night.

As his body deteriorated from the lack of his stomach, he soon found out he could force his body to go back to his muscled form if he willingly activated his quirk, but found out the hard way about the time limit when he started steaming in the middle of a press conference. He'd managed to make it out of there fast enough, but now had to be much more careful.

“I must look ridiculous” He said one day as he dressed up, his clothes hanging like a tent over his skinny body.

Inko chuckled, wrapping her arms around him. “You look adorable. And I can finally hug you all the way around!”

Toshinori hugged back and lifted her up, unable to stand how cute she was.

“Mom! Let's go!” Izuku shouted from the entrance. “We're gonna be late!”

“Well, off to work, both of us” Toshinori said as he set her down, buffing up to his hero form and making his clothes actually fit.

Since Izuku was now old enough, he'd joined Inko in her classes. It was ridiculously adorable how they wore matching aprons and how Izuku was her personal assistant, even so far as going around
helping students himself since he had seen his mother work all his life. It became even more unbearably cute as Izuku grew taller, since Inko was already really short and he had caught up to her, now they looked like twins moving in unison in the classroom.

Home Econ had become one of the most successful classes in UA, not only with perfect attendance from all classes but also perfect grades since no one wanted to disappoint Inko or Izuku with anything less than a hundred percent of their effort. Many times the students left what they'd made in cooking class as gifts for them since everyone was completely enamored with their big eyes and sweet smiles, and so it became no surprise that she started plumping up with the years, and if anything she became more and more adorable to the point some people literally could not go through the class if they looked at her, least they started to cry at how weak they were for her.

At the same time all that extra food only helped with Izuku's steadily growing frame. He was resigned that he'd never be taller than his mother—most likely a side effect of being so extremely malnourished under the hands of the scientists—but with Shouta's increasingly harder training he was turning into the Mini Might he always dreamed of becoming. He could lift his mother and carry her around with ease, and had beaten Tenya in every arm wrestling competition they'd had. Shouta was even considering teaching him how to use his capture weapon to have some more arsenal on his side.

All in all, the road of Izuku's life had had a bunch of bumps and wild rides, but everything had turned well enough for him. He was surrounded by love and friends, and people who appreciated him and helped him be a better person.

Which was why, at age twelve, his first brush with a hateful attitude was such an impact on him.

The year had started the best way possible. Shouta and Hizashi had showed up one morning before class, and Izuku asked them what were they doing here so early, since they always called first before visiting.

“Oh you know” Shouta had shrugged. “Gotta be on time for the first day of work”

That's how Izuku learned three of his favorite people had been hired as teachers in UA.

Shouta had arrived to his first class that day with Izuku latched onto his leg, dragging him along. The students had enough sense to not comment on it as he didn't let go through all his classes that day. He repeated the treatment with Hizashi the next day, and Nemuri the next.
It was such a nice surprise to him, that they would be here every day for him to bother at will, that the bad day in question hit him like a slap of cold water in the face.

At the age kids usually start middle school, Nezu had told Izuku there was a class that had requested permission for a guided visit to UA, since pretty much all of the students wanted to become heroes and attend the best school in the country, and the teachers wanted them to know the reality of what they would face.

Izuku had been excited beyond belief, that was his first chance to see kids his age outside of Tenya!

When the bus came in after the proper security measures for temporary entrance of the class, Izuku was half-hiding behind a tree, watching with interest how the most colorful arrangement of kids and quirks walked off the bus. A teacher was yelling at the rowdier students to settle down and go back in line, and a tall blond boy slapped them in the back of the head, making them shut up.

The teacher had told them to stay put while he went to fetch some files from the principal's office, and walked away after that, leaving the students without further supervision.

As expected, the chaos picked up as soon as he was out of sight. The girls grouped up and started chatting, taking pictures of everything on sight with their phones. Izuku wondered if he could ask for one to his dad. The boys started shouting again, getting hyped up about going to UA and starting play fights with each other, showing off their quirks while Izuku took mental notes of everything he saw.

The blonde boy that had shut them up, however, was staring straight at him.

“Hey you!” He shouted at Izuku, making him jump in surprise and out of his hiding spot. “The fuck are you looking at?”

The fowl language didn't phase Izuku since Shouta tended to curse when he was losing their training fights, but the volume of his voice made him hesitate for a second before starting to walk towards them. Everyone had stopped talking and were staring at him. “H-Hello”

The boy stared down at him, brow seemingly permanently furrowed even as recognition filled his eyes. “You're that kid, aren't you?”
“Huh?” Was Izuku's brilliant response.

“The kid living here everyone's always talking about. Midoriya Deku, isn't it?”

Izuku stopped in front of them, a bit of distance separating them. “M-My name's Izuku”

“Hah!? You telling me I can't read or something?!” The boy exploded out of nowhere. Literally too, since his hands sparked loudly along with his angry outburst.

“No! No, I'm not saying that” Izuku took a step back. “I'm just saying, the kanji is read differently…”

“I know what I read, dumbass” He huffed. “Don't tell me I'm wro—are those fucking tattoos!?” He shouted, catching sight of Izuku's arms. “What the hell are you even thinking, what kind of dump do you live in they'll allow you that?!”

Another boy put his hand on the blond's shoulder, trying to hold him back. “Calm down Bakugou”

The boy—Bakugou, he had a name now—shrugged the hand off, stepping forward towards Izuku. “Listen here, Deku, I don't care how much heroes like you or talk about you, I don't care what the fuck happened that you became the talk in everyone's damn mouth; you stay out of my fucking way. Understood?”

Izuku didn't even have time to answer when the teacher came back, telling them to go back in line or else they all had detention. Izuku took the chance and used the distraction to run away.

He looked it up when he got home. He knew his name could be read another way; most could when written in kanji, but he'd never stopped to actually think about it.

*Useless,* he read. A puppet that could do nothing on its own. Izuku touched his arms self-consciously, the raised skin of his arms stinging. The double joints of his toes suddenly weighting on him in a way he hadn't felt in a decade.

Useless.
He shook his head. No. that couldn't be it, he couldn't let some random boy calling him names bring his whole mood down. All the efforts Shouta put in his training. All the lessons Nezu had taught him. All the things he'd gone through with his mother. All the races he'd had with Tenya.

He wouldn't let it get to him.

A knock on the door surprised him, making him almost drop the laptop from his lap. That wouldn't do, his mother used it too much to damage it.

“Izu-chan!” A peppy voice called from outside, and Izuku recognized immediately who it was. “Let's go have lunch together!”

“I'm going, Nejire!” He called out, turning off the laptop and writing down a note to stick to the fridge for his mom to know where he'd gone. He really needed a phone.

Nejire was standing on the ball of her feet, swinging in place as she waited. Mirio was standing by the side, trying to convince Tamaki to let him braid his hair. They'd been really enthusiastic when meeting Izuku—Tamaki not so much, but it was more his personality than a lack of interest. He was really nice to be around—and insisted on having lunch with him almost every day.

Seemed Izuku made more and more friends every year, but they were always older and busy with class and training and patrolling.

So it was refreshing when, at age fourteen, Izuku met a new friend his age.

Chapter End Notes

BIG EDIT IN THIS CHAPTER: i was so focused on finishing it i didnt realize my huge fuckup but here is the correction: basically i wrote that AfO was sent to tartarus after the fight, but as we know that actually doesnt happen until after kamino ward, i mixed both events. AfO was supposed to be out until that point, just in canon. i fixed it. but dont worry! doesnt affect the plot of this fic at all so go ahead lmao

"Everything happens so much"—Horse_ebooks

next chapter: *endeavor voice* SHOUTO OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO
lemme put my thoughts in order this was so long holy shit

i just put this through the F7, i'll read it over tomorrow i've been writing this for two weeks kfhjdfdf feel free to point out grammatical mistakes, ill fic them tomorrow

*me, seeing izuku is 1.66 m*: hm. not short enough

sorry i didn't expand more on inko and toshi's relationship but this story IS about izuku so i needed him to grow up already dsgsg

izuku was planned to finally cry again when he got told shouta and hizashi were leaving, it was the only reason he's never cried since the rescue. i wanted to make it clear he'd gotten so attached to them and was so upset by them leaving it would be enough to make him cry again, dunno if it was clear enough

is it bad i cried writing that part when shouta was helping izuku with his scars the first time?

inko has actually really low self-esteem here since she wasn't enough to make hisashi stay, so fuck him and let's get her a mans that actually appreciates her how she deserves

broke: inko gained weight out of stress over izuku wanting to be a hero while quirkless woke: inko gained weight out of all the gifts her loving students give her because they adore her so much

i dont know if it's clear what nezu is telling izuku when he tells him not to blame himself about toshi's wounds; basically izuku is convinced that, since all might has been around him so much and is trying to find the villain that is chasing him, the fight MUST have been over him, and so he was responsible of the outcome. Nezu reminded him all might fights for the world, and that despite what AfO wants to do to izuku, he's being a bit selfish thinking all might only cares about him. that defeating AfO is a victory to protect everyone. izuku has been the center of everyone's attention so long he kinda needed the reminder the world doesnt revolve around him

about the tattoos!!! inko's name in katakana means 'parrot', and the kanji for yagi is written with 'eight' and 'tree', so a forest. a parent on each arm.

and uuuuuuuuh it's too much info i can't remember what else i wanted to say, most questions about the plot i cant answer but anything to say about this chapter go right ahead and i'll answer
Chapter 10

and just like that we're at 10 chapters! oh boy if only i was as dedicated to my other wips as i am with this one lmao

sooo, seems you guys had a pretty strong response to bakugou in the last chapter, and that's fine! perfectly justified, he's an asshole; but he's also a really interesting character to dissect and i promise he'll be better, you just have to consider how the lack of izuku's influence in his life might've changed his attitude, like how without the incident in the river he would've never developed that inferiority-superiority complex and would've just stayed with the superiority, thus making him nastier before getting into UA and getting brought down to earth by how good everyone else is as well and so on

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku didn't like following a specific route when going on his runs, so he often found himself going through areas he didn't cross often.

Having lived all his life at UA, he knew every nook and cranny of the place, but there were some places he just didn't frequent as often; he usually was either at home, in Nezu's office, the teachers' lounge, the cafeteria and his mother's classroom. His place of training changed depending on Shouta's mood, and he tended to follow the hero courses around the different training grounds to see the practical classes.

This area was a little garden behind the Support Workshop building, not very popular among students since the support students tended to use part of it as storage for extra material that didn't fit in the building. Izuku added it to his running route only because climbing up and down that pile of junk and moving it from one place to another piece by piece was great strength training.

Which was why he halted mid-stride as he found someone in the garden, not wearing any of the school's uniforms and looking around as if he'd just realized he'd wandered off the crowded areas.

The boy was taller than him—but then again who wasn't—and had very distinctive hair, bicolored and split down the middle. He was too far away to see his face properly, but there was a very visible red patch of skin surrounding his left eye. He was looking around the garden, trying to peer above the tree line to see if he could guess where he was, to no avail.

Izuku liked to think of himself as a friendly guy, ready to hang out with the students when they
called him over for lunch or talked to him during the classes he visited, or when popping around
them to help during his mother's classes. But he also remembered vividly the last time he
approached an outsider, despite how it had been over a year since he was yelled at and chased
away by that Bakugou kid; even if he never saw him again, his words tended to ring in his ears in
his lowest moments.

This boy looked harmless enough though, and Izuku still wanted to be a hero; it wouldn't do to just
keep running and ignore someone who clearly needed help.

“Hey, are you okay?” He called out as he approached. The boy turned to him at the sound of his
voice, equally surprised to see someone else here.

“Yes” The boy said curtly, looking immediately suspicious of Izuku. His whole demeanor
screamed 'closed-off', his heterochromatic eyes suspicious and posture tense. Izuku couldn't help
but feel a bit good about himself at this guy considering him so seriously; he knew he didn't look
particularly menacing and people tended to underestimate him.

“Ah, that's good. I'm just asking since, well, you looked kinda lost there” Izuku explained,
stopping at a respectful distance.

The boy's shoulders dropped slightly, relaxing at not having his personal space immediately
invaded. He looked around once more, a hand rubbing at his neck. “I...kind of am, to be honest”

Izuku wondered how he'd even gotten there. If he wasn't a student he shouldn't have made it past
the security measures, but also he knew there wasn't any more visits scheduled; his first—and last
—one had Nezu telling him beforehand of each, and he preferred to see them from the teachers'
lounge instead of engaging directly to not have a repeat of the last one.

“I could help you if you want? I know this place pretty well” He offered. They weren't close to the
entrance by any means, so it'd be a bit of a walk until they reached the administrative buildings.
UA was way bigger than it looked from the outside, since people were so focused on the main
building they missed the sheer amount of forested areas surrounding it.

The boy looked at Izuku curiously, assessing him with a quick but thorough glance. He must've
decided he wasn't an immediate danger since he nodded a second later. “Okay. I was near the hero
class building before i wandered off”
Izuku hummed. “It's this way. Come on”

He led the way through the forest, following an invisible path he knew well enough would land them right by the entrance door to where they needed to go. Izuku couldn't help how this boy piqued his interest; if his strange coloring split down the middle had to do with his quirk, if that scar had come from a particularly rough training session, why was he alone in here without a school uniform in the middle of the week?

“What's your name?” The boy asked suddenly after a long while of silent walking, making Izuku realize he'd forgotten to introduce himself to the other. “You're not wearing a uniform and it's the middle of the day. Are you not a student?” He'd somehow been wondering the same as Izuku did about him, how funny!

“Midoriya Izuku” He said, already knowing what would follow. People always knew who he was on first sight, or they realized it was him when he said his name. It usually came with some uncomfortable questions following, but he'd gotten quite good at avoiding them.

Seemed this guy also knew who he was, because even if he was walking behind Izuku and he couldn't see his reaction, he heard how the rustling of leaves and branches stopped as he halted his walking, only to pick up after a couple of seconds. The light was starting to become stronger as they neared the exit of the canopy. The buildings on the other side started to come to view. “I see. I've heard of you”

“So everyone says” Izuku laughed. He couldn't understand what was it about him and his mother that had everyone outside UA talking about them. I mean, he knew the fact he was the main target of a terrible villain was public knowledge and that it was 'interesting' enough to gossip about, but the story should've grown old years ago. “And what's your name? You're supposed to introduce yourself first, you know”

“Sorry” He said quickly, realizing he might've said something silly, admitting knowing who Izuku was so fast. “I'm Todoroki--”

“SHOUTO!”

The voice shook the ground as they stepped out of the woods into the paved walkway. A huge man that Izuku had seen many times on TV was stomping towards them, flames licking at his face and shoulders. His presence was way more overpowering than Izuku had originally thought, and he found himself taking a step back.
Todoroki walked by his side towards Endeavor, the stony expression from before back with a vengeance. “Don't be noisy, there are people trying to learn”

Endeavor's frown deepened, and was about to say something back when his eyes caught sight of Izuku, almost blended with the forest with his green tracksuit and hair. His eyes widened almost imperceptibly, but then went back to his angry expression and turned to Todoroki. “Where have you been? I brought you here to show you around specifically so you wouldn't get lost once classes started, and that's the first thing you do!”

“You started droning about something and I zoned out” Todoroki deadpanned. “I thought I was following you. I didn't realize I had wandered off until I was lost”

Endeavor sighed, rubbing the bridge of his nose as if riddled with a permanent headache. “Come on, Nezu has been waiting for a while already. I don't like that creature when it gets mad”

“Don't call him that” Izuku frowned, walking towards the man. Endeavor looked surprised the boy was even capable of speaking and not just one of those school myths passed by mouth of the recent graduates. “Nezu is as much of a hero as you, and works hard to train the next generation of heroes. You owe him some respect”

Endeavor took a step forward, flames flaring out wildly. “How dare you--”

“IZUKU!”

Toshinori was jogging up to them, side-eyeing Endeavor and offering a quick smile to the younger Todoroki as he went to stand by Izuku, placing a comforting hand on his shoulder and making it clear that, despite his skeletal figure, he was there to act as barrier between the number two hero and his son.

“And who are you?” Endeavor asked gruffly.

“I'm Izuku's father” He said simply. “I work here as an assistant” He smiled, hoping Enji wouldn't recognize him like this. He looked nothing like how he did back when they were classmates in high school, but this weaker form kept his old hairstyle for some reason.
Endeavor didn't seem to realize who he was, as he looked him up and down in concealed distaste before huffing and turning to his son. “Let's go” He started walking towards the doors to the building, leaving him to follow.

Todoroki's mouth twisted in contempt as he stared at his father's retreating back. His expression softened as he turned to Izuku, nodding at him. “Thanks for the help, Midoriya. And, um...” He was at a loss of words, not really knowing how to address Toshinori.

Toshinori chuckled. “Midoriya, as well”

Todoroki nodded. “Right, Midoriya-san” He waved his goodbye as he followed his father, Endeavor waiting for him least he got lost again.

When they were out of sight Izuku frowned, turning to his father as they walked back home. “Is Endeavor really that unpleasant in person? I thought it was just a front he put for the cameras”

Toshinori sighed. “He's always been very focused on his job, even before we graduated”

“I didn't know he had children”

“Oh, he has a few” Toshinori said. “It’s not just something that he cares about making public”

Once they were home Toshinori hurried him inside to change. Being in the middle of puberty and the intense workout regimen he followed made no favors for Izuku's sweat glands, and that added to how much he cried over everything and anything it was a wonder he had not passed out from dehydration any of these days.

“Endeavor sounded pretty sure about Todoroki-kun coming to UA” Izuku commented once he was changed into his casual clothes, hair more fluffed up than usual thanks to the shower.

Toshinori hummed, handing him his protein shake. He had one for himself as well, since his lack of stomach meant he digested liquid meals better. “I'm sure he'll write a recommendation for him. Being the Number Two hero tips the balance in his favor for these kind of things”
Izuku had always had mixed feelings about recommended students. On one hand, they were thoroughly tested before being officially admitted, and they always had great quirks and potential to warrant their recommendations. On the other hand, Izuku saw, year after year, hundreds of students with powerful quirks that never made it into UA simply because their quirks were non-physical and couldn't do anything against the examination robots. He and Shouta had had this conversation more times than he could count, and they both agreed it was a poor planned exam considering the wide array of quirks that would be perfect for hero work had they been accepted.

Nezu had heard their concerns and suggestions each and every time, and assured them he was working on it, but there were a lot of government officials involved in the admission process of UA that he had to go through first, and they tended to think of Nezu as a joke most of the time. It was a hard time for everyone, really.

“Well if he's Enji's son then I'm sure he must be very talented” Toshinori said. “I've never met his wife, but I imagine he wouldn't bring his son to see UA if he wasn't sure he'd make it in”

“He seemed nice” Izuku hadn't spoken to him that much, since Todoroki seemed more of the quiet type, but he didn't give him any trouble, readily accepting his help and not making a fuss over his status as UA's local cryptid. “I hope I can see him more often”

Toshinori grinned wide, smile pulling at the skin of his sunken cheeks. “Now that you mention that...”

After what they called their 'Shake Break', Toshinori led him to Nezu's office. Students milling around the halls waved at them as they passed by, used to Izuku's presence and not really wondering anymore what exactly it was Toshinori did at UA, other than occasionally assist his wife in her classes and just be around the principal a lot of the time.

Toshinori knocked at the door before letting himself in, knowing Nezu would be waiting for them.

The office seemed just a tad bit warmer than usual, and there were some scorch marks on the carpet in front of his desk.

Seemed Endeavor had just left.

“Izuku, perfect timing. I could use a nice face right now” Nezu greeted him, his usual smile on his face but with the most imperceptible forced quality to it.
“Is everything alright?” Izuku wondered, taking a seat on his favorite spot; a cushion on the couch by the window that was more worn and softer than the others, were Izuku had spent the last decade learning everything from the ABC to advanced Heroics Law.

Nezu nodded, pulling out a file from a pile next to him. “Perfectly alright. I just wanted to wait until Endeavor left before telling you the news”

Izuku tilted his head, looking confusedly at the principal and then at his father as Toshinori sat down next to him, wide smile still in place as he patted Izuku's knee.

“Don't worry, it's a good thing” Toshinori assured him.

“And right that you are, All Might” Nezu hopped off his chair to walk up to Izuku, handing him the file he'd just picked up. “Here you go”

Izuku took it slowly, looking between it and Nezu suspiciously. Last time Nezu just handed him something so nonchalantly it turned out to be a twenty pages calculus exam that took Izuku five hours to finish. He started reading, brow furrowing more the further he read, until his eyes went wide open near the end. He snapped his head up in disbelief, looking at the mammal smiling warmly at him.

“Is...Is this for real?” Izuku whispered, hand tracing the words printed like he could read them again that way.

Nezu nodded, a twinkle of pride in his eyes. “Completely. Starting next spring you'll be officially a student here at UA”

“But you knew that already” Toshinori added. And it was true; Izuku had known all his life he'd be part of the student body once he hit proper high school age. But this...

“In 1-A?” He asked, voice shaky. “With...with Shouta?”

“That's right” Nezu confirmed. “Since he's your favorite teacher we thought it would be a good idea to put you in his class. This wouldn't change the number of students accepted through regular
entrance exams” He clarified, anticipating Izuku's question. He knew the boy would be worried he would be taking the spot someone else would've rightfully earned, and would most likely reject the offer if that were the case. “This would make the class the first one with twenty-one students”

“And I'm seriously gonna be placed there just because it's Shouta's class?” Izuku asked, a bit suspicious. True, his therapist recommended he be around people and environments that kept his stress level low, since too much strain had shown to throw him into panic attacks if they were of the wrong stimulus, like the time he was alone at one of the gyms and the power went out, drowning the place in darkness; he'd passed out in terror before even reaching the doors, and that's how they found him. But this seemed a bit too good to be true; he could've been perfectly fine in the Gen Ed class as well.

Nezu chuckled, taking the file with his admission papers out of his hands. “Well, I might have a little bias for you”

“Ah, there it is” Izuku grinned. And as soon as the folder was out of his lap he surged forward and hugged Nezu tight, pulling him up with him as he stood. Toshinori knew Izuku was the only person in the world who could get away with it, and had to bite his lip to contain the laugh that wanted to burst from his throat at the sight of Nezu's little Timbs dangling as his feet hung from Izuku's hold.

When they arrived home, Inko was there after having finished her classes for the day, along with the other three heroes-turned-teachers hanging out and having tea.

Shouta raised an eyebrow when the boy ran inside, launching himself to his neck, hanging off him like a baby koala. “Seems you got the news already”

“I'm gonna be in your class!” Izuku laughed, letting him go to jump in place in excitement. “In the hero course!”

“And you better show you deserve that spot” Shouta pointed out, ruffling his hair before Izuku ran off again to greet his mother. “You've seen how many students I've expelled before. Don't make me add you to the numbers”

“You still see me every day though” Izuku counter-argued. “Expelling me would be redundant”

Hizashi laughed, his jacket and voice modulator hanging from the back of the chair and his hair down making him look much smaller than he did during school hours or hero patrols. “He's got a
point there, Shouta”

Shouta huffed, smiling nonetheless. He waved for Izuku to walk over and wrapped an arm around his shoulders to bring him closer, knocking their heads together as he messed up the boy's hair. “To think you're already starting high school, pipsqueak. Can't believe how long it's been”

“But he's still as cute as a baby” Nemuri cooed, reaching over to pinch Izuku's cheeks as he whined at her to let go. “Look at this squishy face”

Izuku swatter her hand away, rubbing at his cheeks to get feeling back into them. “Stooop, I can't make it go away!” And lord knew he tried, but seemed that stubborn baby fat refused to leave his face no matter how different the story was for his body from the neck below.

Toshinori had sat down next to Inko, looking at the scene fondly. No matter how many years it had been, watching them interact like this was the reason they’d forever be just all children in his eyes. He cleared his throat to redirect their attention to him. “Are you going to be watching the entrance exams this year as well, Izuku?”

“Of course I am!” He exclaimed, hands hitting the table. “I've never missed them, and I'm not gonna miss this year's for anything, especially since Tenya is trying out!”

“He hasn't come around in a while, now that I think about it” Hizashi mused. Tenya was a common sight around UA as well, since he constantly visited Izuku and trained with him on weekends or during holidays. Nezu had granted him permanent visitor status after a while, since every time a temporary visit came through the gates he had to deal with the corresponding paperwork, and after seeing Tenya's face for the nth time he just gave him free access. “Must be busy preparing for it”

“You didn't tell him anything about it, did you?” Shouta asked.

Izuku shook his head. “I didn't say anything, I promise” He crossed his heart for emphasis. “Besides, he wouldn't have let me tell him anyway, he wouldn't have liked having an advantage over the rest”

Inko laughed, intertwining her fingers with Toshinori's on top of the table. “Tenya's always been such a good boy. It's going to be great finally having him here every day”
Shouta hummed, sipping at his cup of tea. “I might end up with the two of you in my class. I'm gonna need something a bit stronger than tea”

The day of the entrance exams was, as it was every year, filled to the brim with the excitement and tension emanating from the prospective students. Izuku had risen bright and early to finish his workout in time to join the teachers and invited judges in the observation room, finding his usual spot between his parents and Shouta. Hizashi would be busy explaining the rules of the exam and observing the practical portion in the field, and Nemuri liked to sit right in front of the screens, fluttering from one to another to catch as much action as possible.

Before making it to the room, however, he'd texted Tenya—with the phone he'd finally gotten for his birthday the year prior, specially designed by Power Loader to only allow pre-approved contacts to communicate through—to meet before the exam to wish him luck.

Tenya looked as nervous as he felt, taking deep breaths and constantly taking off his glasses to clean them before putting them back on, only to repeat the process a minute later.

“You're gonna break them if you keep that up” Izuku said gently, taking them out of his hands and carefully placing them back on his nose. “But I know you keep back ups so it's not so bad, I guess”

Tenya sighed, putting his cleaning tissue away in his pocket. “I'm sorry, I-It's just...I can't believe it's finally happening. I've been waiting for this day my whole life”

“And you'll do great!” Izuku said, pumping his fist in the air. “You've been preparing so much for this, there's no way you're not gonna make it”

Tenya smiled, hooking an arm around Izuku to pull him in for a hug. Izuku wrapped around him like a vine around a tree trunk, which was fitting seeing how Tenya was just so much bigger than him. “Thank you. I know I have everyone's support for this but, it means a lot coming from you” His hand instinctively went for his glasses again, but he stopped himself before he could reach them, letting it drop on Izuku's hair instead. “I'm grateful you didn't tell me anything about the exam, but is there some sort of advice you could give me for it?”

Izuku hummed, tapping his chin in thought. “Not much that you don't already know. Just make sure to behave how a hero would and you'll be fine; that's what it's all about after all!”

Tenya laughed. “Simple as that, huh. I'll try that, then”
He'd gone his way then, always the one to be earlier than he should, and Izuku made his way to the observation room to not miss anything. He sat down in his usual place and waited until the time came for it to begin.

When the door opened again a few minutes before the practical exam started as Vlad King made his way in, Izuku caught a glimpse of some figures dressed completely in black on the outside of the room, waving goodbye at the teacher as they walked away.

Shouta seemed to notice his curious staring of the retreating mystery people. “Don't worry about them”

“You know who they are?” Izuku asked him. If they hadn't appeared alongside Kan he would've thought they were suspicious.

Shouta hummed, tapping his pen against the clipboard he'd be using to judge. “You'll see soon enough”

“Honey, look!” Inko called out, making Izuku turn towards the screens. Nezu was using his control over the cameras to focus on Tenya on the outside of his assigned battle arena, doing stretching and breathing exercises as they waited for the exam to start.

“Seems like a promising lot this year” Nezu commented, moving the camera around to look over the other examinees of that arena. Izuku noticed one of them, blonde and with some sort of special belt over his tracksuit, seemed to be looking directly towards the camera with a charming smile.

Izuku looked over the other screens. He kinda hoped he would see that familiar white-and-red head of hair among the crowd, but he never found it. Maybe his dad was right and Todoroki had gotten a recommendation from Endeavor.

What he did find, however, was the serious and focused face of the blond boy who had screamed at him years ago.

“He's trying out?” He whispered absently, feeling chills going down his spine at the thought of sharing a room with someone so volatile. Shouta glanced at him, wondering what he was talking about, when the alarm rang for the exam to begin.
Hizashi’s voice echoed through the comms as he shouted at them to get going, and then the horde of kids rushed forward, Tenya running like a rocket to get ahead of the others. It wasn't long until the robots started pouring in, and as fast as they appeared they went down at the hands of the myriad of quirks shooting and flashing and hitting here and there, so fast it made Izuku's head spin.

A loud noise brought his attention to the other arena, where the Bakugou guy was exploding everything on sight. And by that he meant *everything*. Robots were not the only ones at his mercy when the buildings surrounding him went down in pieces as well, raining down on the other participants. He was racking up points easy as he was breathing but the collateral damage was immense as well.

“That one looks promising” Shouta commented, and Izuku was about to ask what exactly was promising about mass property destruction, when he noticed he was writing down another name.

He looked in closer on that screen, and noticed a black haired boy he hadn't seen before, following Bakugou around and pushing people out of the way of the falling debris as he received the full impact; seemed like a hardening quirk. He was doing all that while bringing down his own robots as well, and his score seemed to be rapidly rising in both rescue and villain points. Of course Shouta would focus more on the one actually helping others instead of just destroying bots with his quirk.

All across the screens the battles went on and on, and it seemed time went by slower as they watched. Some of them cut through robots like a hot knife through butter, while some could do little less than run away and hide since their quirks were not enough to bring down not even the 1 pointers.

“Ah, there they come” Nezu commented casually, and Nemuri started squealing in excitement at whatever he was talking about.

Izuku was confused, looking around. From the wide smiles on his parents' faces and the usual manic grin on Shouta's, they knew something he did not. He kept watching carefully,until suddenly he understood.

The black-clad figures he’d seen outside the room before had made their appearance in the battle fields, a number of them in each arena as they ran through the streets, avoiding the robots with ease and going straight for the examinees.
Understanding finally dawned on him and he launched from his seat, going to stand by Nemuri in front of the screens. “No way!”

Nezu hummed, nodding even though Izuku couldn't see him from his vantage point. “We wanted it to be a surprise for everyone, you included” He said. “We finally managed to get it through the official entities to let us try a new examining method for all kinds of quirk users”

“This year's classes 3-A and 3-B volunteered to act as villains for the ones who can't fight the robots” Shouta added as he walked up behind Izuku. “I just hope Togata's clothes are actually made like his hero suit”

He pointed at the arena where Bakugou and the hardening guy were, showing the exact moment the figure he could now recognize as Mirio dove for the floor and disappeared from sight, only to reemerge behind Bakugou to deliver a swift kick to his shins before going underground again. Izuku could hear Shouta's relieved sigh of 'thank god' as his clothes remained put even as he permeated through concrete.

He caught sight of Nejire floating around an arena that was more forest-based than the others, shooting shockwaves at random people as she tried to avoid what looked like a long tongue shooting her way from beneath the trees. The one who was definitely Tamaki was chasing after a purple haired boy in another arena, the tentacles sprouting from his fingers trying to catch him as he cut through the air with his massive wings. The boy he was chasing made some sort of remark the mics couldn't catch as he ran away, and in a second Tamaki had stopped the chase, standing stock still as the boy finally stopped and walked back to him, catching his breath as he said something else and then Tamaki was following him around and destroying any robots they came across. Izuku noticed that every robot Tamaki destroyed were points added to the boy's score.

“Hitoshi Shinsou” Shouta said as he read over the files, predicting what Izuku was thinking. “Brainwashing quirk. Since he's using his quirk to make Amajiki destroy the robots, technically the points are rightfully his”

“Amazing” Izuku breathed out. He'd never seen anything like that in any of the entrance exams over the years.

Suddenly a red light started blinking on top of one of the screens, signaling the arrival of the zero pointer to the arena Tenya was in. The steady march of the titanic robot made the camera shake as it advanced on the examinees, and Inko gasped as she noticed that, while everyone ran away from its path, a girl had gotten caught beneath some debris right in the middle of the way. Now, they knew Power Loader would stop the robot before it made any actual severe damage, but it was still terribly stressful to see her struggle to get out before it got to her, trying in vain to make her hand reach the blocks of concrete trapping her in.
A trail of dust raised her way, and suddenly Tenya was beside her, using his momentum to kick one of the blocks off her without compromising the structure so the others wouldn't crush her. He repeated the movement with the other and she was free, holding onto him with one arm as she hopped as fast as she could to get out of the robot's way. They robot started firing lasers at random, hitting some buildings near them and making more concrete rain down around them. Before Tenya could pick the girl up to make a run for it, she pushed herself up on his shoulders with a well placed jump and slapped a boulder coming their direction. It suddenly started going up instead of down, and Tenya was stunned enough she could repeat the treatment on a smaller one coming from another direction. Tenya came back around after a second, picking her up properly before running away as fast as he could.

Izuku was holding his breath through it all, feeling like everything was happening in slow motion, despite having been just a couple of seconds in total since Tenya got her out. The horn signaling the end of the exam reverberated through the room, and Hizashi's voice telling everyone to report to the temporary infirmary tent outside to get their injuries fixed, since no one was hurt bad enough it granted Recovery Girl to go directly to the battle grounds.

Nezu jumped out of his chair as the other teachers and judges started filing out of the room. “Very promising lot indeed”

Izuku ran out after that, making his way straight to find Tenya. He found him in the infirmary tent, helping the girl he'd carried out get onto a cot until Recovery Girl got a moment to fix her ankle. The moment his hands were free Izuku flung himself towards him, jumping on his back like an overexcited koala.

“Izuku!” Tenya shouted as he righted himself, not having expected the sudden attack.

“That was amazing!” Izuku laughed, letting go and falling on his feet as Tenya turned around. “I almost couldn't see you going around so fast”

Tenya rubbed the back of his neck, flushing under the praise. “Ah, thank you” He said. “It was more taxing than I thought, though”

“But you got so many robots, I couldn't even keep up with what was going on” Izuku said. “And then when the zero pointer showed up and you turned around and started kicking at those—ah!” Suddenly he remembered why exactly Tenya had been kicking at those rocks. He peeped around his friend's body to look at the girl sitting on the cot. She looked a bit uncomfortable in a mix of pain from her ankle and feeling she was intruding in their conversation. “H-Hello! I'm Midoriya Izuku, Tenya's friend” Izuku had just realized this was the first time he talked to a girl his age in his
life, and got suddenly nervous at the idea.

The girl startled, wincing when the movement pulled at her ankle. She smiled nonetheless, waving at Izuku slowly. “Uraraka Ochako, nice to meet you!”

“Uraraka-kun was just telling how her quirk works, since she used it to help me during the exam” Tenya said.

“It’s just a gravity controlling quirk” She explained, touching the tips of her index fingers together. “Nothing that impressive…”

“Are you kidding?! The way you handled those robots was incredible!” Izuku started geeking out as he always did about new quirks, bringing a smile to Tenya’s face at how his face lit up. “Making them float and then dropping them so they got destroyed by their own weight, that’s so ingenious!”

“Y-You saw that?” She asked, covering her cheeks with her hands as she blushed, then she stopped and stared at him. “I don’t remember seeing you in the arena…”

“Ah, yeah” Izuku said, scratching his cheeks as he flushed this time. “I was in the observation room with the teachers… I can’t tell you anything about the scores though! I don’t even know what they are!” He added in a bit of a panic at the end, waving his hands frantically in front of him.

Uraraka blinked curiously, tilting her head in thought. “You were in the observation room...?” She looked at him up and down, and then remembered his name. “Y-You’re that boy!” She exclaimed, pointing at him before realizing that was very rude and stopped herself. “The boy who lives here, right?”

Izuku nodded, smiling reassuringly at her. This was usually what happened when he met new students and they recognized him, so he was used to it and didn’t take any offense. “I am, and I’m also gonna be a student this year!”

“Izuku has been training just as hard as any of us to be worthy of his spot at UA” Tenya said, hands chopping the air in that robotic motion he never managed to get rid of, despite how relaxed Tensei always said Izuku’s presence had made him. “Please don’t underestimate him just because he didn’t take the exam with the rest of us!”

“I wouldn’t think of it!” Uraraka declared vehemently. “But I guess we’ll really see each other in
“You both did really well” Izuku smiled at the memory of their performances. “I have no doubt you'll make it--”

“What the fuck is he doing here?”

The new voice made Izuku freeze on the spot. As they talked, people with more severe injuries had been walking in and out of the tent as Recovery Girl triaged them and fixed them up, and the ones from arenas that had been a bit further away had just been arriving.

Izuku turned around to stare into the angry red eyes of Katsuki Bakugou, the full name of the boy having been made to his knowledge when one of the judges commented on how many points he was rapidly accumulating.

“You're not following me around, are you, Deku?” He said, spitting the name out as he walked towards the trio.

“I-I was here first” Izuku muttered, shrinking in on himself as Bakugou stepped into his space.

“You tryin' to be funny?” Bakugou said threateningly. Bending at the waist to loom over Izuku.

Suddenly a whack echoed in the tent and Bakugou turned around to yell at whoever had dared smack his back, and came face to face with the frowning face of Recovery Girl brandishing her very normal-looking cane around, decked in her light blue lab coat.

“We don't start fights where we heal wounds, young man” She chastised him. “I can't understand how you still have so much energy after all that fighting you did back there, but you seem lively enough to wait for your turn a while longer”

Bakugou frowned, but didn't respond. Just stepped aside as she made her way towards Uraraka.

“Now let's see here” She said, gentler this time as she carefully grabbed Uraraka's foot and turned it this way and that until the girl let out a little whimper. Recovery girl nodded, setting her foot
back down. “Give me your hand, dearie”

Uraraka did so, and the heroine planted a noisy kiss on the back of her hand. Immediately her ankle set back in place and the pain stopped, the inflammation going down as Uraraka sighed in relief, moving it around to check it out. “Thank you so much ma'am”

Chiyo waved her off. “No problem, young lady. It's my job” She turned around and walked up to Bakugou who was still standing there, silently observing the scene. She poked at his leg with her cane, pushing him forward. “Now's your turn, boy, go ahead that way”

“Don't push me” Bakugou grumbled, but complied anyway, sending one last glare at Izuku as well as Tenya and Uraraka for good measure.

Izuku felt he had to relearn how to breathe once he was out of sight.

“Do you know him?” Tenya asked him, brow furrowed in concern at the reaction his friend had had.

Izuku had never mentioned his minute encounter with Bakugou to anyone else; not his parents, not his friends, not his therapist. He was afraid they'd try to contact the boy's parents to talk about the incident and he didn't want to escalate the situation any further. “He...He was in one of the school visits to UA a couple of years back” He explained. “He recognized me and got angry that I corrected how he said my name”

“Deku? Is that how he called you?” Uraraka asked as she got down from the cot, her stance not giving any indication of the injury to her ankle still bothering her. “You said your name was Izuku”

Izuku nodded. “It is, it's just that the kanji can be read both ways, and since my name was in some news some years back...” He trailed off, not wanting to delve more into that particular subject. “I guess he must've read it in some newspaper and didn't hear it pronounced out loud”

“Well, I think it sounds fine!”

Izuku looked at her like she'd gone mad.
“Wait, let me explain!” She waved her hands frantically. “It just sounds like 'you can do it!' to me” She said. “I don't mean it to be mean or anything, it just seems like that to me”

Izuku looked down at his hands in thought, the green ink of his tattoos peeping out from beneath the sleeves of his hoodie. It was a nice way to seeing it, even if a bit roundabout. Somehow he didn't feel that pang of anxiety and emptiness in the pit of his stomach when she said the nickname with that voice and enthusiasm.

“I guess it does sound nice if you look at it like that” He said, pulling at his bottom lip as he considered the idea. He smiled up at her. “I wouldn't mind you calling me that, Uraraka-san”

She grinned at him, giving him a double thumbs up as Tenya huffed a laugh.

“Are you kids still here?” Chiyo called out as she lead another kid out of the tent. “You're all healed up already, get out!”

And with a hurried apology, the newfound trio of friends ran out of the tent.

Chapter End Notes

same bs as always, posting this at night, will check grammar tomorrow blablabla even though i still havent done that with chapter 9 completely sdfgshgdf

shouto!!! i am a firm believer of shouto being a smart boy in the top 5 students and having an amazing quirk and so so talented but also,,,,,this boy has one (1) braincell REALLY hard at work and i absolutely believe he would get lost easily (remember how he said it took him a while to find deku and tenya in the stain arc bc he didn't know what deku's message said? i call bs he got lost im sure jagdfhagdf)

my girl ochako!!!! i love her sm!!!!!

and my boy shinsou!!!! getting his early cameo along with kirishima and tsuyu and aoyama because as we know aoyama is ALWAYS camera ready ahsgfhasgd

also horikoshi i fixed your stupid entrance exam you can send me my royalties any time

i like to think chiyo's new light blue coat was a gift from izuku once he realized how much she'd changed her workplace just for the possibility of him ever needing the infirmary
“Alright Izuku, it's finally time” Saya announced, sitting down beside Izuku.

She'd been Izuku's assigned therapist ever since he started receiving his sessions and they'd been slowly advancing towards this day. The day he was finally old and mentally mature enough to withstand the effect of her quirk. Being Izuku's only psychological professional, she had been offered a general job as student counselor at UA, and much like every person involved directly in Izuku's life, had been given permanent protection when outside the walls of the school.

“Are you nervous?” She asked him kindly, watching him twist the end of his shirt as he looked at the floor.

He shrugged. “Kinda. I don't know what to expect to be honest” He laughed nervously, scratching the back of his neck.

She nodded, understanding. Her quirk wasn't exactly common, and many of her patients were scared of it before they experienced it. “It's alright, I'll explain it to you first” She said. “My Mind Mapping quirk allows me to visualize your mind as if it were a plane in two dimensions, divided in sections according to thoughts, memories and emotions. I can go over each section in turn and see their contents and analyze them to see what might be the origin of the problem”

“Huh” Izuku said, taking mental notes to add to his notebooks later. “That doesn't sound so bad”

“It's really not” She laughed. “The only side effect that could bother you, however, is if I come across something that you're not aware of, in which case me examining it will force it to the forefront of your mind, making you relive something you might not like. Headaches are also to be expected at the end of the process”

Izuku took a deep breath, laying his hands on his lap and nodding. “Okay. I guess I can't keep pushing it any longer, huh?”
“Izuku, you absolutely can” She said, placing her hand on one of his comfortably. “The whole point of this is making you feel safe and comfortable. If you don't want to go through this right now, you don't have to”

Izuku seemed to be thinking about it for a moment, then shook his head, sitting up straight and looking her in the eye. “No, I can't keep running from it. I'll do it; I have to know what's going on”

Saya smiled warmly, switching from merely touching Izuku's hand to cradling it in both of hers. “You're very brave, Izuku. I'll make sure to stop if I notice you're uncomfortable”

And with that, she closed her eyes and activated her quirk.

Izuku felt his consciousness fade and his head lolling and falling into the pillows previously set behind him.

Like slowly delving into a foggy path with the end of the road clear ahead, his mind was now open to her, unfolding and displaying the entirety of Izuku's life to her eyes like a complex blueprint where every little piece was numbered and listed in a specific order. Everything perfectly organized and classified, just like the boy's meticulously written annotations about heroes and people he interacted with.

She went from one side to the other, jumping from spot to spot and recovering information usually lost to people as they grew older. His parents' wedding, his meeting with his friend Tenya, the times he spent in his mother classes making more of a mess than actually helping, the pranks he liked to play on Nezu in his boring moments during lessons.

His younger years were blurry, lost to the passage of time as his brain wasn't developed enough to store all that information. She looked around that specific plane of his memory, trying to find the section that would hold the period of time spanning his kidnapping. She expected it to be hidden under layers and layers of forced happy memories, boxed and stashed away to the farthest nook of his mind. It was how repressed memories tended to present themselves.

What she found, however, was completely different.

In the deepest corner of his memory, there was something she couldn't describe in words, but the closest thing she could call it was a tall embodiment of impenetrable safety, walls rising securely to
keep anyone, even its owner, away from the memory locked within.

A fortress.

Usually when someone suffered through extremely traumatic events, their minds wrapped it up nice and tight with a neat little bow on top so to speak, and it was usually enough for her to pick up that ribbon and pull at it to unravel the package and release the memory inside.

This here, this was something else. This was something so terrible, Izuku's mind had somehow completely isolated it to a point where she doubted the boy was even aware he had that memory at all. Like a little pocket dimension where he shoved what he couldn't handle and didn't want to deal with in the future.

This would need further investigation.

She released her quirk, her mind going back to the physical world as the mist dissipated. Izuku slowly stirred, groaning as he rubbed at his forehead.

“Hurts...” He said groggily, accepting the aspirin and glass of water Saya handed him, previously ready and set on the table next to them.

“That'd be all for today Izuku. You can go home and rest, and I'll inform your parents of the results later on”

Izuku nodded, gathering himself before standing up with a little bit of extra effort. “Is...everything alright, in there?” He tapped the side of his head.

“I have to analyze what I saw first, but you don't have to concern yourself with it for now; it's just our first session using my quirk after all” She smiled, wanting him to leave the room in a good mood.

Izuku nodded, bidding her goodbye before stepping out of the room where Inko was waiting for him. As the door closed behind him, Saya's smile vanished.
She sat at her desk and pulled out a blank new document, hurrying to write down everything while it was still fresh.

This was something new.

“I can't believe it” Inko said, wiping her tears away as she fumbled with her phone to open the camera. “My baby's first day at UA”

“I've been here for thirteen years, mom”

“Oh hush, you know what I mean”

Izuku huffed, betrayed by the wobbly smile on his face as he gave up trying to fix the mess he'd done of his tie. Inko and Toshinori refused to help him with it since they thought it added a touch of personality to his uniform.

His UA Hero Course uniform, his very own that he would be wearing to his classes in an actual classroom with real classmates.

That sentence sure would sound weird out loud.

It was so new and exhilarating, to look at himself in the mirror wearing the very same jacket he'd seen everyday on people all around him, knowing that he was soon to join the troves of people who came to UA to seek the education needed to become the best heroes the world has ever seen. His red sneakers were a permanent fixture on his feet, ever since he'd gotten that first pair during his first Christmas at his new home.

“You look so good honey” Inko cooed as she snapped one picture after another under the patient but exhausted gaze of Izuku, who had been so excited he'd woken up at five AM after a near sleepless night.
“This brings back memories” Toshinori said, smiling wide as he stood by his wife. “I was a wreck my first day too, don't worry about being nervous”

“But Shouta is gonna be my teacher!” Izuku insisted, pulling at his tie and messing up his hair. “He's not gonna have mercy on me”

Toshinori tapped his chin, nodding in agreement. “Well, I guess you'll just have not to mess up”

Izuku glared at him. “Thanks, dad”

“Alright, alright, enough chit-chat” Inko said, pulling at Toshinori’s shirt to bring him next to Izuku. “Group picture! Two generations of UA students!”

She ignored the unison cries of ‘Mooom/Inkooo’ her boys threw at her, even as they stood next to each other and posed for the photo with twin peace signs and wide grins.

As she finally was satisfied with the amount of pictures she took, Toshinori went to her side to peer into the camera with her, pointing out which ones he liked most to her concordant nodding. Izuku smiled fondly at them, feeling warmth bloom in his chest and a sudden rush of confidence that took him to take a step forward towards them.

“Um, mom? Dad?”

They looked at him, smiling as the gave him their full attention. “Yes baby?” Inko asked.

Izuku gulped, his ears turning pink. “I...I wanted to thank you, both of you, for all you've done for me” He said, hands fidgeting as his gaze fell to the floor. “Mom, you've given up so much for me, to make sure I've always been safe and had as much of a normal life as I could and, and I'll never be able to do enough to show you just how grateful I am for still having you in my life after all the trouble I've caused you”

“Oh sweetie, of course you haven't--”
“But I have!” He interrupted her. “I know it's not any of our faults what happened, but I can't help feeling you've gone far and beyond for me when you didn't have to, and I'm sorry you got dragged into this mess just because I have a target on my back. But I don't know...what I would've done if you weren't here with me to this day”

Inko brought her hands to her chest, Toshinori bringing her close to himself as he smiled at Izuku's words.

“And dad” Izuku continued, surprising Toshinori. “We might not be...blood related, but you've been there practically my whole life! You not only saved my life, you were there for me and mom, to take care of us, support us; you even saw me learn to walk again!” He laughed. “It honestly doesn't matter when you became my dad on paper, because you've been there pretty much since the beginning, and I can't imagine having a better man for a father”

Toshinori rubbed the corners of his eyes, trying to brush away tears. Izuku managed to hit some very important points in so little words, somehow easing most of his worries right away. Truth was, he often second-guessed his own place in Izuku's life since he was not his biological father, but hearing this come unprompted from the boy himself was like a balm dousing his entire soul. He laughed breathily, letting the unshed tears shine in his sunken eyes. “My boy, where did you learn to speak like that?”

Izuku flushed, clearing his throat. “Um, you know, just, just didn't think much about it, ah--”

A knock on the door interrupted him, making the three jump in place as their little bubble burst from the noise.

Izuku hurried to open it, sighing in relief when Shouta's face greeted him, a stack of papers in his arms.

“You ready kid?” He asked, nodding in greeting to the couple walking up to them to join Izuku.

“Yes! Just need my bag” He mumbled, messing with his tie and pulling his jacket down as he turned around and ran to his room.

Inko sighed. “He's grown up so much”
“Figuratively speaking” Shouta said. “He might be the shortest boy in my class, from what I've seen”

Toshinori grinned. “Oh, leave him be. He's still growing”

Izuku came back then, backpack secured on his back and smile firm in place. “I'm ready!”

“Good. Help me with this” Shouta said, taking a portion of the papers he was carrying and handing it to Izuku.

“What is this, a pop quiz?” He asked, trying not to look at them just in case so he wouldn't be cheating. It wasn't out of character for Shouta to pull these kind of things on new students.

Shouta chuckled. “Nah, they're blank” He picked the one on top on showed it to him from both sides. Empty. “Some of the new students have abysmal grades, only made it in because their quirks are good. I'm gonna put the fear of god in their hearts from day one”

“Shouta” Inko said in disapproval, smiling nonetheless. Toshinori just shook his head; this man just didn't change.

“Alright, enough dawdling” Shouta started walking. “Let's go already”

They bid their goodbyes and walked off, Izuku brimming with excitement as he followed Shouta through the well-traveled halls of UA; halls he could navigate with his eyes closed over and over again.

It was already almost time for class to start, and it showed with how empty the place was. The bell still hasn't rung yet Izuku knew Shouta liked to time everything so he could make it into his classroom with nary a second before it marked the beginning of the day.

As they finally reached the classroom of class 1-A, Izuku fell all his excitement turn into a lump in his throat, nervousness replacing it as he was about to start this new chapter in his life. Behind that door were people he'd be seeing all day every day for the next three years, and it was such a new development for him it had him shaking in anticipation.
“Calm down” Shouta reminded him. “Just a bunch of overpowered kids. Nothing you're not used to already”

“I know” Izuku breathed out. “Just excited”

Shouta hummed. “That's fair; you're just a kid yourself”

With his hands full of the blank papers, he used his scarf to slide the door open, coming face to face with a screaming match between Tenya, Bakugou, and Uraraka. Shouta stood there by the door, just watching them go at it while the other students realized one by one he was there. They were too scared of the explosions Bakugou kept releasing to dare tell them the teacher was there already.

Shouta finally walked in after a few seconds, slamming the stack of papers down on his desk loud enough the noise echoed through the room, drowning both explosions and shouting as Tenya flushed in embarrassment before making his way to his desk under the piercing gaze of Shouta.

“First day of class and you've already wasted 8 seconds of valuable learning time” He started, foregoing a formal greeting. “Hope this doesn't become a habit. And take your feet off your desk, Bakugou”

Bakugou grumbled, but complied.

“My name's Aizawa Shouta, and I'll be your homeroom teacher” He introduced himself. He turned to Izuku, waiting for him to drop his stack of papers on the desk as well. “That'd be all. You can go sit now.”

He nodded. “Yes Shouta”

Shouta stopped him before he could go. “You have to call me Aizawa-sensei during class, Izuku”

Izuku blinked in surprise at the new information. “What? Why?” He asked. “Why do I have to use honorifics but you can still call me by my name?”
“Because I changed your diapers is why” Shouta deadpanned. “Now go to your desk”

Izuku muttered something under his breath as his cheeks flushed, but walked off to his seat. Since the classrooms where planned to fit twenty students comfortably, Izuku's desk had to be fitted at the back of the classroom where there was more space, right on the end near the windows. The girl sitting immediately next to him smiled at him, her expression kind if not a bit bewildered at the exchange they'd all just witnessed between him and their teacher.

“Hello” She said as he sat down. “I'm Yaoyorozu Momo. Nice to meet you”

“Midoriya Izuku” He smiled back, pleasantly surprised his first interaction in this class was so nice.

Her eyes widened a bit, but then she subtly hid her surprise, skillfully saving her curiosity for later.

A face popped in from the corner of Izuku's eye, and he noticed the bicolored eyes of Todoroki staring at him from behind Yaoyorozu's back.

“Since I can't tell if you're going to take this seriously, I've prepared something for you” Shouta spoke from the front of the room. He patted the papers on his desk meaningfully.

A couple of students immediately started metaphorically—and some literally--sweating buckets, swallowing and sinking into their chairs. Izuku had to contain his laugh at how Shouta's plan was actually working out.

Shouta continued. “What would you say to a pop quiz to begin our school year on the right foot?” He grinned wickedly. “I'm sure you all prepared properly if you made it this far into this class. I'd like to know what kind of disaster I'm being stuck with this year”

“Please don't” A blond boy near the front of the room whimpered, almost inaudibly but still loud enough for Shouta to hear. Trick or not, Izuku feared the poor guy would mess up his blood pressure permanently from stress.

He hummed, tapping his chin in fake deep thought. “So you're not ready for it” He said, then smiled. “Too bad, guess I could've weeded you out earlier if we were actually having one” He ignored the relieved sighs leaving half of the classroom in favor of opening his desk drawer and
pulling a sweatshirt out of it. “This are your gym clothes. Yours are ready in the locker rooms, so go and change, and meet me in the training field outside”

They all filed out orderly, immediately starting to chat among themselves on how crazy that first impression of their teacher was. Tenya quickly found his way next to Izuku, Uraraka on his other side.

“Izuku! I almost thought you wouldn't make it” Tenya said. “I'm glad you didn't fall asleep as I feared”

“Not like they would let me” Izuku laughed, 'they' being his parents and Shouta. “We agreed Shouta would bring me on the first day to keep everything under control if anyone recognized me”

“Well, it was a good idea” Uraraka chimed in, nodding in agreement. “That Bakugou started yelling as soon as Iida-kun talked to him”

“I just asked him to put his feet down!” Tenya huffed, shaking his head. “He's way too volatile for someone who wants to be a hero”

Izuku hummed, silently agreeing with him. He didn't want to give judgment too soon but it was a really bad first impression Bakugou was giving to everyone he met.

They split on the changing rooms, Uraraka promising to meet them in the field afterwards.

The lockers had their names written on them, their gym clothes waiting for them inside. While Tenya sat down to see how he'd go about putting them on over his engines, Izuku went ahead and started undressing.

“Dude, is that ink?”

Izuku jumped in surprise at the sudden voice so close to him. The blond boy from earlier who had been so afraid of the fake pop quiz was standing next to him, staring open-mouthed at Izuku's arms. He met his eyes and realized he was maybe too close.

“Ah! Sorry about that” He scratched the back of his neck sheepishly, stepping back a little. “Just
“It's alright” Izuku reassured him. “Everyone's curious about them”

He wasn't the only one, either. Izuku noticed a sharp-toothed redhead looking at them as well, and a quick glance from who he recognized as the brainwashing guy from the entrance exam.

“I'm sure we can socialize further after class is over” Tenya said, already dressed up and ready to go. “But for now we mustn't keep Aizawa-sensei waiting”

Izuku had to contain his laugh. He wondered if Shouta had also told Tenya he had to call him by his last name or if he did it of his own volition; they'd known each other as long as Izuku had, and even then Tenya tended to be overly formal in most situations.

When they met the rest of the class in the field, Shouta was already there as well, phone in hand and seemingly timing how long it took them to get ready.

*Geez,* Izuku thought, calm down a little, maybe?

“Glad to see no one got lost” Shouta said as he put away his phone. “We'll be having a quirk apprehension test today to see how far you are controlling yourselves”

Uraraka raised her hand. “Sensei, aren't we attending the entrance ceremony?”

“UA has a free teaching policy” He answered. “I don't particularly find it practical to lose time on formal proceedings when we can get started with class right away”

He proceeded to explain what they'd be doing, and Izuku had to fight slapping his hands on his face when Uraraka said how fun it sounded, as then Shouta declared that since they saw this as some sort of game, the one with the lowest score would be expelled; and Izuku knew damn well Shouta was not playing around.

Even he wasn't safe.
While Izuku's mind was buzzing with all the quirks he saw on display during the different tests, he himself had a really hard time scoring up enough points to be on the safe zone. Seemed the only one who was having as much trouble as him was a girl whose quirk was purely invisibility. Izuku was doing decently thanks to his constant training, but it was clear how his lack of a quirk put him at a disadvantage.

Soon enough the tests were done, and Shouta displayed the scores for everyone to see.

Some of the others looked a bit mad, not at his own scores but rather at Shinsou's score, since he was pretty high on the list thanks to using his quirk to have them do some of the tests in his place, which still scored him points since he could use his quirk any way he wanted. They couldn't stay mad, however, since he actually went one by one and apologized to each of them.

Izuku wasn't really paying attention, however, since his eyes were stuck on his name on the bottom of the list.

Was this how it ended? Before it even began? Shouta had earned a reputation in UA due to expelling entire classes before the first day started. Was Izuku about to become a name among the others? Oh god, what would his parents thing? Would Nezu be mad all his teachings had been for nothing?

“The one's who is getting expelled today” Shouta started. “Is no one”

Izuku felt his soul return to his body like a snapped rubber band.

Shouta grinned at the chaos that erupted, everyone shouting at him for fooling and scaring them like that. Izuku thought he was enjoying himself too damn much playing with them like one of his cats toying with mice.

After explaining it was all a ruse to squeeze their potential to the last drop, Shouta sent them off and wandered away to the side of a building, where Izuku found out his dad was hiding in his true form, watching the tests as inconspicuously as he could. Toshinori managed to smile and wave his way before Shouta grabbed him by the ear and pulled him away, presumably to the teachers' lounge for a stern talking to about minding his own business during class hours.

“Do you know that man, Deku-kun?” Uraraka asked him as she fell into step beside him, Tenya
quickly catching up with them.

“He's my dad” Izuku explained. “I guess he wanted to see us on our first day?” He said, looking to Tenya.

He hummed. “Maybe, though I'm sure he was only looking at your performance” Tenya smiled. “I'm sure he's just as excited as you are; I bet your mother might've been here as well if she wasn't busy”

“Wait, both your parents are here?” Uraraka asked, then slapped her hand on her forehead. “Oh, what am I asking, of course they are, you live here after all”

Izuku laughed, reassuring her it was a common question people asked him. They parted ways to change back into their uniforms and go back for their things at the classroom, Uraraka saying she would change as fast as she could and leave right after since she had to put some order to her new apartment since she had recently moved in and was living alone, and bid them goodbye first.

As Izuku was finishing buttoning up his jacket, he felt Tenya's hand on his shoulder.

“Before I forget” Tenya started. “I wanted to thank you”

Izuku tilted his head, hands stilling as he tried to fix his tie. “What for?”

“What you said before the entrance exam, about just acting how a hero would” Tenya released his hold on him and, to Izuku's surprise, bowed deeply in front of him. “If it hadn't been for that advice, I don't think I would've tried to help Uraraka-kun escape from the robot; I owe my place here to your words!”

Izuku shook his head, waving his hands in front of him. “No, no, no! That was all you!”

“I insist!”

“Of course you would've helped her on your own!”
“I can't know that for sure!”

“Are you two going to be here all night or...” Shouta called from the door, staring at them as they realized they were the only ones left. "I knew having you both together in my class would spell disaster" He added teasingly, smiling as they hurried into motion.

Izuku quickly slammed the door of his locker shut, Tenya quickly following behind him. “Sorry! We'll be going now”

Shouta hummed, letting them through before locking the door behind them. He reached to ruffle Izuku's hair. “Your dad wanted me to tell you to hurry home to tell them all about your first day, but don't tell him I actually told you; I don't want him thinking he can go around asking me favors”

Izuku laughed and nodded, rushing to the classroom with Tenya by his side.

When he made it to the classroom, however, he knew he was going to have to apologize to his parents for making them wait.

“There you are!” A pink haired girl jumped in front of him as soon as he slid the door open. “I've been wanting to talk to you all day!”

Izuku felt like a rabbit in the headlights as more people surrounded him, Tenya subtly sliding past him with a grin as he left him to be crowded by their classmates.

“Dude, your name has been going around my head all day” The blond guy from that morning stepped up. “But now I remember why; you're that Midoriya kid from the news!”

“I hear the heroes on patrol talk about you all the time!”

“You're shorter than I expected, kero”

“Come on guys, let him breathe” The sharp-toothed redhead came to his rescue, coming forward and making everyone step back. He offered his hand and a grin. “Kirishima Eijirou, nice to meet you!”
Izuku released the breath he was holding at the onslaught of questions, smiling in thanks at Kirishima and accepting the handshake. Everyone around them started introducing themselves in turn, and Izuku made mental notes of each name to later connect it to the quirks he'd seen them use to add to his notes later.

“So is it true then? About you living here all this time?” Satou asked him, now sitting on a desk as the group had settled down around Izuku.

Tenya didn't even have the energy anymore to tell them to sit down properly.

“Yes, I've been here pretty much my whole life” Izuku answered, twiddling his thumbs.

“And is it true about...the villain?” Kaminari added, brows furrowed. The media didn't have any information on All for One so the most people knew was that some powerful villain was targeting him and the measures UA took to keep him safe. It was a wonder they even got their hands in the story to begin with.

Izuku hummed in confirmation, eyes on his lap. It was no use trying to avoid talking about it, especially since this kind of questions came his way every year from new students and teachers, but this time felt weird, knowing that these were his classmates and that he'd be with them every day for the next few years.

Kirishima, cross-legged on top of another desk, smiled sympathetically at how Izuku avoided eye-contact. He knew that feeling all too well; not wanting people to see your weakness. “Hey so, I know it's weird to bring this up but, what's up with your quirk?”

Everyone perked up at his question.

“Now that you mention it, you didn't use it in the apprehension test” Kaminari mused.

“They didn't talk about it in TV either” Tsuyu agreed. “But also that was many years ago, kero. You must not have had it yet then”

“Is it something you can't use in tests like that?” Jirou asked, twirling her ear jacks as she stared at Izuku.
Izuku licked his lips nervously, suddenly feeling them very dry.

A familiar weight on his shoulder had him looking up at Tenya, who was smiling at him encouragingly.

One thing Izuku really appreciated about having Tenya as his friend was how similar they were where it mattered. Being the target of a villain and the son of a hero family respectively meant they both grew up heavily protected and sheltered from the most common forms of human contact, having each other as pretty much the only company alike to themselves. Tenya could tell how uneasy he felt at having his entire life dissected by strangers all the time, always someone talking or speculating about them; he could most likely understand how afraid Izuku was of risking this bunch of new possible friends over the truth about his quirkless state.

Had this been another life, one where he grew up a normal kid surrounded by others his age, it was very likely Izuku would have been persecuted endlessly over his lack of powers, maybe even discouraged from pursuing the path of heroism; but this was his life now, and he'd grown up around wonderful people who cared about him and loved him and never put him down with cruel words. He'd had his parents and Shouta and Hizashi, Nemuri and Tensei and Tenya, Nezu and Tsukauchi and countless other people who accepted him just how he was, and all that love and support had landed him right here in this moment.

He could open up.

“I'm quirkless, actually”

He was looking at them now, assessing their reactions as his own heart was beating high up in his throat. They looked expectedly surprised, eyes wide and mouths hanging open as they processed his admission. Tsuyu was the only one looking more curious than shocked, finger on her chin and tongue poking out of her closed smile as she'd been all day.

“That's surprising” She said, breaking the silence they'd fallen in.

“Yo, for real?!” Kaminari shouted, biting his tongue when Jirou smacked his head.

“Don't be so loud” She said, rubbing her ears. “And don't be rude, either”
Kirishima's face had turned from surprise to pure awe, eyes shining as his hands went up to his face. “And you kept up with everyone so easily through all those test this morning too...” He wiped a stray tear from the corner of his eyes, “That's so manly, bro”

Izuku had a hard time believing that, remembering how almost everyone had him beat when it came to speed, strength or technique during the exercises, but decided to bite his tongue for now; no use in putting himself down in front of his peers.

“That's a relief to hear” A new voice chimed in and everyone turned to see Shinsou leisurely walking up to the group, Todoroki closing in as well on his own at the turn the conversation took. Seemed everyone around was listening as well. “I mean, not in a bad way or anything” He suddenly said, raising his hands placatingly at the glares he got from the others. “I just thought for a moment you didn't want to show us your quirk because you thought you were hot shit or--” He sighed deeply, dragging his hands down his face as the tip of his ears turned deep red. “I'm sorry. I'm terrible with words”

“I think he meant to say he's glad you're not in over your head just because you are surrounded by top heroes every day” Todoroki piped in. “Or at least I think so?” He said, looking at Shinsou for confirmation.

Shinsou still had his face hidden behind his hands, but he nodded.

Izuku bursted out laughing, glad that the atmosphere had turned around so quick. He could understand where Shinsou came from, with a quirk like his.

With the years he'd spent analyzing quirks, Izuku had also developed a well honed ability to connect dots without much context. Shinsou had an amazing quirk, but since it involved mind control and his general appearance showcased him as tired and aloof, he must've gone through some harsh judgment through the years. If he'd seen Izuku this morning and thought he was purposely withholding his quirk because he thought he was too good to show them, he was in his right to be suspicious.

And since Izuku knew his quirk also required verbal responses, he assumed Shinsou instinctively stringed his words to provoke as strong a reaction from people as he could, and didn't realize what he'd just said until his own ears processed it.

He seemed like a nice guy.
“It’s okay, I understand!” He reassured him. “I guess I would be mad at someone who thought they could go on par with you without using their full abilities, too”

For some reason and from the corner of his eye, Izuku saw Todoroki’s face scrunch up like he’d licked a particularly sour lemon. Todoroki picked up his bag and wordlessly walked out of the classroom, only a few curiously glancing at him as he left.

Another voice cut through the momentary silence, bringing everyone's attention to Bakugou as he barked a laugh, approaching as he himself was all ready to go home.

“Figures” He said, glaring daggers at Izuku. “Fucking Deku doesn't even have a quirk. I can't believe we have to deal with a damn charity case dragging us down”

“Hey, that's not nice!” Ashido exclaimed, walking up to him and poking his chest. "You better apologize!"

Bakugou snorted, but didn't make a move to lay a hand on her. “Who cares about being nice, I'm here to be a hero, not make friends” He turned towards the door, bag slung over his shoulders in such a stereotypical delinquent pose it was almost laughable. “Just keep your weak ass away from me, Deku!”

As he left, Kirishima stood up, huffing. “What's that dude's problem?”

Tsuyu shrugged, patting Izuku's arm a couple of times in an attempt at comfort. “Don't listen to him, all those explosions must be messing with his head, kero”

“Yeah man, don't think we agree with him!”

“Honestly, what is he even thinking?”

They continued assuring Izuku that Bakugou's words were meaningless, even changing the subject to share more about themselves and asking about Izuku to keep his mind away from it as it turned late and they had to get ready to leave as well. They all walked to the main gates as a group, chatting and laughing about typical dumb teenager stuff in such a casual tone it made Izuku's chest
feel warm, and they all waved goodbye to him as they walked through the massive gates and into the outside world. Tenya wanted to accompany Izuku home before leaving, but Izuku assured him he could use the few minutes alone to think about today, and to not worry about him. Tenya seemed unconvinced but he nodded, hugging him tightly before leaving as well.

When his friend's back was out of sight, Izuku turned around and walked the familiar path home, indeed taking the time to think about the events of the day. He didn't know what he was expecting his first day as a student to go like, but it had been so far extremely eventful and he kept thinking about if he should tell all that happened to his parents once he was back.

As the excited voice of his mother welcomed him home and the radiant smile of his father looked at him expectantly, he made his choice.

“IZUKU, YOU'RE BACK AT LAST!” INKO RAN TO HUG HIM EXCITEDLY, JUMPING UP AND DOWN IN PLACE AS TOSHINORI HERDED THEM BOTH TO THE TABLE FOR DINNER. “YOU HAVE TO TELL ME EVERYTHING! ARE YOUR CLASSES FUN? IS SHOUTA AS HARSH AS EVERYONE SAYS? DID YOU MAKE ANY FRIENDS?”

TOSHINORI CHUCKLED, KISSING THE TOP OF HER HEAD, NOT ABLE TO RESIST THE SIGHT OF HIS WIFE ACTING LIKE A SUPERCHARGED MINI-SIZED BATTERY. “CALM DOWN, LOVE, LET HIM SPEAK”

IZUKU LOOKED DOWN AT HIS PLATE, THINKING ABOUT THE SCARE OF ALMOST BEING EXPelled, the shock on everyone's faces at his quirkless reveal, how angry Todoroki seemed out of nowhere before he left, the harsh words from Bakugou...

THE WARMTH AND WEIGHT OF TENYA'S HAND ON HIS SHOULDER AND AS HE HUGGED HIM, the encouraging words from his classmates, the immediate apology from Shinsou at getting tangled in his own words, the empathetic way Kirishima looked at him and swiftly moved the subject around to comfortable areas, the unexpected way Tsuyu accepted his situation without question or hesitation.

He smiled, locking eyes with them, bright and excited for what was to come. Did he make any friends, she asked him?

“I THINK I DID!”

Chapter End Notes
tenya KNOWS deflated toshi is all might but no one other than naomasa, nezu and chiyo know about ofa--yet

again with bakugou being nasty, I promise he'll get better give him some time lmao

shinsou, in his mind: wow they're being a bit noisy im gonna politely ask them to keep it down
shinsou, out loud: hey yall wanna shut up

dont worry shinsou, you'll be drowning in friends soon enough

no one besides UA staff knows toshi is gonna be teaching, not even izuku. they're gonna DIE when he shows up the next day ajshfgajhf--yes the press will eventually know i need that plot point

since i made izuku the same height as inko here he's 160 cm and m*jeta doesnt exist so tokoyami remains King Shorty at 158

"because i changed your diapers is why" is a line that has been here since this idea was conceived, im so glad i finally got to it asgfjhsdg
Despite how much he loved Hizashi, Izuku did not appreciate having classes with him directly after his appointment with Saya.

The therapist had dug around his mind once more that morning, trying many different ways to chip away at the wall surrounding that hidden memory, but after thirty minutes of bringing a metaphorical pickax down on it, not even a scratch had been made, and Izuku had been left with the same headache as the last session. It should go away soon enough and Hizashi had no problem keeping his voice down until it did so, but he was an over-excitable man who just couldn't contain himself sometimes.

He'd been helping mentor Izuku in English for years since it was one of the few subjects Nezu found himself lost at—extreme intelligence or not, learning a new language was a completely different thing. All that meant Izuku didn't really need to pay that much attention in class, could just lie his head down and drift off for a few minutes to clear his headache. But he didn't want to be rude, because despite being one of the most well-known pro heroes and working three jobs, people tended to see Hizashi as a bit of a joke because of his silly public persona and appearance; he didn't want people to think he of all people didn't respect him enough to stay awake in his class.

He must've zoned out at some point, however, because he didn't notice the silence that fell on the classroom until a gentle hand set itself on his shoulder.

“You alright there, little listener?” Hizashi asked him in English, looking concerned as he pushed his glasses up to his hair, letting Izuku see the worry in those unusual eyes of his. “I've been calling for you to read the sentence on the board for a while now”

Izuku hummed, rubbing at his forehead absentmindedly. “I’m good”

Hizashi shook his head, sliding his glasses back into place. “Go to the infirmary. There's no point of being in class if you're not feeling well”

“But I am--!” Izuku tried to protest, only for a sharp stab of pain to hit his temples.

“Go before I call your mother. See if you can tell her no” Hizashi insisted, pointing at the door. “Or
you want me to get Shouta instead?”

Izuku stood up, grabbing his bag and dragging his feet as he made his way to the door. He stuck his tongue out at Hizashi while passing by his desk, getting the same response from the hero while the rest of the class snickered.

“I'll ask Recovery Girl if you actually made it there later, so don't even think about escaping!” He shouted after Izuku as the door closed. “Now then, Tsunotori, can you read the sentence on the board?”

Izuku dragged his feet as he traversed the halls, pouting at having being kicked out of class but also thankful for the peace and quiet of the corridors. His headache was a bit better with the medicine Saya always gave him afterwards but he certainly could use a nap and some tea. Maybe he begged pretty please to Recovery Girl she'd let him go home until lunch time to sleep in his own bed.

“Izu-chaaan!” A voice called from down the hall, and Izuku looked up to see a group of older students walking his way.

Nejire, who had called out to him just now, was in front of the group, waving at him as they got closer. She stopped in front of him alongside Mirio and Tamaki, the rest of the 3-A students waving at him and ruffling his hair as they passed by on their way to their classroom.

“Oh my gosh, look at you!” Nejire gushed, flitting around him as she poked and prodded at Izuku's uniform. “You look so good! I need a commemorative selfie!”

“Oh, me too!” Mirio said, jumping next to Izuku. “Tamaki, come here! We have to record Izuku's beginnings in the hero course!”

“Oh, me too!” Tamaki muttered, sliding slowly next to Mirio.

Nejire pulled out her phone and handed it to Tamaki, who turned one of his hands into tentacles to hold it at a good enough distance to have them all in frame. He snapped it just in time with the teacher shouting at them to hurry up or they'd be marked as tardy, making Tamaki startle and almost drop the phone until Izuku jumped forward to catch it, handing it to Nejire who promised to send it to him as they rushed back to class.

“Are you done?” A new voice asked him, and Izuku turned around to came face to face with
Shouta who was crouching to be at his level.

“How do you always know?” Izuku asked him, letting himself be guided forward as Shouta stood up and put a hand on his back to push him slightly. “Did Hizashi call you?”

“He texted your mom” Shouta explained. “I just so happened to be in the teachers’ lounge next to her, and offered to come make sure you wouldn't run away”

Izuku huffed, hiking his backpack higher up his shoulders. “I wasn't going to--”

“What about that time you kept running under the rain and passed out from a fever in the middle of Home Econ class?”

“That was two years ago!” Izuku complained. “I just wanted to go back for my phone! I wasn't running away” He huffed. “Besides...I wouldn't go anywhere now that I'm in classes and all” He muttered the last part, looking at the floor.

Shouta hummed, turning around the corner into the hallway leading to the infirmary. “I know you wouldn't but it's just a precaution” He slid the door open, waiting for him to go in first. He waved at Izuku to sit on one of the cots, smiling. “I need you in top shape for what you'll be doing in Heroics later today”

Izuku brightened up at that, swinging his feet in excitement. “Are we having hands-on practice?!”

“I can't tell you, can't have you running your mouth near your classmates; I don't want them to prepare for it”

“I won't tell!”

“You don't know what you say when you start that muttering of yours”

The door to the little office on the other side of the room opened and Chiyo walked out, smiling at the sight of Izuku sitting there waiting for her. She nodded at Shouta. “Bodyguard duty again?”
“Just making sure he made it here”

Izuku grumbled something about 'not running away every time', crossing his arms across his chest.

Chiyo chuckled, the tapping of her cane stopping as she stood next to Izuku. “So what seems to be the problem today, dearie?”

Izuku shrugged. “Just a headache after this morning's appointment with Saya-san”

She hummed, looking him over this way and that. “Did you have a good breakfast?”

“Yes ma'am”

“Alright then” She gestured for him to come closer and Izuku complied, leaning down enough for her to press an unnecessarily noisy kiss on his cheek. Immediately Izuku felt the headache disappear, and he rubbed at his eyes at the sudden drowsiness that filled him.

“You can stay here until lunch time, then go and make sure Lunch Rush gives you extra” She said, patting his knee. “It's better if you come straight to me after your therapy so I can fix you up before classes, okay Izukkun?”

“Okay” He agreed, accepting the candy bar Shouta had pulled out of the drawer next to the cot.

“Eat that and take a nap. I'll tell Inko you're fine” He assured him, ruffling his hair before turning around, nodding at Recovery Girl before making his way to the door. “See you later”

Chiyo chuckled once more, shaking her head as if knowing a particularly funny secret Izuku was not privy to while he got comfortable on the cot.

Also, Izuku thought before sleep claimed him, if his mom knew about his coming here, where was his dad?
“I am coming through the door like a normal person!”

Izuku wanted to die.

In a good sense, mind you.

He just would've liked to have been told his own father was going to be teaching him this year, is all.

While everyone was losing their minds over the hero being their teacher, Izuku looked across the room at Tenya, who stared back with equally wide, surprised eyes as he shrugged. Seemed he hadn't known either.

Toshinori laughed heartily, cape flowing behind him as he took his place in front of the class, stance sure and powerful. “That's right! I decided to try my hand at teaching, and you will be the fortunate class to be my first guinea pigs!”

Izuku wanted to be embarrassed at the clearly rehearsed speech—was this what he'd heard him mutter in the bathroom every night for the past week?—but at the same time this wasn't only his father, it was his favorite hero of all time, here to teach them Heroics; arguably the most important lesson in a hero's education!

He was vibrating in his seat.

The official story that All Might was living at UA to protect him and Inko while investigating All for One still held since he was still technically doing that, but his appearances in his 'hero' form progressively diminished after his last fight with the villain, and no-one seemed to notice it just so happened to match up with the time Inko's equally tall, blonde husband had popped into existence within the halls of UA. Izuku usually wasn't around when he arrived from his hero work before he turned into his true form, so it was still exciting for him to see him like this.
“Today we will be having battle training!” All Might declared. “And you can’t fight crime without the proper attire!”

He pulled out a controller and clicked its button. Everyone turned around as multiple sections of the far wall started opening, several numbered suitcases coming on sight.

Everyone scrambled to their feet, pulling out their costumes and running out of the classroom, hooting and hollering as they left to the annoyance of the neighboring classes.

“Keep it down!” Vlad King barked as he popped his head out of his classroom, slamming the door shut a second later.

No one listened to him.

It was chaos in the dressing rooms as they pulled out their costumes from the cases, staring at their designs made reality in awe. Izuku was rubbing the familiar green fabric with his thumb, smiling fondly at the jumpsuit he and his mother had designed together.

Izuku had made the initial draft of the design but had asked his mother for the input. They both had wanted it to be a surprise for his dad, since there was a particular piece of it he would’ve choked himself over if he saw it. Once it was done, Inko had insisted in actually making the suit, using the special fabric Power Loader had given her, and afterwards had sent it along with the rest of Izuku’s design to the Hero Support company for proper fitting and accessorizing.

They were supposed to go out in ranking order from yesterday’s apprehension test so Izuku, being last, had to wait until the very end to get out and join the others on the battle training grounds. When he made it there, he quickly found Uraraka and Tenya and slid next to them while also staring starstruck at all the costumes he didn’t manage to catch while he was changing.

“Izuku! That's a very, ah, interesting costume” Tenya commented, biting his lip to keep any laugh from escaping. His own suit was big and strong to protect him while also not heavy enough to slow him down.

“What do you mean? It's really cute!” Uraraka said.

Izuku got flustered pretty quick at both Tenya’s comment, clearly meaning the detail on the hood,
and how adorable Uraraka's own suit was. “Ah, thank you Uraraka-san, yours too! I really like the color”

Now that everyone was in place, All Might walked to the front, eyes subtly but keenly looking out for Izuku to finally see what the big deal with his suit was, and when he finally saw him he had to bite back a laugh and suppress the cough that wanted to burst from his chest. He expected the suit to be green since it seemed to be just the theme Izuku and Inko always had going on, but the special protective mask in the shape of a very familiar wide smile and the 'bunny ears' protruding from his hood were indicative of a completely different inspiration.

He cleared his throat, wondering if anyone noticed his trademark smile seemed just a bit wider than usual.

The battle training he'd had in mind consisted of dividing the class in duos that would play the part of heroes and villains that would fight to either keep or take a fake missile threatening to destroy the city. The pairs were decided at random, which was why Izuku and Uraraka had been ecstatic at being paired, high-fiving while Tenya sighed at being teamed up with Bakugou. Since their class was an uneven number the one who was left alone would go with a volunteer who wanted to try again versus whichever team wasn't too roughed up at the end.

Especially since they turned out to be the villain team against Izuku and Uraraka.

“Remember, either capture both opponents or touch the missile to win!” All Might reminded them as they went to get ready for their battle as he herded the rest of the students to the observation room.

“First day and already against that guy” Uraraka whined as she and Izuku walked towards their designated waiting point to come up with a strategy. “At least Iida-kun is there too”

“I guess it can't be helped” Izuku said, adjusting his mask. “It's not like we can choose who we will be fighting with in the future”

Uraraka suddenly jumped up, fists pumping in anticipation. “But you've known Iida-kun all your life, haven't you Deku-kun? You know how to go around him!”

Izuku scratched the back of his neck, humming in thought. “I mean, it's true I know mostly everything about his quirk, and we've trained together for years...”
“But?” Uraraka asked, already hearing the unspoken word.

“But that's why I know he'd be really difficult to beat; it's not just his speed, he's also really smart and knows me just as well as I know him. I'd say we cancel each other out in terms of advantage”

Uraraka sighed, shoulders dropping. “That's okay. Guess we have to account for Bakugou first then”

“He seems really impulsive, might try to attack first instead of protecting the bomb” Izuku mused, pulling at his lip as he got deep in thought.

“Then we have to do something about him!” Uraraka nodded, determined.

They spent the rest of the time setting out their plan until the signal made them rush inside the building. They sneaked in through a window, quietly making their way down the narrow corridors as they tried to find the stairs to keep going up and find where they'd hidden the bomb. It was eerily silent as they traversed the halls, only the soft 'clack' of Uraraka's heels and the occasional squeak from Izuku's sneakers betraying their position.

Suddenly Uraraka stopped, touching Izuku's back softly to make him keep still as well. Her hand was on the wall, eyes drifting to the side in concentration. “Do you feel that?”

Izuku looked around, not seeing any movement. He crouched down to the floor, touching the tiles lightly until he could feel the slightest tremor on his fingertips. It followed a constant rhythm, tap, tap, tap, and it kept getting stronger and stronger--

“Look out!” Izuku shouted as he pushed her to the side just in time to avoid the blast hitting the wall where she'd been, Bakugou appearing around the corner and setting off an explosion the second he had them on sight.

The scorch mark where he had hit was still smoking as he approached them, a manic grin on his face as the thrill of his first battle filled him to the brim.

His eyes swept from Uraraka to Izuku and he scoffed. “Figures, first fight and I'm stuck with all the
Izuku could almost hear Tenya telling him off through their comms at his words towards his friends, play-villain or not.

Bakugou scoffed, looking at Izuku up and down. “I'm not even gonna bother losing my time on some quirkless loser. If you know what's good for you you'll just leave where you came from” And without further warning he set off a new explosion, blasting himself forward straight towards Uraraka.

She rolled out of the way, landing on a crouch to take advantage of the spring in her heels and propel herself towards him, hands splayed and trying to reach out to touch him.

Bakugou didn't know what her quirk consisted of, but he was careful enough to avoid being within her reach. His hands angled purposefully so his explosions would take him out of her way while also directing his attacks towards her.

Izuku meanwhile kept low to the ground, slowly sliding away while Uraraka kept him busy. Bakugou didn't seem to notice how, every time he avoided her touch, he was being led further and further away from the corridor he'd come from.

With their only knowledge about him being his quirk and his short temper, they had guessed he'd try to come fight them directly, leaving Tenya and the bomb unprotected. They'd based their strategy around that and the fact Izuku's lack of a quirk would most likely have Bakugou take him out of the equation immediately. They'd use him to figure out where the bomb was hidden, tracing his steps backwards towards it.

Izuku quietly slipped into the corridor, quickly finding the stairs to the next floor and doing a quick sweep of the entire area to make sure the bomb wasn't hidden there. It took some valuable time but it was better to make sure. Besides, he knew Tenya well enough to know he wouldn't leave the bomb unattended, and with Bakugou's explosions still shaking the building from his fight with Uraraka downstairs he knew he was free to run around without worry.

A particularly strong blast shook the building so much it made him stumble to his knees, groaning at the sudden movement. His hand went for his comm, trying to hear what was going on. “Uraraka-san?! Are you okay?!”
It was only static for a moment until he picked up a groan, then her voice coming through ragged and panting. “He's really strong...” She said. She sounded like she'd managed to shake him off her back for a second to catch her breath. “I'm fine though, you keep going!”

“Okay” Izuku breathed out, keeping his comm on to keep an ear on her while he made his way up. Time was running fast and he had to find Tenya soon no matter what.

The sounds of further fighting and destruction in his ear almost distracted him from the task at hand, but he finally manged to reach the last floor, seeing a door wide open like a shiny trap just waiting for him to walk through.

He made his way along the wall silently, slowly peeping inside the room.

It was big and open, multiple supporting pillars spread across the only thing in the room. No, really, it was completely bare save for the massive fake bomb set by the far wall, Tenya standing guard right in front of it.

He wasn't looking towards the door though. He was pacing in front of the bomb, seemingly muttering something to himself.

“Playing a villain surely can't be fit of someone of the Iida name, but for the sake of the exercise I must do my best to fit my role. It would be no good to not give it my all...”

Izuku couldn't help the snort that left him when he caught part of Tenya's moral dilemma, gasping immediately after as he realized it gave away his position.

Tenya swirled around, eyes locking on Izuku's form as he ditched his hiding spot and just marched into the room, falling into a defensive position. “Izuku, so it was you!” Tenya said grandly, arms opening wide to show off his work. “I wasn't sure who of you would make it here first, so I cleaned up every piece of furniture and debris in case Uraraka-kun was my opponent”

Izuku grinned, giddy at the thought of being Tenya's first enemy as official students. “Well, thanks for giving me more space to maneuver!” He said, before taking off and running around the pillars as Tenya jumped into action chasing after him.

It was a nice remembrance of the days they spent training in the years past, kicking and punching
and dodging under the blazing rays of the sun beating down on them. More than once Izuku had had to beat it into Tenya's head to not hold back just because he was quirkless since his friend would usually not use his engines when training, trying to make it a fair fight. Izuku had to remind him it was actually pretty offensive that Tenya thought he couldn't handle him at full power for him to finally turn on his quirk.

Seemed Tenya had remembered that, since the bright blue fire coming out of his engines as he chased after him kept almost scorching Izuku's suit the nearer he got. Luckily Shouta had trained Izuku very well in the art of dodging at the last second, and Izuku managed to get out of his way every time Tenya got close enough to catch him.

He kept steadily making his way closer to the bomb, the occasional explosion from the first floor shaking the building and helping him by making Tenya lose momentum. But Tenya was also smart enough to not let Izuku near the bomb, positioning himself in front of it and running into him to chase him off.

All Might's voice echoed through the building as he announced the little time they had left, and Izuku knew he had to hurry before they failed the exercise. If only Tenya's suit wasn't so hard he could go in a head-on fight with him, but with his armor on Izuku couldn't reach any soft spot to take him out.

It was moments like this Izuku resented being quirkless. All those years of training and bruises and fractured bones were meaningless if his opponent could counteract all his strengths and up them with their own powers. The scars under his sleeves itched as they always did when he thought about it, and his hands twitched as he fought the need to scratch at them.

They were a reminder of his helplessness, of his inability to save himself when it counted most. He had covered them in an attempt to forget about them, but they would never leave no matter what he did. No matter what he wore. No matter what anyone said.

“I don’t want them to be a reminder” He'd said many years ago. “I don’t want them to be a weakness”

“Then turn them into a strength”
Shouta had been so insistent of him putting his scars in a new light, so caring when he treated his arms with the sole purpose of making them as non-noticeable as possible. So understanding when he gave Izuku the option of covering them with something new and good and meaningful. Shouta was so similar to him, sometimes he felt he was his only confidant during the times his insecurities hit him. The only one who would listen instead of offering unwanted advise, just letting him unload his chest while looking at the starts late at night on top of UA's tallest building, when he'd come even if Izuku called him at ungodly hours.

Turning it into a strength...

Izuku stumbled during his run, letting Tenya catch him and land a swift kick to his side, sending Izuku flying and skidding across the floor. He landed in a heap, limbs strewn about as he remained motionless.

Tenya stood there, frozen in place as he stared at his best friend laying prone on the floor, the echo of blasts the only noise in the room.

“Izuku...?” Tenya asked quietly, breaking character as he slowly approached his figure.

Izuku's eyes were closed, suit dirty and torn in a few places from the drag on the floor when he was sent flying. Did Tenya really kick him hard enough to render him unconscious?

Tenya knelt next to him, carefully setting an arm on Izuku's and shaking him. “Izuku, are you okay?” He lightly tapped his friend's face, trying to wake him up. “Please be okay, oh lord, please wake up!” He took off his helmet, face twisted in worry and hair messy from the strain of the exercise. He set his ear down on Izuku's chest, knowing he was exaggerating a bit but still relieved to hear the constant beating of his heart and soft inhale and exhale of his breathing.

On the other hand, Izuku had to fight the smile threatening to break his facade.

Tenya was so good, so sweet and caring. Truly the best friend he could ask for. Izuku loved him so much.

So it made him feel a bit bad when in the next millisecond he twisted around, jumping towards his surprised and unguarded friend to twist around his torso and latch onto his back like a koala backpack.
“I'm so sorry” He said before pinching the back of Tenya's now exposed neck, sending him tumbling down like a sack of potatoes as his body went limp as a ragdoll.

With Tenya now incapacitated, Izuku stood up and walked towards the bomb, leisurely placing his hand on it as he heard All Might's voice declaring the hero team the winner.

Izuku walked up to Tenya and fell to the ground next to him, sitting cross-legged and pulling him up to rest Tenya's head on his leg as they waited for the med-bots to show up. “Sorry about that. You'll be fine in a few minutes”

Tenya couldn't speak, but the look he was sending Izuku said more than enough about what he thought of his little stunt. Izuku laughed at the face he put, patting his cheek lovingly.

Soon enough All Might made his way into the room, med-bots following him with a stretcher.

Toshinori's gaze landed on them as he shook his head. “That was quite a move you two pulled just now”

Izuku grinned sheepishly, letting his dad pick Tenya up and set him down gently on the stretcher. The bots took off towards the observation room, having had previous instructions from Toshinori about the technique Izuku had just performed, knowing it would wear off soon enough and that he had no need to go the infirmary.

Toshinori helped pull Izuku up, patting off some of the dust from his suit as he guided him out of the building. “You did really well”

Izuku pulled back his hood, grinning at the praise.

He met with Uraraka in the observation room, bumping fists at their triumph as they sat on the floor next to were Tenya was slowly regaining mobility. Bakugou was fuming off to the side, small explosions crackling in his palms.

While Bakugou was advised to not overestimate or outright dismiss his opponents for future exercises, Iida was commended for his commitment to the villain role, but was reminded a real villain wouldn't worry if their enemy was seemingly knocked out in front of them; had he not dropped the pretense to care about Izuku's well-being, they would've won.
Izuku patted his shoulder, appreciating the concern anyway.

The teams went forwards one by one, some taking as much as they did while some others finishing up in a matter of seconds. Izuku looked flabbergasted at Todoroki freezing over the entire building and calmly walking up to the bomb to claim his victory, Shouji silently following as he too stared in awe at the display of power. He couldn't help thinking how weird it was, him having an ice based quirk while being the son of the most well-known fire-based hero in Japan.

Uraraka shuddered next to him. “I'm so glad we weren't up against him”

Tenya nodded, having finally come out of the paralysis. “It is a unfair advantage to have such a powerful long ranged quirk”

Izuku took mental notes about the quirk, especially when after being declared the winner Todoroki used his left hand to melt the ice. Could he maybe ask him about it later? They'd gotten along well enough during their first meeting the year before, but yesterday he'd taken off the classroom looking mad for some reason while Izuku chatted with the others.

The one who had been left alone due to uneven numbers had been Shinsou, who ended up paired with Yaoyorozu as she volunteered to go again after her first turn with Tsunotori. All Might ended up pairing them against Todoroki and Shouji, whose turn had been so short-lived they were still in peak condition.

As the final battle went off, a few of their classmates approached the trio sitting down, plopping next to them casually.

Kirishima sat next to Izuku, leaning back against the wall and throwing a grin and thumbs up at them. “Dude, what you did there at the end was so cool!”

“I didn't even know you could do that outside the movies” Kaminari added, sitting cross-legged in front of Tenya. “How did it feel?”

Tenya tilted his head to get rid of the final cricks in his neck. “Like an electric shock, I imagine. And then you just can't move”
“Oooh” Kaminari said, lifting a hand to let some sparkles off his fingertips. “Wanna find out?”

Tenya politely declined.

“Midoriya! I wanted to ask you” Hagakure asked out of nowhere, startling Izuku who hadn’t noticed her there. He focused on her gloves waving wildly around where her face should be. “All Might has lived here as long as you, right?”

“Yeah, he wanted to be near me and my mom when we were brought in” He nodded. “He lives next door to us” Or at least he used to. Truth was his 'house' was more of a storage unit now since he moved in with them.

“So you knew he would be teaching us this year and didn't tell us?!” She huffed, and Izuku was almost able to see the metaphorical smoke coming out of her ears.

He waved his hands frantically, especially since the outburst had gathered the attention of the rest around them. All Might himself was shaking from keeping his laughter in, trying to focus on the screens. “I didn't! I swear I didn't know!”

Ashido hummed in disbelief. “Really? Because you seem really buddy-buddy with the teachers to not be in on it...”

“They didn't tell me, not even my mom did!”

Kirishima suddenly sat up. “Oh right, your mom teaches Home Econ, right? I heard from some upperclassmen in lunch how much they liked it”

Izuku smiled, delighted of having the chance to talk about his mother. “Yeah! She asked Ne—Uh, I mean,Principal Nezu to give her a slot in thanks for accepting us here. I've been helping her every year since I was old enough”

The girls 'awwed' at the image, and even Kaminari wiped off an imaginary tear. They hadn't even met his mother—Would have if they had been to the entrance ceremony the day before—but they could guess the kind of person she was just based on how Izuku acted.
“We should be having our first class with her tomorrow” Tenya said, pushing his glasses up his nose. “Right after lunch as usual”

“She doesn’t want her students to be too full for lunch” Izuku explained. “Her first classes are always cooking, and then she goes over electronics and other home repairs”

“Aw man” Kaminari hung his head in defeat. “So many years avoiding being a useful member of society, and now they’re gonna grade me for it”

Everyone laughed around him, even he did once Jirou shoved him playfully.

All in all, Izuku thought as he made quick eye-contact with Toshinori to flash him a wide smile and get one in turn, he was as happy as can be.

Chapter End Notes

I'm filling up the empty spot left in 1-A with Pony since as far as I remember she's supposed to be one semester with each class? so I decided to just put her in 1-A immediately lmao

of course i couldn't leave the big three out of izuku's first days as a student!!! they've been waiting for it just as much as izuku!!! they love him!!!!!

this chapter turned out shorter because, since izuku's childhood friend is tenya and not katsuki i had to cut off a chunk of that part of the story with izuku telling him about his quirk and bakugou crying and the whole scene you remember which one.

izuku feels so so bad about taking advantage of tenya's pure goody good boy's heart faking being knocked out jashdfhgsdf he's gonna give him everything he bakes in inko's class for the next month

also idk know if that ‘sleep pinch’ or however you call it in english even is a thing you can do irl but this is a fanfic aaaaaaa who cares
Izuku was woken up by the rumbling of voices echoing in the distance.

He groaned as he dragged himself out of bed, walking down the hallway towards the living room to see what the fuss was all about. His parents were huddled together in their pajamas, watching out the window and looking as disheveled as Izuku was from being woken up so early.

“Whazzat?” Izuku slurred, rubbing his eyes as he joined them. There was nothing within sight that could tell them what the scandal was, but it was either near or loud enough to reach their little home within the depths of UA.

“I don’t know baby” Inko answered, sighing and stepping away to start with breakfast since they were all up already. “Must be something outside; we would’ve been told if there was something going on today.

Toshinori followed after her to help, reaching up to take whatever they needed from the higher cupboards. “Whatever it is, it's way too early” He yawned. “I might just join Shouta on his naps later”

Inko hummed. “Sounds good”

Toshinori's phone started ringing from their room and Izuku went to fetch it, seeing the caller was Nezu and answering it as he went back to the kitchen. “Hello?”
“Izuku, good morning” Nezu greeted him, his voice calm and joyful as always—or so would think someone who didn't know him. To Izuku, who had learned to read him through the years to guess what he'd be asked on tests during his classes, he sounded really mad and on edge. “Is your father around?” Izuku hummed. “Great, can you give him the phone please?”

Izuku silently handed the phone to Toshinori, who excused himself and stepped aside to answer while Izuku replaced him helping his mother. They were finishing up and setting the table when he came back, sighing and rubbing absently at the scar on his stomach.

“Everything alright, dear?” Inko asked as he sat down next to her.

He sighed. “Apparently someone sold the news that I would be teaching this year and the info spread. That noise outside? News reporters” He accepted the cup of tea she handed him, downing it in one go like a bastardized version of the stronger thing he might've needed at the moment. “Nezu wanted me to know so I wouldn't go near the entrance while using my quirk. You two would be better avoiding that area as well; any reporter would be well instructed to recognize you on sight”

“Aw, I wanted to wait for Tenya and Uraraka-san” Izuku said, crestfallen.

“You can see them in the classroom. For now it's better we be careful” Toshinori declared with finality.

Izuku decided to kill time before classes started by hanging out in the teacher's lounge, watching from the window the mass of people crowding around the gates. As students and teachers arrived, the cameras started following them and microphones were shoved in their faces. He could see his own classmates being stopped and questioned; some answered, some tried to scurry away as quickly as possible.

“Having fun, Izukkun?” Nemuri asked as she leaned against the windowsill, turning to look at the reporters as well.

“I don't know” He said. “It's kinda interesting to see so many people out there at once, but it looks like they're annoying everyone who gets close”

She hummed. “You get used to it when you start working. The hero industry is a public service, after all” Suddenly she pointed down, grinning. “And look who comes there!”
Izuku followed her pointing to see Shouta leisurely walking towards the school, being ignored by the reporters until they realized he was making his way towards the gate. They tried to interrogate him as well, but Shouta just waved them off. One of them tried to follow him inside, and Izuku winced as the gate closed mere inches from her face.

UA’s security system was no joke.

“You should head to your classroom now. Tenya must be making it there by now” She reminded him. “And who knows what would be your fate if Shouta decides to get there early”

He scampered out into the halls, her laugh following him as he hurried to the classroom.

“Bakugou, grow up already” Shouta lectured him during his evaluation of the previous day's activities. “You have talent, but it's no use if you waste it with that personality. And you can't just choose which enemies you fight; in a real life situation, dismissing a villain like you did Izuku can cost lives. Don't underestimate your opponents”

Bakugou frowned, looking down at his desk. He mumbled a few words of agreement anyway, at least understanding where he went wrong.

A few minutes later once Shouta was done giving a piece of his mind about everyone's performances, he dropped the bomb on them about the need to choose a class president, which predictably sent the class into chaos as everyone wanted to be it. It was Tenya who finally put an end to the yelling with his proposal of a democratic election, which was ultimately carried on despite the grumbling and pouting of the ones who wanted to be picked the most.

One round of voting later, and a baffled Izuku stood in front of the class next to Yaoyorozu.

“What just happened...?” He asked himself, shaking under the intense stares of the class. How in the world did he end up with three votes?! To think he would've gotten even more if he'd actually voted for himself...
“Good. If you’re done then” Shouta grunted, getting up from his spot napping on the corner. Although it was a wonder if he was ever actually sleeping in that yellow bag of his, considering he was alert enough to know when they had finished. “Lunch is about to start. Get out of here before I decide to really get that pop quiz”

Everyone filed out orderly after that, chatting on their way to the cafeteria while Izuku marched on with limbs stiff enough to make Tenya proud.

“Don’t worry Deku-kun, I’m sure you’d make a great president!” Uraraka claimed, walking forward on her spot in line at the cafeteria as she stared enviously at the generous serving Lunch Rush was dumping on Izuku's tray.

“B-But I’ve never even been in a classroom before! I don’t know how all this--” He gestured wildly with one hand, holding his tray with the other with unexpected ease. “--even works! What does a class president even do?!”

“You’ll do fine” Tenya assured him. “I know you; you have enough brains to guide us to the best choices. Besides” He added. “You know how UA works better than anyone. That’s why I voted for you”

“You what?!?”

Uraraka hummed as she sat down to start eating, saving it for herself that her own vote had gone to him as well.

“I don’t get it” Izuku sighed, picking at his rice. “Who else voted for me then? I voted for Tenya…”

Tenya choked on his stew, holding a napkin to his mouth as he banged on his chest.

“Aw, childhood friends having each other’s backs” Uraraka cooed, slamming her palm on Tenya's back to help him.

“I really don’t think I’d deserve that spot” Tenya explained once he got his breathing back to normal. “Not only do you have an advantage over all of use regarding everything related to the
school, you also have a good relationship with the teachers and a great determination to meet your goals” He picked at his food, not looking up even as his ears turned visibly red. That meant he couldn't see Izuku wrapping his arms around his head in embarrassment or Uraraka snickering at them. “Despite how much I would've liked to be class president, I think my humble decision was correct”

There was quiet for a second, then Uraraka spoke again. “Iida-kun, you sound like a rich kid”

Izuku snorted. “He is”

Tenya glared at him, balling up his napkin at throwing it at him. Izuku caught it and set it down on his own tray. It wouldn't do for Tenya to be littering. “It's not something I like to broadcast, but I come from a renowned hero family” He sighed, smiling. “The hero Ingenium is my older brother”

Uraraka gasped, slamming her hands on the table. She hurried to press her fingertips together and release her quirk once the table started floating. “Ingenium! I see him on the news all the time!”

“I've known him longer than I've known Tenya” Izuku said. “He's the one who introduced us when we were little, actually”

Uraraka wanted to ask more about it, but at that moment a loud noise rang through the building, making everyone jump to attention. It was like a siren breaching through the chatter of the busy room, a pre-recorded voice announcing a breach in security level-3, and ordered an immediate evacuation.

Izuku's chair screeched as he got up, eyes wide and filled with a kind of fright that sent the other two stumbling to their feet as well.

“How's going on?” Uraraka asked as the older students hurried towards the doors. “Deku-kun?”

Izuku couldn't speak, he was looking around frantically, seeing how the students completely forgot the meaning of order and scrambled for the doors, dragging everyone on their way with them. Someone walking behind him pushed him on their way out, and soon enough they had been swallowed by the crowd and separated by the other students.

He was paralyzed, pushed around by the people around him as the crowd got stuck in the hallway.
leading to the exit, the chaos keeping them from actually moving forward. Izuku felt like he'd forgotten how to breathe, vision turning hazy and cloudy as he felt the world spin in its axis under his feet. His heart was clenching painfully in his chest and a cold sweat covered his body and made him shiver uncontrollably as his head swam.

A level-3 security breach was something he'd only known theoretically when reading and re-reading UA's rule book through the years. It meant someone not authorized had made their way through the reinforced gates and all the way into campus to the front doors of the main building.

Izuku only had read about it, because it was virtually impossible to break into UA.

That's why he ha been brought here in the first place.

He jumped and screeched when a pair of hands landed on his shoulders, bringing him back to reality but doing nothing for the panic quickly making its way through his body and threatening to make him pass out.

“'Izuku, breathe” Shouta said, herding him away as best as he could with the crowd around them. “Come on, keep yourself grounded. I'm right here”

He could barely hear him through the static in his ears, but he was in enough control of his body to take the few steps needed towards the side of the hall where movement was less violent. He could barely see someone he'd later recognize as Tenya floating up over everyone and flying through the air only to slam on the wall, shouting something he could not process but that quickly made the crowd calm down around him.

When they reached the windows, Shouta made him face the garden, where he could see the reason of the alarm; the crowd of reporters from that morning had somehow made their way in and was currently being controlled by Hizashi and Kan. Izuku's eyes flitted over them, trying to find anyone who could pose a threat to him and his mother with their infiltration.

Wait.

“Mom?” He asked, unfocused eyes looking at Shouta in fear and worry. He couldn't stop shaking.

Shouta enveloped him in his arms in a calming hug as slowly as he could, petting his hair and
ignoring the curious stares of the students finally making an orderly line towards the exit while Tenya tried to make his way down. “Your dad is with her, she's fine” He assured him. “I came looking for you as soon as the alarm started. I got you”

Izuku took a shaky breath, turning around and hiding his face in Shouta's scarf, clutching at his clothes as his sobs wracked his body. He hadn't felt this distressed in years, so long ago that it was more of an unsure memory buried and covered with years of peace and happiness after his kidnapping. That whole part of his life captive in a cage was but a blurry set of random images in his mind, but the feeling of terror and hopelessness had been so vivid he could recall it just from the stress this event had triggered.

Shouta kept him in his hold, never wavering or letting go.

They didn't move even when the hallway was empty and the reporters had been long removed from the premises by the police. Shouta had nodded to Tenya and Uraraka to go ahead without them, and he just kept petting Izuku's hair while he gathered himself.

“Izuku!” Inko's voice rang through the silence and it finally made Izuku's head pop from his hiding place as he searched for her. She was running towards him, Toshinori hot on her heels.

Izuku tore himself from Shouta's arms and threw himself at his mother. He latched onto her as tight as he could, feeling himself want to cry once more but feeling completely dry. Toshinori carefully wrapped them both easily in his arms, sighing in relief at seeing his family together and unharmed.

Shouta gave them a moment before speaking, directing himself to Toshinori as he knew Inko and Izuku would be out of commission for a while. “This is unprecedented. Nezu will want a meeting as soon as possible”

Toshinori sighed, nodding in agreement. “I know. But for now we should try to stick to their normal schedule. We have to keep them as undisturbed as possible or it could set off something worse than a panic attack” He said, gesturing to his wife and son with a move of his head. They were so focused on each other they weren't really hearing the conversation. “I'll go with them. I'm sure Nezu will call us when he wants a meeting”

“Alright. I'll go back to my classroom then” Shouta said. “Do you want to take them both with you?”
Before Toshinori could answer, he felt Izuku move in his hold. He stepped back while still holding his little family within reach as Izuku looked around at them, eyes clearer and a bit calmer even with the fresh tear tracks running through his freckles.

“I'm fine” He muttered. “Gotta go to class”

Inko wiped the remaining tears off his cheeks. “Baby, it's fine if you want to rest for a minute” She said, still a bit shaken herself but not near as scared as Izuku had been through the whole ordeal. “You can come with me until your class has to come to my classroom”

Izuku shook his head, feeling tired but slowly regaining his senses. He never liked people treating him differently for his story, and especially now that he was finally experiencing something as normal as being in school. He didn't want this incident to taint his experiences, shaken as he was from it. “I'll go with Shouta, mom” He rubbed his eye, smiling tiredly. “There's something I need to do, anyway”

Shouta didn't expect that 'something' to be Izuku resigning from his position as class president, opting instead to offer the position to Tenya.

“I can't handle the pressure of leading a group of people, not right now at least” He explained. “And I don't remember everything that happened after the alarm, but I noticed Tenya managed to keep everyone calm somehow; that's what a good leader looks like, not someone who freezes at the first sign of danger”

Shouta sighed from inside his sleeping bag, watching how Tenya accepted the offer and swapped places with Izuku as his problem child took his spot back on his desk. He agreed with Izuku in that it might have been too much responsibility too soon for him, but he would've liked him to take that chance to develop himself in that area.

But also, he'd just gone through a tremendous scare with those damn reporters getting into the school. He didn't blame him for wanting to focus on himself for the time being.

He let Tenya and Yaoyorozu take over for the rest of the period, burrowing himself in his cocoon as he read the string of texts the other teachers where sending about the impending meeting Nezu had already scheduled for the end of the day. The news had, of course, reached the media with what little the reporters had gotten from them, and even Tensei was blowing up his phone with concerned messages. He'd calmed him down assuring him Izuku was alright, and distracted him with the news of Tenya's new presidency.
When the bell rang, Tenya and Uraraka quickly went for Izuku, flanking him as he stepped out of the room first. The rest of the class followed them since Izuku knew where the Home Econ classroom was.

“Are you alright, Deku-kun?” Uraraka asked him, frowning in concern. “You look really tired after that alarm during lunch”

Izuku nodded, trying to smile but lacking the energy to do so in the reassuring way he wanted. “I'm fine. Just took me by surprise”

“I was wondering where you were when everyone went crazy!” Kaminari jumped in, marching next to them. Tsuyu and Kirishima joined them with the rest of the class close by behind them. “That was really scary, I can't imagine how you must've felt”

“Are you sure you don't need to visit the infirmary, kero?”

Izuku waved them off. “We only have this class left. After that I'll go home and sleep”

When they reached the classroom, they came across class 1-B walking in as well from the other side of the hallway. The two in front of the group, a redheaded girl with a side ponytail and a grey haired boy with the most impressive eyelashes they'd ever seen, waved at them cheerily as they closed in. Izuku smiled and waved back before moving to pull the door open only to stop with his hand on the handle, waiting a moment before turning towards everyone, bringing a finger to his lips to keep them quiet. They looked at him curiously but obeyed nonetheless, even Bakugou grumbling but remaining silent as Izuku pulled the door open carefully, peering inside.

The others piled up around him, trying to see what he was looking at.

Inside the room and by the window, a woman that looked like the striking copy of Izuku and the man who a few of them had identified as his father were standing by, talking softly about something none of them could hear. Her hand was resting on the sill and he had his own on top, rubbing his thumb on her wrist with such tenderness Kirishima couldn't help letting out a noise, effectively alerting them of the twenty one kids waiting by the door.

Izuku finished sliding the door open, walking in like nothing had happened with the rest following in behind him, some smiling sheepishly at Inko while some avoided her eyes.
She quickly made her way towards the front, flustered as she cleared her throat and waited until everyone had found a spot.

The classroom was bigger than they expected, divided in various areas all throughout with the kitchen being the one closest to the door. On the far side by the windows was what looked like a workshop, and on the other extreme sat a bulk of equipment that kept interchanging electric charges with Kaminari until Inko told him to swap places with Kirishima.

Izuku had taken the spot closest to her desk, already decked in a white apron with a bandana keeping his mop of hair down and controlled.

“Alright then, guess we could start now” Inko started, clapping her hands. “I’m Midoriya Inko and I'll be your Home Economics teacher” She said. “Now, I know this class will be a little unusual for all of you since it's the only class that has both hero courses together, but that's how it's been since it was added to the curriculum. So I hope all of you get along!” She made a shooing motion with her hand, hurrying them to go get their supplies. "You can find all you'll need for this class in the cupboard by the back, so go ahead and then we'll start”

As they moved to get their own aprons and bandanas—Ashido, Aoyama and Hagakure lamenting they were all plain white and simple—Toshinori took this as his time to leave and wait in standby for them to be done. It was after he'd kissed Inko's cheek as goodbye than he felt something pulling at his sleeve. He turned around to find Izuku holding onto his shirt.

“Where are you going?”

Toshinori tilted his head. “To the teacher's lounge? Class has already started, hasn't it?”

“Can't you stay?” Izuku asked, letting go of his sleeve but staying close. “I can't be mom's assistant anymore; I'm a student now. She's gonna need someone to help her”

Inko hummed, tapping her chin in thought. “He's right, you know. I'm short an assistant starting this year”

The ones who were ready and waiting by their stations witnessed the conversation taking place, Ashido and Tsunotori busy cutting holes in their bandanas for their horns.
“B-But I'm not a teacher, you know how terrible I am at it” Toshinori tried to argue, as if at least three people in the room didn't know he'd been giving classes to these exact same group the day before.

Whether he did well or not, that was another matter altogether. Just because he'd offered his help when he was just starting to court Inko didn't mean he had any actual skill in what she'd taught back then.

“You don't need to teach, just help me when I need you to!” Inko insisted as well, taking his hand in hers and pulling him back deeper into the room and away from the door. It reminded him of the first time he tried to get back to hero work after his last fight with All for One, when Inko and Izuku had clung to him and pulled him back inside so he could get some more rest.

Before he could give another retort, Toshinori noticed something.

Inko's hand was trembling.

He looked at it with a new focus, following the line of her arm all the way to her face and then to Izuku's right next to hers. They were looking at him, asking him to stay, pleading with the subtlest frown on their faces and expectation in those big green eyes that had always been one of his biggest weaknesses.

Don't leave us alone.

He sighed, grasping his wife's hand with both of his and kissing it quickly before going to find an apron long enough to fit him. Inko and Izuku sighed relieved.

Inko faced the class, doing a quick once-over to make sure they were all properly geared up and each had a station. It was one of the things she loved most about her work; all these kids who came here to become heroes and train their amazing powers, standing there in front of her decked in the most domestic of attires. All of them looked ready and at attention, eager to learn and not the least bit down over having to perform tasks so unrelated to hero business.

Even that Bakugou boy on the other side of the room looked surprisingly comfortable in the getup, despite what he'd heard about his temper from the other teachers.
“Since it's our first class I wanted to start with something that will make you want to come back. It's worked every year so far, so I guess I'm onto something!” She laughed, getting some grins from the most friendly-looking students in return. The quieter ones huffed in amusement instead.

They all, however, gasped and dodged when she waved her hand and the doors of the industry-sized fridge on the edge of the kitchen section flew open and a number of ingredients came floating out, making their way leisurely towards her to be set down carefully on each station as they went across the room. Soon enough multiple identical sets of items were in front of each of them, and to whoever knew something about cooking it was clear they were meant for--

“Cake?” Satou perked up, looking hopefully at her. Izuku sent him a covert double thumbs-up before Inko could see him.

Inko nodded. “That's right! It's a simple enough recipe that will be it's own reward once it's done” She moved to the whiteboard where Toshinori had already written down some rules he knew by heart at this point. “So, first rule is no quirks! This class is meant to teach you about the most simple aspects of life, not just hero life” She huffed. “I remember my first class a student forgot that rule and accidentally sent an entire egg flying into someone's face when he activated his quirk when it got stuck on him”

Tenya cleared his throat, fighting back the grin threatening to split his focused facade; he remembered the day Tensei came home absolutely heartbroken at having started his second food fight of the year. Nemuri certainly hadn't appreciated the egg face mask.

“Second rule, no asking Izuku for help” She held her hands up when a few of them tried to complain. “Izuku is a student now, he has to work just like the rest for his grade here. Any question you might have or if you need help, me or my husband are available whenever”

Toshinori waved, feeling a drop of sweat slide down the back of his neck at the focused staring from the kids. It was clear they had their doubts about how much help he could actually be.

“Third rule is: Have fun! It's the most relaxed class in the curriculum, so don't stress over things not going your way!” She clapped her hands once more. “Alright then, let's get started! Each of you has a copy of the instructions, so chop chop, get to it!”

The class evolved into a chaos of muttering and clangs of bowls and tins as most read the recipe aloud, while others more experienced like Izuku, Satou and Bakugou started immediately. Uraraka
tried to subtly peer at what Izuku was doing next to her, but he was going so fast she couldn't follow or know what step he was on. Inko walked around the room, nodding to herself as she saw their progress, giving advice here or there—mostly for Aoyama to stop trying to add edible glitter into the mix—with Toshinori following behind her like a lost puppy afraid of the world around him.

She would also try to mix up the students of both classes to make it a bit more entertaining and get them to know each other better. Inko liked to think she was quite good at picking up people's personalities at a glance so she encouraged them to mingle, pushing and dragging them this way and that until you couldn't tell where 1-A started and 1-B ended. Yaoyorozu and Kendou quickly falling into casual conversation as they worked, while Tetsutetsu and Kirishima seemed to form a neverending synergic loop of compliments and encouragement that bled out towards the classmates around them and only had everyone more hyped up than they would normally be in this situation.

She had her doubts with her decision to put Monoma and Shinsou together since it seemed Monoma was mostly talking Shinsou's ear off about anything and everything, from class 1-B's clear superiority to the various techniques he knew to whisk an egg. Shinsou looked a bit constipated but he was taking it like a champ. Inko let them be, thinking it would do him some good to interact with someone so different to himself.

Soon enough most ovens were in use, and the ones with nothing left to do meanwhile started chatting with Inko, absolutely entranced by this sweet little woman who had a peculiar aura around her that both drew them in and kept them in line.

“Oh, the first time Izuku helped me in class he dropped an entire bowl of batter on himself!” She laughed as she told the tale to Kirishima and Sero, with Kaminari and Jirou leaning in while whisking their bowls. “He got some into his eyes and ran straight into the wall! Some say you can still see the outline he left there”

Izuku, who could hear her perfectly fine in the small room, was dragging his bandana all the way down to cover his face in embarrassment.

For being such a volatile class, in Shouta's own words, the hour went by without major incidents; if only a few burnt cakes and the mess that erupted when everyone tried to clean up at the same time. Everyone finally filed out dirty, tired and very content with the full stomachs they departed with. Satou, who somehow had managed to bake three cakes in the limited time they had, had shared his own with the ones who'd ended up with little less than a lump of coal.

“I like dark things” Said Tokoyami as he accepted the perfect and fluffy slice from his classmate. “But some things are not meant to meet the shadows”
“Your cake burnt down, huh” Jirou said. Tokoyami just hung his head as response.

Izuku made sure to drop by Tenya and hand him the little one he'd baked, as he'd promised himself he'd do as his way to apologize for his tricky victory in the battle training exercise.

He watched everyone go, smiling at the sight he'd gotten so used to for the past years every time this happened; both classes of the hero course, who would mostly butt heads in every encounter, walking side by side and laughing and exchanging numbers as they let the short hours they spend together form brand new bonds between them. It was always lovely to see, and even more as he knew that, as time passed, those new friendships would strengthen and last for years yet to come.

He didn't leave with the rest, however. He stared at the quiet emptiness of the corridors as the school day came to an end, the silence enveloping the halls and setting the scene for the next stage of their day.

Toshinori wrapped an arm around his shoulders, his other hand holding Inko as he pushed Izuku forward and out as well. “Let's go” He said. “Nezu wants to talk about what happened this morning”

Izuku gulped, remembering the way his head swam and heart clenched the second he heard that alarm like a siren of doom upon the peace he had in his life. He felt conflicted; on one hand he didn't want to be present in that meeting, didn't want to know what happened or what would happen based on it.

On the other hand, both his parents being in the meeting meant he'd be home alone.

“Okay” He said, stepping out first and feeling his legs as wobbly as the day he took his first steps, back on that unforgettable Christmas night.

“You have to be out of your mind!”
Nezu's words were usually met with some level of antagonism from one or two parties in each meeting, but this had to be the first time he was contradicted so vocally by almost every single member of the staff.

“I said what I said” He reiterated. “We don't know who or what caused the break in, but we know it was powerful enough that it turned three layers of reinforced quirk-resistant alloy into dust”

“So maybe someone out there has a quirk the security system didn't account for!” Hizashi cried out. “We fix them! We go on as we have! Who knows, maybe one of the reporters has a metal-eating quirk--”

“They'd been there for a long time before the gate was broken down” Power Loader interrupted. “If it had been one of them then why wait so long to act? That gate was tested against a myriad of quirks before being approved for use; whatever caused that was something we've never seen before”

“But can be sure it was a villain?” Nemuri spoke. “There was no other incident apart from the media rushing in, no attacks or attempts at anything”

Nezu shook his head. “I'm not taking any chances. Villain, prank, mistake; my decision is final”

“So your choice to protect the Midoriyas from whoever made their way into UA is to get them out of it?” Shouta asked, voice calm and underlying with a deep fury his expression didn't betray.

Izu sat by the end of the table, lodged securely between his parents and looking down at his lap as the words flew this way and that. His mother's hand was trembling as she held his, and his father's grip on his own chair was so hard he'd already ripped out both of its arms, the pieces of wood laying uselessly on the floor.

“Clearly UA is no longer as impenetrable as we thought it was” Nezu continued. “If someone can make their way in so easily right under our noses, there's no telling how safe they are. Izuku especially is my main concern; we know All for One could just as well go for Inko as an indirect way to get to him, but he is still his main goal”

Aizawa stood up. “That still doesn't explain why you want me to take him to the field trip” He said. “The moment he's out of these walls he becomes fair game. Did you forget the number of
followers that man has out there? How one of them tried to attack them the very same night they were sent home?” He slammed his hands down on the table, making everyone jump. “Are you trying to tell us all these years of isolation from the world were for nothing?”

“Eraserhead, you are one of my most esteemed teachers” Nezu said in lieu of an answer. “Your teaching methods are questionable, but they have proved to work exceptionally well. You are, as we are all aware, Izuku's favorite teacher and the main reason he was sent to class 1-A”

Aizawa huffed. “Are you trying to get somewhere with all this babble?”

Nezu hummed. “I'm trying to say I could trust no one else to keep Izuku safe in absolutely any situation”

Toshinori coughed, a bit of blood seeping down his chin.

“Starting from this moment, the Midoriyas will have protection all hours of the day, every day of the week. All Might” He addressed the hero. “You'll be in charge of them when at home, since we know you still have enough strength to ward off mostly anything that comes your way. Shouta will escort Izuku from home to the classroom, and every teacher who has his class before a change of rooms must go with him. Be it the Home Econ room, the training fields, the cafeteria; he doesn't go anywhere without a pro hero by his side”

Shouta brought a hand to his face, rubbing at the impending headache building up behind his already tired eyes. “And I suppose this is why you want him to come to the USJ with me? So I can keep an eye on him?”

“Your quirk is the best suited for defense. You can incapacitate multiple enemies at once and disable any threat coming your way” Nezu explained. “Leaving Izuku here in UA while you are away would be considerably more dangerous”

Toshinori accepted the handkerchief Inko handed him to wipe the blood off. “Nezu, you can't expect me to just sit back and agree with this. I understand your concerns more than anyone, but to just send Izuku out there not even twenty-four hours after a break in like this...” He shook his head. “I think we should wait a bit longer, investigate the origin of this down to the root”

“We're already running all the tests available” The voice of Naomasa piped in. He'd been brought in along with the police squad sent to respond to Nezu's call to remove the media from the campus
and had stayed all day brainstorming with the principal. “But even those results could take days, or even weeks. I'm afraid to say I agree with Nezu on this”

Izuku looked at him, a hint of betrayal in his eyes. “Tsuchi...”

Naomasa shook his head. “I'm sorry, Zuku, but it's true” He said. “If we wait until the results are back and it turns out this was the work of a villain looking for you, then it's a risk too high to leave you here while Eraserhead is away. Nezu is right; he's the biggest line of defense we have when it comes to your protection”

“So you just expect me to come up with a contingency plan to keep Izuku safe on my own during the field trip?” Shouta asked, still fuming. “I won't meet with Thirteen until we arrive there, and a moving bus full of untrained high schoolers isn't exactly prepared to fight back against a horde of villains, if the situation were to escalate”

“All Might will go as well” Nezu explained as if that solved everything. “He has been scheduled to go along since the beginning. I'd say his addition is protection enough”

“If you think this is some sort of game--”

“I don't appreciate you suggesting I don't take Izuku's safety seriously, Eraserhead”

The room went completely quiet, a freezing chill going up everyone's spines at the cold way Nezu entoned each word. Gone was his smile and friendly demeanor. All that was left was a piercing glare and the downward curve of his mouth as he stared at the hero.

He spoke up once more. “Never in my life have I worried over a human the way I do over him. Never before had I met someone who I could actually feel connected to in the way I do with him. We're more similar than any of you could ever imagine, and I will wear myself to the bone if it means no harm falls on a single hair of his head” He declared, eyes sweeping over everyone in the room and stopping on Izuku's shocked face. “That is a promise, and I want you to realize to which lengths I'll go to achieve it”

Shouta could not utter any more words, simply hiding his face in his scarf and nodding as he sat back down. Hizashi reached for his hand under the table, and let Shouta crush it in his hold to vent out his frustration.
Nezu did a quick once-over of the room, nodding to himself. “That's all we can come up with for now with the information we have. All Might” He directed his words at the hero, startling him at the sudden call. Toshinori looked genuinely scared of what the principal would say to him after his last outburst. “I know you have your hero duties in the morning, so I'll assign Midnight to take Inko into the main building from your house. But I still want you to be here on time when the bus leaves, so don't overdo it. I trust Eraserhead to keep things under control, but your help is always a plus”

Nemuri crossed her arms. “You're talking as if all of us were useless compared to Shouta”

Nezu smiled, his little eyes far away in thought. “It's a simple balance of skills. A dozen heroes defending doesn't guarantee just one of the enemy's attacks won't hit its target. A single hero attacking a powerless opponent has a much higher rate of success”

Finally, after what felt like hours of the adults talking, Izuku looked up. “And what if it's not just one?” He said, his voice thin and frail, like a thread stretched tight and ready to snap. “What if there's more than one person out there responsible for this?”

Nezu sighed, jumping down from his chair and pattering over to him. He gently laid his paw on Izuku's arm, his eternally frozen smile gaining that concerned edge he only got around his favorite kid, “Then, my boy, we might be confronting something even worse than All for One”

The meeting was considered finished, and it was clear the orders had been abided immediately seeing how Shouta was walking right next to them the second they left the room. It was a short walk all the way to their little house, but the silence was heavy enough to make every step feel like there was a never-ending leak of lead in their shoes.

When they finally got there, Toshinori went in first to make a sweep of the inside before letting them in, Inko remaining by the door when Shouta held Izuku back for a moment.

Shouta looked down at him, at this kid who he'd spent practically half of his life looking over, the one variable he never expected to crash into the logical equation that was his life.

He went down on a low crouch, staying eye level with his problem child, and spoke slow and clear. “Izuku, regardless of what Nezu says, you know he won't force you to do something you don't want if it's of this magnitude” He said. “I'm sure there are other options, maybe he's wrong and I'm not the safest bet regarding your security; much less outside of UA”
Izuku shook his head. “Don't say that...”

“I have to say it, because it's true” Shouta insisted. “I can't begin to think how scary this must be for you, and it's moving way too fast and maybe the solutions we're coming up with are too rushed to be foolproof. You have the right to have a say in this, in your own life” He reached forward and held Izuku's hands. “If you don't want to come with me, if you don't want to leave UA, you have to tell us”

Izuku bit his lip, feeling frustrated tears gathering on the corners of his eyes. He could feel his mother's presence behind him, waiting for him in an instinctual need to have him on sight and within reach every time danger was near, the same way she'd done all his life to keep him out of harm's way. And it was exactly this that was making this choice particularly hard.

All his life, his mother had been drastically altering her own life just to adjust to his own. From the moment his existence was made known she had done no less than terminate a long standing relationship, miss any chance at a normal social life to raise him properly, endured extreme psychological and physical distress during his kidnapping, and last and most important of all was giving up her freedom for his sake, where anyone else would have been justified to not want to deal with the pressure. She'd given up so many years of her life for him, and he could feel the sharp claws of guilt tearing up his insides as he couldn't help but feel, want the need to grab this first chance and make his way to the outside world, terrified as he was of what he might encounter out there.

He was so confused.

“Honey, it's okay” Her voice broke through his thoughts, making him notice for the first time the hot tears flowing down his cheeks and the shaky sob tearing through his throat. “It's what Shouta said; you can choose. No one is going to force you to leave or stay if you don't want to”

God, sometimes Izuku wished people were less considerate of his feelings. “I-I don't k-know” He stuttered, wiping at his eyes and runny nose with the sleeve of his jacket. “I don't wanna”

“What don't you want?” Shouta asked. Toshinori had appeared at the door once more and was looking at the scene with heartbreak written all over his face from the way his son was so clearly split right down the middle in what might be the most important decision he's ever had to take in his life. “Izuku, I need to know”

Izuku cried harder, vision completely blurry and ears ringing from the blood rushing to his head. “I don't know!” He shouted. “I want to go! I don't want to! I'm scared!”
Shouta sighed, standing up and carefully guiding him and Inko inside. “Come one, this is no place to discuss this. It seems we might need to talk about it a bit longer”

He bypassed the living room and directed Izuku straight to his room, maneuvering him down to sit on his bed as Izuku immediately reached over for his pillow, the bunny shaped one Toshinori had gotten him for Christmas so many years ago and that had turned into a comfort item, cuddled and hugged so much it was misshapen and worn down in some places, torn and sewn back in others.

Shouta let Inko and Toshinori sit down on the bed flanking their son, while he himself dropped down to sit cross-legged on the floor. “Alright, talk to me” He said to Izuku. “What are you afraid of?”

Izuku shook his head, burying his face in the pillow and mumbling something that got drowned in the fluff. No one spoke, no one hurried him to repeat what he'd just said. It took him a few moments to gather his bearings to uncover his mouth once more, stray sobs rising occasionally intertwined with hiccups. “Outside”

“Are you scared of going outside, baby?” Inko wanted to confirm. “Do you want to stay here tomorrow?”

Izuku's face twisted. “I don't know” He said. “I'm...I'm scared of going out there...but...” He looked down at his feet, his toes clenching and unclenching inside his slippers. “...but I wanna see”

“My boy, it's alright to feel confused in your situation” Toshinori said. “You've been hidden from the outside world for so long, it's only natural to want to see it once more. But you also have the right to be wary of it at the same time”

“That's just how emotions are, honey” Inko added. “You don't have to feel one thing at a time; sometimes all your feelings crash into a big mess that you just can't sort out, and it's alright to feel lost”

Shouta patted Izuku's hand. “How about you sleep on it? Maybe some peace and quiet would help you put your thoughts in order”

Izuku looked conflicted, but hesitantly nodded. “Alright...”
Shouta stood up, stretching and making his back pop in a few places. Today had been an extremely long day. “I'll give you tomorrow morning off to rest. You already know the effect a panic attack has on the body; if you come in tomorrow you're just gonna fall asleep in class anyway” He said. “The bus will be leaving a bit after noon, so whatever you decide, you know where I'll be”

Izuku nodded once more, standing up and going to hug Shouta goodbye when the hero opened his arms in invitation. He made sure to squeeze back extra tight to let go of some of the tension accumulated in his body, and when he let go Shouta ruffled his hair before making his way out with Inko and Toshinori following after him to give Izuku some space.

He went around his room doing his usual nightly routine almost in daze, putting on his nightwear and slipping into bed with his bunny pillow held tight in his arms. Thoughts rushed through his head at a speed he couldn't quite control, and in the end it turned so exhausting Izuku didn't realize his eyes were falling closed or the moment he fell asleep.

“Please enter the bus in order!” Tenya shouted as he made the class form in line outside the vehicle. His arms seemed to be working overtime with how many times he chopped the air per second, and it seemed it'd only been getting worse since Shouta gave them the news that morning that Izuku would be skipping class that day to recover from the emotional distress from yesterday.

Tenya had actually broken any kind of protocol he had tasked himself to follow in school, and had spent the better part of the morning with his phone pulled out under his desk, texting Izuku and making sure he was okay while Shouta and the other teachers pretended they didn't notice. He'd wanted to go visit him but Izuku insisted that it wasn't necessary and that he shouldn't risk missing class for him. Izuku had confided in him about the meeting they'd had the day before, and the talk with Shouta and his parents, and he was quite concerned with what Nezu was planning as well. Not to mention the possibility of Izuku actually going outside with so many risks involved.

He wasn't the only worried one either. Uraraka kept glancing at his empty desk and Yaoyorozu seemed particularly conscious of the empty spot beside her. Shouta and Hizashi would unconsciously start calling on him to answer questions only to stop after barely getting the first letter of his name out.

“Hey Iida! This bus is open seated!” Sero pointed out once he'd climbed on, leaning out the door to
tell him.

Tenya hung his head in defeat. “Just get on in order, please”

Everyone made their way in leisurely, chatting as they waited for the ones ahead to find a spot they liked. Tenya stayed down until the last one, and was about to get in as well when he noticed Shouta looking out into the trees.

In the direction of Izuku's house.

“Everything alright?” He asked quietly, approaching the man that was more family than teacher at this point.

Shouta stared ahead a second longer before sighing. He shook his head. “It's fine. I was just wondering...”

“If Izuku would come?”

Shouta snorted. “Why am I not surprised he told you? It's a good thing those phones you have can't be hacked”

“They're more like close range radios than phones” Tenya breathed out a laugh. When Izuku had first asked for a phone everyone had wanted him to forget about the idea; it would do him no good to have a device that could be hacked, tracked and possibly controlled from a distance. Power Loader had stepped up and created a few that could only work within a limited range from each other and using a new form of wireless communication he was still testing, but that had never left the school's walls. Even Tenya's phone was left securely stored away in UA when he wasn't in.

“It's getting late” He pulled out his own phone to check the time. “And that guy still hasn't shown up--”

“Wait!” A deep voice called out, and a second later All Might was sliding in front of them, dust rising from how fast he'd run there. His civilian clothes did nothing to conceal his heroic aura. “I'm here!”
“Late is what you are” Shouta deadpanned, pushing him to hurry up and get into the bus. The kids were squishing their faces against the windows to see him, and started calling out for him to sit with them.

He laughed heartily, opting to sit in the middle of the very last row, to the discomfort of the more reserved students that had found peace back there.

Tenya spared one last glance at Shouta before finally going to find his own spot. Shouta gave himself a few more seconds to watch the trees covering the invisible path that lead directly to the little house hidden within before deciding it was time to go.

As soon as he set a foot on the steps, a rustle of leaves caught his attention.

“Wait!” Izuku called out, an ironic copy of his father's shout just a minute ago. “Shouta!”

Shouta couldn't help the small smile pulling at his lips as he saw him come bursting out of the forest, decked in his hero costume with the hood pulled down and completely covering his face with the mak hanging down by his neck to leave his mouth exposed, those ridiculous bunny ears of his flapping in the wind as he ran.

The bus shook in place as the horde of kids Tenya had so lovingly ordered inside came rushing out, All Might close on their heels as they hollered and screamed when he approached.

Izuku came to a stop in front of the teacher, looking up at him with that mix of fear and determination that Shouta hadn't seen in his eyes since the first time he'd started training him. “I'm not late, am I?”

“It was a close call” Shouta shrugged. His smile didn't match the emotionless tone to his words. True, he had his doubts about taking Izuku out of these walls, but it filled him to the brim with affection to know he trusted him enough to want to go with him on what would be his first time outside in over a decade. “So you'll join us then?”

Izuku looked at his classmates, their overjoyed faces staring at him expectantly. He gulped and nodded slowly, earning even more screaming as they all went back inside in a hurry to try and sit down somewhere he could join them, which started quite a few wars for poor Tenya to separate.
Toshinori joined Shouta in front of Izuku, back to the bus so the kids couldn't see the very personal worry that filled his face. “How are you feeling, son?”

“Nervous” Izuku said. “Scared. Excited. Bit nauseous”

“I brought bags for that last one” Shouta said. “Been in enough bus trips with enough kids to know better”

Toshinori sighed, knowing even if he wanted to have a last go at trying to convince Izuku he was as stubborn as Inko with the things they loved; Inko with Izuku, Izuku with being a hero. “I'll be right there with you the entire time, if it makes you feel better”

Izuku smiled. “It does. Thanks, dad”

“Hey!” Ashido shouted from an open window, making the three outside startle. “Hurry up and get in already, we want to learn and all that!”

“I can't believe I'm saying this but Ashido is right” Shouta said. “Hurry in now. All Might, go back to where you were seating. I'll stay by the front to cover the other half of the bus”

When Izuku made his way up there was a round of enthusiastic clapping welcoming him. He stood there rubbing the back of his neck, thanking his mask for covering his surely reddening face at the attention and support from everyone. Shouta pulled him down to sit by the front where he'd be staying himself before doing a last lap up and down the aisle to make sure everything was alright before departing. He was met with booing and whining from the ones who wanted Izuku to sit with them.

“Why is it so dark in here?” Izuku asked him once he finally decided they were all set to leave and plopped down on his seat.

“Polarized windows” Shouta explained, giving the bus driver a thumbs up to get going. “Just in case”

He would never get used to one of Power Loader's little robots driving them everywhere.
As soon as the vehicle got in motion, Izuku felt his breathing pick up and heart rate rise. The trees turned into a green blur outside the windows as they went by, and soon enough there was the gate, slowly opening in preparation of them going through.

He didn't notice how the bus had gone completely quiet, everyone focused on him, gauging his reactions and ready to jump in would he need help at some point.

Toshinori in particular had tensed every muscle in his body, ready to get into action in a moment's notice.

The gate had finished opening and the bus was steadily approaching it as Izuku's gaze focused on the buildings he could see surrounding UA through the gap in the wall. His chest rose and fell faster and faster by the second.

Shouta searched for his hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze.

And here it came, closer, closer, closer.

And they were out. Simple as that.

Izuku's breath had caught in his throat, eyes wide and frozen in a single spot far into the distance.

The world opened up around them, buildings and houses and stores he'd only seen from the highest points of UA now rushing close by past him, people leisurely walking down the sidewalk, families and kids and animals in every corner. A loud group of girls laughing by a café, a salaryman talking on the phone, a hero patrolling the area with his sidekick.

Izuku looked around slowly, taking everything in as he felt his brain start working again. A deep and long sigh left his mouth, then another and another until they'd turned into a laugh so unbelieving it'd sent the rest of his classmates cheering in response.

At least until he choked and retched, covering his mouth and holding his throat quickly.

Shouta wordlessly handed him a bag, and rubbed his back as Izuku let all his excitement get out of
his body.

Soon enough the air had calmed down enough he was just laying limp on his seat, eyes glued to the window as he drank all the sights he had been deprived of for so long. Shouta had wrapped an arm around him and let him rest his head on his shoulder as he quietly pointed out buildings and public areas and named everything for him to keep to memory.

When they'd left the city and started the road through a more forested area, Izuku turned around to look at the others. It seemed Bakugou was in a heated one-sided discussion with Kaminari while Kirishima tried to calm him down, Tsuyu’s brutally sincere comments doing nothing to help the situation. Uraraka was laughing loudly at the show next to a disturbed Yaoyorozu, and Tenya was trying with all his might to get Bakugou back down on his seat to follow proper security measures.

Izuku let his eyes roam over the back of the bus where the quieter ones were mostly reading or listening to music, his dad looking set in stone with his impressive muscle form seating stock still and taking his protection role as seriously as possible. Shinsou was turned around talking to Sero in the seat behind him. Everyone else was asleep.

He moved a few rows ahead, and he noticed something. Todoroki was looking out the window, an empty spot next to him.

“Shouta?” He asked. He got a hum as answer. “I'm moving to the back”

“What?” Shouta actually answered this time. “Why?”

Izuku pursed his lips. “I want to talk to someone”

“Oh, I'm not good enough for you anymore?” Shouta said, sounding angry for a second, only to snicker at the way Izuku whipped his head to face him, excuses and apologies on the tip of his tongue at the suggestion. “I'm playing with you, kiddo. It's fine, with that big brute back there. Just be careful not to trip on the way down; you seem to get carsick easily”

He nodded. Slowly unbluckling his seatbelt and shakily making his way down the aisle, balancing himself on every pole and handle he could reach. Curious eyes followed him as he went, idle chatter and heated discussions simmering to silence as he walked past. Bakugou even fell back on his seat, surprise clear on his face.
Soon enough, in what felt to him life a lifetime, he'd reached Todoroki's seat. He'd only noticed Izuku approaching when the fight in front of him had silenced out of nowhere, and was now looking at him expectantly, a single red eyebrow raised in place.

“Um” Izuku started, wobbling in place as the bus took a turn. “C-Can I sit here?”

Todoroki stared at him a second longer before nodding. “Sure” He said, watching curiously as Izuku sighed in relief and flopped down next to him. “Are you feeling alright?”

“Huh?” Izuku blinked at him. “Yes? Do I...not look alright?” He asked, patting his face through his mask. Then he realized how weird that question was; he couldn't even see his face like this. “I mean--”

“You look fine” Todoroki assured him, “Just wondering why you'd come all the way here. Thought maybe you wanted to move around to loosen up a bit”

Izuku tapped his fingers together. “Well, not quite” He scratched at his cheek. “I just wanted to come say hi? We haven't really talked since that one time last year...”

“Ah” Todoroki nodded. “I remember”

There was silence after that, and Izuku couldn't help feeling uncomfortable. He'd come all the way here, now what? If he didn't think of something soon the trip would be over and he'd have lost his chance. But what could he talk about? Making friends through casual conversation wasn't his forte.

“Why did you walk out so suddenly after class the other day?” He blurted out, immediately mentally facepalming. Why did he ask that?! He clearly looked mad that day! Why would he tell him?

Todoroki pursed his lips, looking out the window. “Nothing you'd care about”

“Sorry” He hurried to apologize. “I shouldn't have asked that”

Todoroki didn't say anything, but sighed after a moment. “It's fine. I shouldn't be rude about it. You
Izuku muttered quietly, earning a snort from Todoroki but still somehow getting Shouta to hear him.

“Attention” Shouta called from the front. “We're approaching the simulation joint. Get your stuff ready and only bring down what you'll need. I won't be responsible for your clutter, I'm not your mom”
“Izuku I will put you on house arrest, don't test me”

The jest was clear enough for Izuku, who burst out laughing to the confusion of everyone else sans Tenya, who was hiding his own chortle behind his hand. It was typical of Shouta to threaten him with joke punishments that involved staying put, a tradition he'd started years ago as a way to make it easier on him to get used to the idea of being stuck behind walls.

The bus slowly came to a stop in front of a massive dome-shaped building, excited chatter and words of awe all around while Izuku on his part was much more focused on the sight of all that open area surrounding them.

Shouta stood on one side of him, All Might on the other while taking advantage of his size to also cover his back as they made their way into the building. Once inside, they couldn't stop him as he ran towards the hero waiting for them, Thirteen opening their arms wide to catch the little ball of energy that was Izuku.

“Look at you! Outside and I'm the first one you visit! I'm honored” Thirteen greeted him, pinching his cheeks.

“Thirteen, you haven't visited me in forever!” Izuku huffed, rubbing at his cheek after it was pulled.

Uraraka slowly approached, standing behind Izuku as she looked in awe at the hero. “I-It really is Thirteen, the Space Hero...” She looked ready to keel over from joy, stars in her eyes as said hero gave her a peace sign in response.

Everyone stood around as Thirteen went off in a little introductory speech about their powers, how they had the capacity to harm or even kill and how they'd constructed this joint with the sole purpose of teaching the prospective heroes to control themselves and cause as little collateral damage as possible while maximizing their rescuing potential. Uraraka nodded enthusiastically at every word they said while Izuku wrote everything down dutifully on one of his notebooks.

He'd been there when Thirteen had started planning this building with the help of Nezu and Cementoss as well as a few other teachers, and he'd always thought he'd never actually get to see the real thing in his life, but here he was! And he was ready to do his best to improve his skills as best as possible.
Shouta kept watch over the kids from afar, leaning against a railing overlooking the establishment. Once Thirteen was done and bowing at the round of applause their speech earned them, Shouta stood up. “Alright, let's start with--”

Movement from the corner of his eye caught his attention and he turned around in time to catch a black spot appear by the fountain in the center of the building, watching it get bigger by the second until he could clearly see something appear through it.

He jumped into position, mind immediately screaming at him to run back for Izuku and get him out of there, but knowing if he took his eyes out of what he could now recognize as a massive black hole spitting people into the small square down below, he could be attacked from behind. He trusted Toshinori and Thirteen with the safety of the students, and knew Toshinori would rather die than let anything happen to his son. “Stay back! Don't move!”

Oh how did he hate it when Nezu was right.

Only then did the rest realize something was wrong and Thirteen hurried to stand in front of the kids with their hands splayed out ready to attack, All Might staying by the back of the group to protect their weaker spots.

“What's that?” Kirishima asked, taking a step forward to get a better look. “Is this part of the exercise?”

“This was not planned” Shouta growled. More and more people with monstrous looking quirks and shrill cackles filing in “Those...those are villains”

Izuku felt his blood turn to ice.

“Fuck” Shouta cursed. “Why today, why now!”

They couldn't even see how many they were from the distance, they just kept coming and coming and standing around in wait of something. Shouta was quickly formulating a plan to take out as many as possible to give the others enough time to run away.
“Doesn't this place have sensors for situations like this?” Yaoyorozu asked, looking around frantically at the group of villains down below.

Thirteen shook their head. “We do! But…”

“They must be interfering them” Todoroki finished the thought. “Must be one of their quirks”

“Kaminari” Shouta snapped. “Try to find the source of the interference with your quirk” He ordered. “I'm going in”

“Shouta, wait!” Izuku called out. “You can't fight them on your own, they're too many!”

Shouta spared him a minute glance. “You know damn well I keep more than one trick up my sleeve, Izuku” He said, pulling up his goggles and activating his capture scarf before jumping into the fray, immediately taking out an entire group of them in one go.

“We have to get out of here” Tenya reminded them. “Let's go!”

But before they could reach the doors, the same black mass from before reappeared in front of them, spreading wide and blocking the exit. A shining pair of yellow eyes appeared from the darkness, and it stared at them with its piercing gaze.

“Greetings” A definitely masculine voice said from withing the darkness. “We are the League of Villains, here to end the life of the so called Symbol of Peace” He said, now decidedly looking at All Might in front of him, standing in position in front of the kids. “Glad to see everything's going according to schedule. Pleasure to meet you, All Might”

“Can't say the same” Toshinori said before leaping forward, snarling as he threw punches in his direction, never hitting but with enough force to send gusts of wind towards the misty man.

“I see you've already noticed you shouldn't touch me. As expected of the number one hero” The villain chuckled. “Pity it won't do you any good”

The black mist expanded, surrounding the group. Bakugou and Kirishima jumped out of the way.
and towards the villain, trying to attack while it was busy with All Might, but they were easily thrown aside and swallowed by the mist, leaving an empty spot where they'd been. Panic descended on the others, instinctively huddling up tighter while purposefully putting Izuku in the center of the group, surrounded by everyone else. But to no avail, as the mist slithered easily around each of them to swallow them and make them disappear to who-knows where.

When the darkness finally enclosed around Izuku, it was as if all his senses had been shut down. He couldn't see, couldn't hear, couldn't feel the floor beneath his feet. It was a different darkness to the one that haunted his dreams, a silent and empty one instead of one filled with beeping lights and occasional dragging of chains.

It made his flesh itch.

Suddenly gravity was gone and he was airborne, falling down as a scream tore itself from his throat. He saw only blue as he descended and only realized it was water when he didn't splat against the floor like a squashed melon, sinking down into the depths instead. Right now he couldn't help thinking how thankful he was for Nemuri making him learn how to swim in UA's pool because 'you never know!'.

The ear-like protrusions of his hood slapped his face as they were pushed around by the currents, and it almost made him miss the villain heading straight for him underwater, huge shark maw open wide.

Something wrapped around his waist a second before he was hit, dragging him out of the water at a speed that left his head spinning. He landed carefully on a ship he was just now noticing was stationed in the middle of the flood zone they were in. Tsuyu's tongue unwrapped from his middle and went back to her, the tip peeking out as it usually did. He noticed she wasn't the only one there when she walked off to the side to Shinsou, who was busy coughing up water.

Izuku croaked around some of the water he'd swallowed. “Thanks Tsuyu” He managed to say.

“No problem, kero” She answered, carefully slapping Shinsou's back to help him. "How are you doing, by the way, Midoriya-chan?“

Izuku's face twisted. He was reluctant to look into the water, scared of how his body would react if he saw what exactly was waiting for them down there. “Could be better”
Shinsou finally stood up, clearing his throat. “Glad to hear that, but right now we're all kinda on the same boat” He looked around. “Quite...literally, might I add”

“I know” Izuku assured him. “I'll try not to be a hindrance”

“No wait” Shinsou sighed. “I didn't mean anything bad, I'm just saying I'm glad you're alright and all that, but these villains are here for all of us as far as we know, not just you. Hell, they could not even know who you are, with your mask”

Izuku patted his face, the reminder that his face was completely covered somehow managing to calm him down a peg. It was true, his coming with the group was quite literally a last second decision; there was no way they were here for him. Besides, hadn't that villain said they were here for his dad?

“All Might” He gasped, turning around towards the entrance. Doing so, unfortunately, put him face to face with the water below where a dozen or so villains were waiting and staring up at them. Izuku felt nauseous all over again and stepped back out of their sight.

“What do we do now?” Tsuyu asked.

Izuku was wracking his brain. He remembered something curious the portal villain had said; everything going according to 'schedule'. “They were waiting for us” He whispered. “They knew we would come here today, but how--” The memory of yesterday's events jumped into the forefront of his mind. “They...they are the ones who made the reporters broke into UA yesterday!”

“They could do something like that?” Shinsou muttered, peeking out over the railing to count the villains surrounding them. “Then how are we supposed to get out of here?”

“We'll have to fight” Tsuyu said. “There's no other way out of here, kero. There's water everywhere and they all seem to have water-based quirks”

Izuku's head snapped up at her words. “Water-based...” He hurried to the railing next to Shinsou, fighting down the chills running up and down his back as he surveyed the men down there. “That's it!”

Shinsou turned to him. “You got something?”
“Think about it” Izuku started. “There’s only water quirk users down there. That means they knew about the USJ’s different zones, so whatever information they stole was detailed enough about that for them to prepare”

“Yeah, that doesn't sound good for us”

“But it is!” Izuku insisted. “If they know about the USJ, then why did they send Tsuyu all the way over here?”

Tsuyu tapped her chin. “You're right. I'm more than at an advantage in the water. They should've sent me to the fiery zone” She tilted her head, understanding.

Izuku breathed out slowly. “They don't know our quirks” He said. “They don't know I'm quirkless. We have the upper hand in planning a surprise attack”

Shinsou lifted an eyebrow. It was amazing how this kid had slowly gotten over the clear terror of not only being outside, but also being attacked the very same day he did so. He supposed he was smart, since he was sent to class 1-A, but it seemed it was more than that; this guy was planning a whole battle strategy with little to no information about the situation, only with his wildly accurate guesses. Shinsou knew he’d made the right choice when he'd given his vote for class president for Izuku, trusting the one quirkless kid in the school would not believe himself above everyone else like so many people he'd met in his life. And even if it made him a bit mad his vote had ultimately been for nothing as Izuku had given his spot to Tenya, he couldn't be mad at the kid himself after seeing him act like this in a real life or death situation. “I don't know if I could help here, my quirk isn't exactly powerful”

Izuku looked at him like he was nuts. “Are you kidding me? I saw you on the entrance exams”

Shinsou flushed. “You wha--”

“i don't know how you did it, but your brainwashing is amazing” Izuku said, not loud enough that the villains down there could hear him. “I'm sure it'd be really useful if we figure out how to get out with it”

Shinsou looked at him like he'd grown another head. He sighed, looking away with the flush still spread over the bridge of his nose. “You're insane, Midoriya” He was smiling nonetheless. “Alright
then, let's get that big brain of yours to work, then”

Down by the water, the villains were swimming around in circles, growing impatient. Weren't this kids training to become heroes?! Why didn't they do anything!

“This is so boring” One of them said, bubbles coming from his mouth. “Hey, if they don't move in the next minute I'm sinking that ship”

The other one shrugged. “Sure, whatever” He said. “S long as I'm getting paid I don't care what y'all do”

“Look! One of them came back!”

They all stopped in their places, staying afloat lazily as they waited for the kid to do something that could finally get them moving.

“Hey you! Shrimp-head!” The kid shouted, pointing at the largest of them.

The villain looked around himself, pointing a finger at his chest when he noticed no one behind him. “Me?”

He wasn't very bright, it seemed.

He suddenly stopped moving, hand falling limp back into the water. His eyes were hazy and empty as he stared at the ship.

“Uh, dude? You alright?” The shark-mouthed villain swam closer.

Suddenly 'Shrimp-head' turned around in a tight circle, cutting through the water like it was air and decking the other villain so hard it sent them flying out of the water to get lost among the trees in the forested area lining the building.

“What the fuck was that!” Another one shouted while a number of them swam to subdue him as he
went for the next closest one, knocking him out cold.

Shinsou stared at his work, shaking as he focused on directing his orders to the villain, making him get rid of all his comrades as fast as he could. It wasn't hard to keep the brute under control, but he had to tell him how and when to avoid incoming attacks and when to retaliate himself like some sort of bastardized character from a fighting videogame.

Not to mention how scared he was he'd lose his control over him and ruin Izuku's plan.

“Only a few more left” Izuku muttered next to him. “You're nearly there, Shinsou”

When the last villain was knocked out cold, Shrimp-head turned back towards the ship, going around it to the front. He went underwater for a moment and resurfaced soon after, the ship's anchor hooked around his torso. He started pulling, and slowly but surely the ship moved forward. They didn't lose time running to the bow, jumping down as soon as it was close enough to land safely on solid ground.

Once they were all down, Tsuyu wrapped her tongue around the villain's face, waiting until he passed out from lack of oxygen to release him, making sure he was still breathing as he floated harmlessly on the water. “It's done, kero”

Shinsou wiped sweat from his brow. “That was insane. How the hell did you come up with something like that, Midoriya?”

Izuku was breathing heavily as well, pulling back the ears of his hood form his eyes. “I have no idea”

They stayed down close to the ground as they made their way closer to the fountain in the middle where Shouta was still fighting an unconceivable numbe rof opponents on his own. He looked tired, breathing ragged and some tears in his suit as he dodged and erased quirks this way and that, attacking back with a speed Izuku thought made his high school self look like a sloth in comparison.

“Should we help him?” Tsuyu asked. “He looks worn down”

“We have to wait for an opening, then we can step in” Izuku nodded.
Tsuyu and Shinsou stared at him.

He stared right back. “...what?”

“Again, I don’t mean to be rude, but Midoriya those are dozens of villains, and you're quirkless” Shinsou said. “I don't think any of us has a real chance of winning against that many, and even Aizawa-sensei is only winning because he actually knows how to fight enemies whose quirks he erases”

Izuku scoffed. “So you're saying he's fine fighting quirkless but I'm not?”

Shinsou blinked at him in surprise. “Uh, well when you put it like that--”

“Besides” Izuku interrupted, standing up. “Who do you trained me?”

Shouta was now fighting a really peculiar villain. Where most of them had been huge or had visibly destructive quirks, this one was little more than a stick of a teenager with a myriad of disembodied hands stuck all over his body. The few villains surrounding them that Shouta hadn't beat into a pulp were keeping their distance. Shouta must've been fighting him for a while because there was a moment when the villain touched his arm, and Shouta must've overworked his erasure because the second his hand made contact Shouta was huddling over in pain as the fabric of his suit and the skin and flesh underneath crumbled to pieces before his very eyes.

A tremor shaking the dome brought everyone's attention momentarily towards the entrance, where All Might was trying to pin down the mist man as he was quickly identified as the main menace within the group, being their likely only way in or out.

The moment the lesser villains turned their heads to the commotion was when Izuku launched forward, much faster than either Shinsou or Tsuyu thought he could be, and watched as he body slammed the villain who was about to put his hands on Shouta once more after he released his arm.

Both Izuku and the villain went tumbling down, crashing painfully against the fountain. The villain groaned, snapping his head towards Izuku.
“You...” He growled. “Who do you think you are, NPC?” He stood up slowly, his posture limp and slouching as he made his way towards him.

Izuku scampered backwards away from him. Whatever this guy's quirk was, it was clear from how all the villains steered clear from their fight that he was their leader, and Izuku didn't want to find out what he could do. “W-Who do you think you are, saying you're gonna kill All Might?!”

“Hah?” The villain breathed out menacingly. “You're one of his little fans, aren't you?” He tsked, finally cornering Izuku against an upturned broken piece of concrete. “Just look at this ridiculous mask” He said. “Disgusting...”

He reached a hand out for it, grabbing it harshly by one of the flappy ears, and to Izuku's horror it started disintegrating, the dust falling on his chest as the decay ate up more and more fabric. Soon enough his mop of hair was out in the open, and it wasn't long before the last of it had disappeared and flown away in the air. Izuku gulped, face exposed to the world, and looked up at the villain towering over him.

But he wasn't attacking. His red eyes were staring at him, wide open and with a crazed look as his shoulders started shaking.

“Ah” The villain breathed out. “I can't believe this” He crouched down so fast Izuku screeched as his face was suddenly in front of him. He reached up to the hand covering his face and slowly removed it, showing Izuku his face, cracked skin pulling as his lips stretched in a horrifying grin, a demented joy in his expression as he stared at every inch of Izuku's face. “Yes...it has to be you!”

“W-Wha...” Izuku croaked. “Who are you?”

The villain tilted his head, child-like curiosity filling his eyes. “Of course” He whispered. “I guess you wouldn't remember me, would you, Pet?”

Izuku shook his head, an impending sense of dread crawling up his spine. His head was throbbing, pain shooting up his temples and stinging behind his eyes. Who was this guy? Why was he looking at him like he'd just found his long-lost favorite toy? Why was he calling him that?

What was this sheer terror sprouting from his heart at the sight of him?
“That's fine” He said, waving off his own question. “I didn't even expect to find you here of all places, anyway. But” He grinned. “It's funny, how I brought someone I'm sure you'll remember”

“What are you talking about” Izuku whispered, not managing to make his voice louder than the thin silk of a spider, but nowhere near as strong.

The villain turned around. “Kurogiri!” He shouted.

Izuku saw how the mist man his father was fighting disappeared from sight, only to appear next to them the next second, startling Izuku and sending his heart up to his throat.

“Shigaraki Tomura” Kurogiri said. “Is it time?”

“Yeah” Shigaraki said, standing up straight and smirking down at Izuku. “My little Pet here wants to say hi to his old friend”

Kurogiri glanced down at Izuku, now bare without his mask obscuring his face, and the yellow spots that were his eyes widened minutely before going back to normal. “I see. Very well then”

The mist spread once more, widening into a portal of proportions not unsimilar to the one he'd created to bring all the villains inside, and Izuku stared into the void frozen to his spot.

Because the void was staring back.

He could hear his dad calling his name, rushing his way with as much speed as he could muster with the little strength he had left over. But even with such amazing speed, it all slowed down to a snail's crawl in his eyes as a hulking black mass lumbered out of the portal, tongue lolling out of a gaping maw full of only razor-sharp fangs. The top of its head was open, exposing what no one could confuse as anything other than its brain.

A pair of round, yellow eyes staring straight ahead, unblinking, unfeeling.

Izuku's heart stopped beating, or at least that's what it felt like. His breathing, on the other hand, picked up exponentially, until it was as if every one of his bodily functions had shut down except
for his ability to hyperventilate.

*It was dark and cold and he was alone.*

The creature walked closer, stopping next to Shigaraki as the villain kept grinning at Izuku, gauging his reaction with sadistic enjoyment.

*Metal and tile and doors opening and closing. Men in white coats dragging him. The chair. Needles on his skin.*

Izuku scratched at his arms frantically, somehow managing to tear apart the fabric of his sleeves and getting to the skin, dragging his gloves fingers over his tattoos as if trying to tear them out.

*Groans and grunting around him. Grinding of inhuman teeth gnawing at metal bars. Screeches of pain and bodies falling limp to the floor.*

“I don't think you ever met them officially, Pet” Shigaraki said casually. “Allow me to introduce you”

*Black masses and yellow eyes. Staring at him from the darkness. Staring. Staring. Staring.*

**STARING.**

“The ultimate weapon, perfectly bioengineered to destroy the number one hero once and for all, the Anti-Symbol of Peace”

**SCREECHING.**

Shigaraki snapped his fingers, and the beast lunged off to the side, stopping All Might easily with only clasping their hands together the second the hero reached them. With one swift move, Toshinori was sent flying sideways towards the nearest wall, the monster not fazed the littlest bit.

*“Nomu”*
Tears flowing uncontrollably down his cheeks, ears ringing and body shaking, Izuku slammed his hands over his ears, and screamed.

Chapter End Notes

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He was sure if he moved, his back would touch the iron bars surrounding him. If he stood, his head would hit the solid roof of the cage he was stashed away in. If he opened his eyes, dozens of yellow ones would be staring right back.

If he stopped screaming, the all-encompassing silence of the lab would consume him.

Shigaraki stood there, watching the kid with an almost bored expression if it weren't for the delighted smile splitting his face. He would usually be bothered by how loud his pet was being, but it was a refreshing change compared to those times so many years ago, when every time he'd wanted to play with him he'd be asleep or passed out, not even reacting at being manipulated like a stringless puppet.

"Now, now" He said, taking a step towards him. "Why are you throwing a tantrum like that?"

The kid was so out of it, eyes so unfocused and far away he didn't even register Shigaraki approaching and crouching in front of him, two hands closing around Izuku's wrists with both index fingers raised and prying his hands away from his ears.

Izuku's screams became a mess of stuttered sobs and choked up words of nonsense, staring at Shigaraki's face without really seeing. His eyes would shift between him and the Nomu, as if unable to decide which one was worse to be staring at but somehow not thinking clear enough to think about simply closing his eyes shut.

The monstrous creature kept guard like a well trained dog, waiting patiently in place each and every time All Might would jump at it, always able to easily resist his punches and counterattack with its own.

"You remember them, don't you?" Shigaraki asked, calmly shifting Izuku by the hold he still had on his wrists so he could more clearly see the fight. "Well, not this one exactly, but the other ones. The first ones. I guess you could call them your roommates?" He laughed at his own words, as if telling the funniest internal joke he could think of.

Izuku, on the other hand, couldn't think of much. His brain was going haywire with images that
weren’t really there and an incessant beeping sound filling his ears, like a stuttering tinnitus deafening him to the chaos around him. He could vaguely register a second, smaller black form moving in his peripheral vision, and his breath picked up.

“Pity we can't play too long” Shigaraki said, scratching his already messed up neck. Skin flaked off at his mere touch and red scabs were exposed from underneath. “I'm supposed to kill you, you know” He said, casually wriggling the raised finger of the hand still holding Izuku's. He shrugged. “Oh well, nice seeing you again!”

The finger was brought down on his wrist with such finality that it appeared to move in slow motion, Izuku's eyes following it with a dread that made his heart plummet to the ground. He closed his eyes, and waited for the pain to come.

There was a moment of stillness, not a single breath being heard.

Shigaraki tsked, violently releasing Izuku's wrist and throwing him away while standing up. “I see I'm still not done with you, Eraserhead”

Izuku opened his eyes just enough to realize that yes, he was still alive and his flesh wasn't consuming itself. The blob of black he'd seen moving before—Shouta, was shakily standing up, holding his right elbow where the remnants of his skin were slowly peeling away from the sudden movement, the muscle underneath exposed to the air in what Izuku assumed must be excruciating pain. His hair was floating above him, goggles hanging around his neck as his red and bloodshot eyes stared unfailingly at the villain.

“Save me the monologue, asshat” Shouta said shortly, jumping back into action the second he was done.

Despite his scrawny form, Shigaraki was quite good at dodging, evading all direct physical attacks and relying on Kurogiri to open portals where the capture tape would've otherwise hit him. The misty villain was standing just near enough to have his attention on the fight while at the same time remaining out of it.

“Come on, how longer are you gonna keep that up?” Shigaraki asked mockingly, dropping into a portal opening beneath his feet to reappear midair behind Shouta. He managed to twist away before being touched, only his scarf ending up in the grasp of the villain as a good chunk of it turned to dust. “You can't hold that quirk forever!”
Shouta didn't raise to the bait, focused on never letting Shigaraki out of his sight, but it was probing difficult with Kurogiri interfering and allowing Shigaraki the chance to disappear and reappear wherever they saw fit. Shouta was tired from fighting all the other villains and his mind was split between the worry for his students and the even bigger worry for Izuku, who was right in the middle of the fray.

He must've made the mistake of unconsciously letting his eyes shift towards Izuku for a millisecond, because the next thing he knew Shigaraki was right next to Izuku once more, ready to pick him up and potentially take him somewhere outside Shouta's field of vision to finish the job.

Shouta couldn't explain where the sudden burst of energy came from, like electricity filling his body and finding the only outlet through his legs as he rushed forth, watching with bated breath how the villain reached for the boy while a sizable new portal appeared next to him, eyes burning and tearing up at the new sudden speed added to the stress from his quirk.

Shouta managed to slot himself between them, raising both arms to block Shigaraki just as the villain's hands came down on his own arms.

And then he blinked.

Shouta had to choke back a scream from the new waves of pain blossoming on his flesh, inner arms exposed and on fire as his skin decayed in what felt like forever, Shigaraki's breathy laugh fanning against his face.

It was in reality less than a second, enough for him to open his eyes once more and erase the villain's quirk almost as soon as it had started. His skin stopped disintegrating, looking much like his elbow but doubled. Blood dripped down his arms and to the floor, a minuscule and forgettable sound that seemed to be the only thing registering in his brain.

He wanted desperately to turn back and check on Izuku, still on the ground in shock behind his back, but he knew the moment he took his eyes off Shigaraki it was over for him; he'd taken too much damage as it was, and his energy was running low.

“This has been fun” Shigaraki breathed out. “But we don't have all day” Much like how he'd done with Izuku, he shoved Shouta aside, walking into the portal still open next to him. “I'll just go see how the main boss is beaten and we'll be out of your hair, after I deal with him” He said, pointing a dangerous hand at Izuku.
Before Shouta could try again to go after him, the portal closed behind him, leaving him alone with Izuku while the main battle was carried out some distance away.

*Izuku.*

He dropped to the ground, ignoring the pain in his arms and quickly crawling to him, dreadful to touch him in his current state least he sent him into a panic attack he couldn’t take him out of.

Izuku was prone on the ground, unmoving and staring off into the distance, limbs strewn randomly in positions it couldn’t possibly be comfortable to be in. The only movement Shouta could see were the minute jerks of his hands every time All Might made noise as he battled the Nomu.

“*Izuku*” He whispered, carefully reaching to push back some of the hair that had fallen on his face, uncovering a bleeding scrape from being thrown away by Shigaraki. “*Izuku, come on, we don’t have time for this!*”

All Might grunted in pain behind him, and Izuku's eye twitched, a single tear making its way down and landing on the ground,

Shouta seriously did not have time for this. “*Sorry*” He said, picking him up as best as he could with his injuries and looking for a way to get far from the main fight and drop Izuku somewhere safe before going looking for the rest of the students. He caught sight of Tsuyu and Shinsou off to the side near the water of the flood zone, hiding in the bushes and staring back at him wide-eyed. Shouta cursed under his breath; had they witnessed the whole thing?

He made his way to them as fast and inconspicuously as he could, dropping to his knees next to them and carefully handing them his charge. “*I have to go find the rest. You two try to make it to the entrance and keep yourselves safe*” He didn’t even wait for an answer before taking off again, headed straight for the zone where he could see and hear Bakugou's explosions going off.

Shinsou fixed Izuku in his arms, noticing how heavy he was despite his size. “*I'm gonna need help here*” He said, waiting for Tsuyu to get a hold of Izuku's legs before making their way around the dome.

Izuku's eyes were still open, sluggishly blinking as his mind felt full of wet cotton.
A noise in particular managed to make its way through his muddled mind, and his head lolled to the side.

The monster from his nightmares was somehow stuck halfway into the ground, going through it as if it were water. He then noticed his father's arms locked around its middle in a maneuver he knew quite well, aimed to smash it face first on the floor in a devastating finishing move. The upper half of the Nomu was raising from the floor directly beneath him, grabbing his back and digging its claws right where the ages old wound on his stomach was.

The next second, Izuku didn't know what turned red first; his father's blood-soaked shirt, or his own vision.

He was out of Shinsou and Tsuyu's arms in a second, fear and shock forgotten as he shot forward in a déjà vu of just moments before. He didn't even bat an eyelash when he ran past a surprised Shigaraki, throwing himself at the Nomu and locking his arms around the creature's hand, pulling at it with all his strength.

It didn't budge an inch, as he expected, but he'd rather drop dead than just stand there and watch one of the most important people in his life get hurt like this. He couldn't help the frustrated tears accumulating in his eyes and blurring his vision the longer he tried to pry his father free from the Nomu's clutches, knowing it was a futile effort that would most likely only end with both of them killed.

But he just couldn't let go, couldn't step aside and accept defeat so easily. His memories from his childhood were imprecise and scary to think of, but the one thing he always held close and clear was that feeling of warmth and safety, being held in All Might's careful hands after being finally found. This man wasn't just family; he was his hero and the reason he was still alive at all.

He wouldn't go down without at least attempting to return the favor.

The Nomu chirped curiously, wondering what he was doing but not showing signs of even feeling him, and then it started pushing back, legs coming into contact with the ground as it started pulling All Might into the portal, dragging Izuku along as well. With Kurogiri and Shigaraki standing so casually off to the side, watching patiently how everything unfolded, it was clear to Izuku what was about to happen; as soon as they were pulled through the portal, it would close around them, effectively killing two birds with one stone.

Or two heroes with one monster.
Izuku thought it was weird, how having been so close to death before in his life he couldn't remember it being this slow, this frustrating, this, this...

This cold.

An explosion right next to them startled him back into the present and he turned to see Kurogiri on the ground, Bakugou holding him down by the metal plates around his neck.

Izuku soon saw Kirishima and Todoroki running towards them, and realized there was ice spreading from his spot, across the ground and all the way over to cover the Nomu's body, freezing him in place long enough for All Might to dislodge himself, snatching Izuku and jumping away.

He set Izuku down, breathing heavily through his signature smile. “That was close...”

Izuku held onto his arms, legs feeling like jelly under his weight.

Bakugou was leaning over Kurogiri's body, feral grin on place as he held the villain down with a hand at the ready to go off. “You thought you could hide your body under all that foggy shit?” He growled, pushing him down harder. “Try some tricky shit and I'll blow you to pieces”

Kirishima sighed next to him, still at the ready to defend. “We're supposed to be the good guys, dude”

“Beaten by a bunch of brats, huh” Shigaraki said. “What a shame, and we brought so many players just to beat this level” He turned toward the Nomu. “Nomu, get that brat off our escape gate”

Everyone took a step back when the monster started moving again, pushing itself out of the portal and up on his feet. The side of his body that had been frozen slowly crumbled away, taking with it the limbs encased in ice.

Only for them to start growing again.
“What the hell is that thing” Toshinori said, stepping forward and putting himself in front of the kids.

“Didn't I say it already? This is the ultimate weapon against you, number one” Shigaraki said grandly, arms spreading open. “Shock absorption, hyper-regeneration and a number of other quirks; built specifically to be your perfect nemesis!”

The Nomu started moving, faster than a creature of its size should, and headed straight from Bakugou who was looking on in shock as it approached, not even noticing Kurogiri slipping away from his grasp at his distraction.

Before the hit could reach him, however, he wasn't there anymore. He suddenly found himself next to the others, staring wide eyed at All Might standing in his previous spot.

“H-How did you...?” Izuku asked, looking at him and noticing how surprised Bakugou was as well.

“I didn't” He answered, shaking in place as his eyes stared wide to the spot where he'd been less than a second ago.

“Aaah, I see” Shigaraki spoke. “You heroes, always stepping in to save each other” He pointed a thumb at Izuku. “Just like my pet there, jumping head first into it, coming at me like he could do something”

The others surrounding Izuku turned to look at him, disbelief in their eyes. Had he really...?

“But it's exactly that, isn't it!” Shigaraki continued. “You heroes always decide who's 'good' and 'bad', but you like resorting to violence as much as villains! And you especially, Symbol of Peace” He spat. “Making the world believe whatever you choose is right and wrong; I'll have to show them what reality is like by finally killing you”

“I've faced uncountable villains before you” All Might grunted, standing firm. “And I know what the ones with an ideal look like, with a drive pushing them forward, but you” He said. “You're just enjoying all these destruction for the sake of it!”

Shigaraki giggled, the maniacal sound muted by the hand on his face. “Shucks, you got me”
Todoroki moved forward. “If we all attack together we could--”

“No” All Might interrupted him. “You kids need to leave for safety”

“But we can help!” Kirishima protested. “It's not fair to leave you alone against three!”

“I am a pro” He said with finality. “This is what it means to be a hero!”

Soon as he had uttered his words, Shigaraki jumped forwards towards the kids, Kurogiri and the Nomu launching a combined attack on All Might. The Nomu, however, moved faster.

All Might met the monster halfway through, and the speed and power of his movements were enough to actually physically prevent Shigaraki from advancing on the children right before he reached them. The battle that ensued between the overpowered two in the middle of the dome expelled so much energy it almost felt like a mini tornado was building around them. It felt like and eternity as All Might send punch after punch so fast they were practically invisible to the eye, all the while the Nomu met each and every one easily and spot-on.

The reality was that the fight carried on for less than a minute, and soon enough it was made clear by Shigaraki’s expression of surprise as the creature was sent flying with the last, all-out punch that the Nomu's shock absorption ability had a limit that All Might had figured out and easily surpassed.

“T-That can't be” Shigaraki muttered, eyes wide behind the hand clamped down on his face.
“Your'e supposed to be weakened, you cheater!”

“Why don't you come here and see for yourself!” All Might claimed, standing firm and in position as a cloud of dust rose around him, roused by the fast paced combat he'd just gotten out of.

Izuku took a step forward almost on autopilot, only stopped by the firm grip of Kirishima suddenly on his wrist.

“Better stay here, man” Kirishima advised, pulling him back with the rest of them. “All Might will be fine; you don't want them to reach you”
Izuku shook his head. He absolutely did not want to be taken by those villains, but there was another thing.

All that dust around his father...there was a telltale trail of smoke mixed in, one that Izuku knew very well.

He was about to run out of time.

“He'll be fine” Kirishima repeated, pulling on Izuku's arm harder. “Let's get out of here and help the others. Aizawa-sensei must need help”

Izuku didn't want to go. He felt if he tore his eyes away, he would not like what he saw the next time he turned his head around.

Just as he'd let that thought through his mind, Shigaraki and Kurogiri, apparently agreeing to a last attempt for All Might's life, had gone into motion at once. The shadow of the warp gate enlarging to colossal levels as Shigaraki hid in the dark as he approached the hero, hands at the ready for his quirk to reach him.

Izuku's feet were moving before he could realize it, ripping his hand out of Kirishima's hold and running as fast as he could. He couldn't even tell if he'd started moving before the villains did, if some sort of gut feeling drove him forward to compensate for his regular speed.

He jumped as soon as he was close enough, directing a hit for Kurogiri's visible metal plates marking his physical body. “Don't touch him!” He shouted, eyes widening as he saw Shigaraki shoving one of his hands into the mist, the portal user letting it out through his other side right above Izuku's head.

Izuku saw the hand approaching, but he knew he'd never be able to stop himself or dodge. He thought bitterly how ironic it was; a life behind walls, only to be finished like this the same day he finally was allowed outside.

He closed his eyes, and waited.
But nothing came.

Falling to the ground as nothing grabbed him, he heard the scream before he heard the gunshot, and his eyes snapped open to see Shigaraki standing there, holding his hand where a bullet had just gone through. He was looking up towards the entrance gates. Against every survival instinct telling Izuku to not take his eyes away from him, he followed his gaze.

Every pro hero staffed at UA was standing by the gates, Snipe blowing the smoke rising from the barrel of his gun. Tenya was standing next to them, looking winded but relieved to see everyone within his eyesight was alright.

“Ah” Shigaraki said, voice surprisingly calm for someone who just got shot. “We're done for. Let's get out of he--”

He could barely turn towards the portal opening behind him before more bullets tore through him, but he was resilient enough to manage to step into the gate and disappear away from the dome, even as Thirteen, still beat up from their last fight, tried to suck the portal away with their quirk.

And then they were gone.

There was a deafening silence afterwards, the dust and smoke enveloping the place creating a curtain that kept everyone on the outer areas from seeing the duo still in the middle of the combat zone.

Izuku, feeling all the previous shock and fear along with the last minute of adrenaline flooding him turning to a deep exhaustion wearing him down, let himself remain on the floor as he stared at the ground, hands shaking as he tried to control the tears threatening to fall. “I-I couldn't do anything after all” He sniffed. “What was I thinking...”

“Hey now” The soft voice of his father was only for his ears to hear, the noise of the other heroes rushing everyone out to safety along with the sirens of both ambulances and police cars outside drowning their voices for everyone else. “That's not true”

Izuku raised his head, wide eyes meeting with the half-emaciated face of his father, the other half of his body barely clinging to the illusion of the heroic figure his quirk allowed him. “Wha--”
“That last time you jumped in” He shook his head, smiling as wide as ever, if only with a slight tremble to it. Izuku had to remember that, as strong as he was, this man was still his family and was probably just as scared of something happening to his son. “Those seconds you distracted them, they saved my life” He sighed, a couple of stray tears escaping the half of his face that showed his true form. “You saved me, kiddo. Thank you”

Izuku couldn't help the choked sob that escaped his throat, nor the ones that followed.

As the warp gate opened and Shigaraki fell on the well kept floor of Kurogiri's bar, he couldn't stop the laugh building up and echoing through the empty room in spite of his multiple painful wounds bleeding out as he lay there.

Kurogiri materialized next to him, sighing as he walked off to fetch the first aid kit.

On the farthest end of the bar, a screen was turned on, the image blank as Shigaraki kept laughing. He managed to stop long enough to even his breathing as a voice from the screen spoke to him. “I take it you lost my Nomu?”

Shigaraki turned his head towards the screen, smile manic behind the severed hand on his face. “Sensei...Sensei, he was there!”

The voice crackled through the static of the transmission. “Hmm? Who, All Might? That's who you went there for, didn't you?”

“Not that bastard; him, my pet!” He exclaimed, giggling at the end. “He was there!”

Silence rang through the room, Kurogiri warily staring at the screen in wait of the next words.

“Did you kill him?” Sensei asked calmly.
Shigaraki grumbled. “I couldn't do it. Those heroes got in the way!” He said. “And All Might was more important anyway”

Sensei hummed, his tone carrying on a meaning that Kurogiri wasn't sure he wanted to understand. He almost felt as his boss didn't share Shigaraki's opinion. “I see. So he's been allowed outside at last...” He sounded as if his mind was far away with multiple thoughts running through his head. “I'll keep that information at hand. Meanwhile, remember the orders are the same; the kid is to be killed on sight. I'd do it myself if I was in better shape, but shouldn't be an easy enough job now that his defenses have been lowered. Do not fail again, Shigaraki” He said, before the transmission cut off.

Kurogiri walked towards the teen on the floor, reaching for the alcohol and tweezers he'd need to start pulling bullets out. “So that was the kid? Wasn't he supposed to just be an average boy after all? That's what Sensei told me once”

Shigaraki groaned as his wounds were cleaned before the tool started looking for the metallic bits inside of him. “You wouldn't understand. It's between Sensei, me and the brat” He said. “Just don't butt your nose in”

Kurogiri sighed. “Of course”

The most severely hurt of the students were being loaded into ambulances for a deeper checkup than what Recovery Girl could get done at UA, while the rest had already been taken back to the school to be fixed up by the heroine, so by the time Izuku and Toshinori made their way out of the dome, the only ones left were the other teachers and Tenya, who was pacing around in circles like a worried mother as he waited for them.

“Izuku!” He shouted once his friend had made it outside. He approached him with a quick dash, worriedly hovering his hands over him but afraid of actually touching him. “Are you alright?! I lost sight of you after we were all separated and I didn't know if you were fine and--”

“I'm fine” Izuku sighed, exhausted to the bone. “We're both fine” He added, looking up at his father completely in his true form as Toshinori gave Tenya a smile and thumbs up before coughing
some blood into his fist.

Movement from the corner of his eye alerted Izuku of Hizashi and Nemuri approaching as well. They both looked just as worried as Tenya, but Hizashi in particular seemed to be more antsy than her. That's when Izuku noticed Shouta was nowhere to be seen.

“Where's Shouta?” He asked, looking around at the other heroes. All ambulances were gone sans one, presumably waiting for Toshinori, since Izuku would most likely just be brought to Recovery Girl directly so he could go back home at once.

Hizashi sighed, pulling his glasses up to rub at the bridge of his nose. There were dark circles under his eyes. “He left with the last of the kids to the hospital. He wanted to stay until he was sure you were fine, but we forced him to go” He said. “He was...I wanted him to get attention as soon as possible”

“We'll go see him as soon as we escort you back home” Nemuri added, nodding at the car waiting off to the side. “Then we'll tell you how it all went. All your classmates looked fine, if you wanted to know. Thirteen took the most damage, but we were told they are stable”

Izuku nodded, thanking her for the info. A paramedic approached them, gesturing for Toshinori to get into the ambulance.

“Oh, thank you, but I'm fine” He waved her off. “I'd rather just go to Recovery Girl with my son”

“Actually” Izuku said, gathering everyone's attention. “I...I wanted to see...” His voice trailed off, his fingers fumbling together as he looked at the ground.

“Zuzu?” Hizashi asked, wanting him to finish.

Izuku swallowed. “I wanted to...to see Shouta”

“Izukkun” Nemuri sighed. “He's at the hospital now, you know that”

“I know!” He insisted. “But, but I want to” He sniffled, rubbing away tears from his eyes. His nose
was turning red from holding them back. “He saved me. I want to see him”

There was silence for a moment, but finally Nemuri hummed. “There's just no winning with you, huh. Alright, I'll tell Nezu” She said, pointing at where the principal was talking to Tsuragamae. “Zashi?”

“I'll go with them” Hizashi nodded. “Tenya, you better come as well, you ran too much to get us here; I want you to get your engines checked”

Tenya agreed, and walked behind the group as Hizashi guided them to the car. The front seat was left empty as Toshinori and Tenya sat in the back with Izuku in the middle, an automatic arrangement they fell into to keep him out of sight during the trip. Izuku wanted to fall asleep to the warmth of the car and the soft seat underneath him, but the recent events had his mind reeling, added to the knowledge of where they were headed, even if it had been his own decision to go there.

He hadn't been to a hospital in over a decade, but even then he knew he wasn't thrilled to be back to one.

When they made it there, the building looming over them as Hizashi looked for a place to park, Izuku sunk into his seat, gulping as dread began to build in the pit of his stomach.

“You two go get a once-over” Hizashi said as they made their way inside, his hands on Izuku's shoulders as he walked behind the boy for support. “I'll take Izuku to see Shouta”

Toshinori and Tenya looked reluctant to leave him, but Izuku assured them he would be fine, despite the cold sweat clearly building on his forehead. They wanted to protest, but Izuku insisted and wouldn't move another step forward until they had made their way inside first. Toshinori was almost walking into the building backwards with how much he refused to let him out of his sight until the last second.

Izuku sighed once they were out of sight, gulping as it was now his turn to go in.

“Don't worry, listener, I got you” Hizashi assured him, rubbing his shoulder for support as they marched on.
The whoosh of the automatic doors opening for them startled Izuku a bit, and then the gush of warm air being exhaled by an A/C machine on top before the second set of doors opened while the first closed behind them. They weren't even properly inside yet and Izuku's heart was already in his throat.

When they reached the waiting room, the amount of white surrounding them made Izuku instinctively step back. The tiles under his feet made his sneakers squeak and the strong smell of disinfectant burned his nose. There were dozens of people milling around, both civilians waiting to be called over and medical staff rushing this way and that.

His back met with Hizashi's legs as he kept walking backwards, his body trying to find an escape route from the place he'd insisted on being brought to. His breath had fallen short and he had trouble getting any sounds out with how dry his mouth was getting. The more he stared around the more he felt his head swimming, the pure white of the tiles and walls blinding him and he flinched when a doctor wearing his white coat walked too close to them.

Suddenly there was something cold around his neck and he jumped, whimpering in fright until he noticed he wasn't being attacked or held down, and that the heavy material of the thing smelled of metal and drowned out the smell of cleaning products. He touched the thing and realized he recognized it.

“Sorry” Hizashi said, stepping around him and carefully sliding his glasses in place on Izuku's face. “My voice modulator is a bit heavy, but it should cover your nose” The orange tinted glasses gave the entire hospital a colorful hue that had Izuku's heart calming down a little, even if the prescription glasses made his head hurt somewhat from the strain on his eyes.

Hizashi then took off his jacket, draping it over Izuku's head and effectively blocking out everything from sight, except the tiled floor underneath as Hizashi started guiding him through the halls, but the glasses took care of that. He was effectively shielded from everything that might have made him too uncomfortable to see Shouta, while at the same time hiding him from prying eyes in case someone recognized him.

He didn't know how long they walked, only that they went up quite a few flights of stairs—and he couldn't thank Hizashi enough for avoiding the elevators; he didn't think he'd appreciate being inside an enclosed metallic box even for a few seconds. They stopped in front of what Izuku assumed was Shouta's room, and after a couple of knocks Hizashi opened the door and gently pushed him inside.

The leather jacket was slowly pulled off of his head, leaving his hair in an even bigger mess than normal, but he didn't care as he could now see Shouta lying in the bed in the middle of the room, looking back at him with surprise in his eyes.
“What the hell” Was all he could get out before Izuku was at his side, his hands clutching the covers as he ran his eyes over Shouta, taking note of all his visible injuries and trying to guess when exactly each happened, as if needing the confirmation he indeed could've done nothing to prevent them.

“Sorry, he really wanted to come see you” Hizashi explained, flopping down on the chair next to the bed, smiling tiredly. “It's amazing, isn't it? Powered all the way through to reach you”

Shouta sighed, scooting over to the side and patting the space he'd freed on the bed. Izuku didn't lose time climbing up and cuddling as close as he could while minding he wouldn't touch any sensitive areas. Shouta's hand came to guide him to rest his head on his shoulder, petting his mop of unruly green hair as Izuku sniffled against his shirt.

“I'm sorry” He said quietly.

Shouta hummed. “What for?”

“You got hurt because I froze” Izuku said, looking down at Shouta's arms, the sight of them wrapped in bandages like a slap to the face.

“Zuzu, it's our job” Hizashi added softly. “We're heroes, we have to do anything at hand to protect those who can't, regardless of reason”

Shouta nodded. “Besides, you're still just a kid. We don't expect you guys to be up and fighting villains before your first year is even done; fuck, it's not even the first month” He sighed, rubbing at his tired eyes. Hizashi reached for his eye drops on the bedside table and handed them over. Shouta thanked him before applying a drop to each eye. “This shouldn't have happened at all”

“They were the ones who broke into UA, I'm sure” Izuku said. “They knew we would be there today, this was all planned who knows how far ahead--”

“And yet you were not supposed to be there, not until you decided it last minute this morning” Shouta interrupted. “Your name was nowhere in those files, so they most definitely did not come for you” His eyes were lit in a kind of anger Izuku knew well—the kind that flashed every time Izuku started feeling the heavy weight of being a burden. “The were going to attack us today, with or without you, with or without All Might. Don't start thinking it's your fault”
Izuku sighed, nodding and hiding his face in Shouta's neck. It was a conversation he'd had often with Nezu and his parents, how he tended to blame himself for every little thing that happened to others. He tried to stop this train of thought, but ever since his kidnapping everything that has been a major change in his life had been in order to protect him; the danger he put his mother in was something he couldn't quite stop thinking about just yet, not since that first night when their apartment got broken into. He was very sad at having to move and say goodbye to the outside world, but he wanted her to be safe first and foremost, so he'd be a good kid for her.

“Though I do have something to say”

“Hm?”

Shouta turned to look at him straight in the eye, expression as serious as he'd never seen him. Shouta fumbled a bit to reach over and hold Izuku's hand closest to him, quite difficult with how they were sitting. “I don't ever want you to do something like that ever again”

Izuku blinked at him. “Wha--”

“Jumping in just like that, in the middle of a battle with an actual villain looking to kill” Shouta hissed. “I know you're training to be a hero, that I've always believed you could be one and that you will, but throwing yourself against someone you know nothing about, with no strategy, no backup plan; fuck Izuku, you're fifteen!” He breathed deeply, reigning himself in. “It was an emergency situation, everyone tried just as much to do anything to protect themselves and I know how much of a hypocrite I sound like right now after all the encouragement I've given you through the years, but you have to realize you kids have no experience and this day ended up fine out of sheer luck and how ridiculously overpowered you lot are”

Izuku frowned. “You said it didn't matter if I was quirkless!”

“It doesn't!” Shouta exclaimed. “It doesn't matter if you have a quirk or not because whether you have one or not you don't know what to do in these situations and one misstep can mean certain death!”

“When we were stuck in the flood zone--”

“You were with Tsuyu and Shinsou. You had backup and they told me of the plan you hatched.
That was fine. Amazing, even” Shouta said. “They also told me how you just threw yourself at Shigaraki in a spur of the moment”

Izuku pursed his lips, looking away at the window.

Shouta sighed, laying back on the pile of pillows keeping him upright. “I won't deny that your little act potentially saved my life, and I'll thank you for that” He said, squeezing Izuku's hand still in his hold. “But I...I...” He sniffled, and both Izuku and Hizashi’s heads snapped up at the sound. Shouta was holding the heel of his free hand to one of his eyes, uselessly trying to cover the fact he'd started to cry. “I don't want you to do that again. Please” He muttered. “At least not until you're better prepared”

Izuku felt a lump form in his throat, and he carefully wrapped his arm around Shouta's chest as he cuddled as close as he could to him, his own rebel tears soaking the hero's shirt. “I can't promise that. I'd do it over and over again, if it means saving your life”

Shouta laughed wetly, burying his face in Izuku's hair. “I guess it was worth a try”

Hizashi breathed out a laugh as well, reaching for Shouta's free hand and pressing it against his cheek as he scooted closer to the bed.

They remained like that for a while, reveling in the comforting silence and knowledge that they were all fine and whole, and that the day that had started so bright and full of hopes and new beginnings had at least ended well. The peace lasted until a nurse quietly made her way in with supplies to change Shouta's bandages, softly asking for space to work without asking them to leave.

As the scissors snipped away and the strips fell on the bed, Izuku's eyes were glued to Shouta's arms.

Shouta noticed the stare, and once his arms were free and the nurse turned around for the new roll of bandages he raised his arms, mindful of the wound by his elbow as he exposed the ones on his inner forearms, already beginning to scar over with a dark layer of new tissue thanks to the medical quirks and advancements involved. “Hey Izuku” He called over. “We match”

Izuku clutched at his scarred, tattooed arms as he laughed breathlessly, already knowing the waterworks would begin anew.
Inko looked blankly at the live feed on the screen of the laptop, not trusting herself to keep her composure as she saw what Naomasa was showing her. She had insisted on getting all the information possible about what had happened to her son today, and had wanted to know who was responsible as well.

But this?

“So you just found it laying there by the USJ grounds?” Toshinori asked as he sat beside her. They had all been discharged from the hospital and promptly brought back to her at UA. She had stayed glued to Izuku for hours, almost catatonic as the fear of almost losing her baby all over again couldn’t quite sink in properly. She had only let him go when Toshinori calmly suggested it’d be good for him to rest for a while in his bed now that the day was finally over; thought it was just as difficult to get Izuku to let go of her. “And it didn't attack you?”

Naomasa's voice spoke from outside what the camera was showing. “That's right. It just let us cuff it and followed us to the station”

“Any idea what it might be?”

“We ran a few tests already” Naomasa sighed, deep exhaustion bleeding into his voice as if he knew what he was about to say was something no one involved in that conversation wanted to hear. “We got back some...surprising results”

Toshinori frowned, leaning in to get a better view of the Nomu currently in focus of the camera. It was sitting still inside a reinforced cell, eyes blank as it just stared ahead. “Anything that could explain those freaky abilities? There were too many for it to be human”

“You'd be half-right on that” Naomasa said. “The DNA analysis showed that this...thing is actually made up of several different people”

“What?!”
“Each one of those quirks it has is the result of mixing multiple genetic sources into one single person, as if someone took bits and pieces of many people and spliced it into this creature” The detective explained. “As you know, there is one person we know of who is capable of such a feat”

Inko gulped, feeling her hands shake on her lap. “D-Don't tell me...”

“I'd like it not to be this way but” Naomasa said slowly. “This might be the work of All for One after all. The genetic sources we managed to identify all match with people who disappeared under the same circumstances of being swallowed up by a black sludge out of nowhere, according to witness reports” There was a moment of silence. “We don't have anything left of what was stored in there, but we are almost completely sure this Nomu was at least partially made in that lab where Izuku was taken thirteen years ago”

“Y-You're telling me” Inko whispered, her gut twisting as she feared the words about to come out of her own mouth. “That if we hadn't found him, my Izuku would've been turned into...into one of those things?”

There was another bout of silence from the other end of the feed, until Naomasa found just enough words to cause the less damage possible. “I'm afraid that's almost certain, Inko. The experiments they wanted to run on him, they might have been with this result in sight”

Toshinori almost fell back from his chair with how fast Inko jumped out of hers, running off and into the bathroom a second before the sound of retching reached his ears. He stood up and hurried to follow her to make sure she was alright. Naomasa didn't say another word as he cut the feed, feeling unsatisfied but knowing it was part of his job and that it needed to be done.

When Inko was done emptying her soul out of the horror she'd just experienced and getting rid of the bad taste it left in her mouth, Toshinori led her back to lie down on bed. She was pale and shaky still, her eyes haunted by the image of the monster her baby had been saved from becoming without any of them even knowing his luck.

Toshinori sat down on his side of the bed, looking down at his lap for a minute before sighing and fishing out his phone from his pocket, starting to type frantically.

Inko slowly turned to look at him, blinking sluggishly as her body came down from the fear that had crawled into her bones. “Toshi?” She muttered. “What are you doing?”
He stopped, looked at her briefly then sighed, continuing his typing. “I'm texting Nezu. I'm going to need an impromptu meeting with some people tomorrow”

“What for?”

“You'll know when I tell you. You and Izuku need to be there as well” He hit send and dropped his phone on the table, reaching over to hold his wife properly so that she would be warm and secure in his arms. He pet her long hair and found comfort in the knowledge his family was safe and sound under the same roof. “I haven't been completely honest with you two”

She looked at him from where her face had been hiding in his chest, making a questioning noise.

Toshinori gulped before speaking again. “I haven't told you the truth” He said. “About my quirk”
Izuku was still slightly out of it by the time he and his parents made it to the meeting room, everyone else invited already seated down and waiting for Toshinori, the one who had called them in in the first place.

He didn't know who had been called in the first place, but seeing Nezu, Shouta, Hizashi and Nemuri wasn't weird. Recovery Girl was a bit odd but not unusual, and Naomasa's presence wasn't strange considering what had just gone down the previous day on the USJ.

Tensei and Tenya were the surprise.

“Is...Is this not about yesterday?” Izuku asked, wondering why the Iida brothers had been called in as well. Sure, Tenya had been involved in the villain attack, but so had every other one of his classmates, and none of them were here. Tensei wasn't even a teacher.

Toshinori herded him and Inko to the three free spots waiting for them by the head of the table and next to Nezu, pulling back Inko's chair as Izuku plopped down on his, still tired from a night's sleep that just couldn't be enough. “Yes and no. It's something that surged from yesterday's events, and it's become of extreme importance that it is discussed with everyone in this room” He finished, taking his own seat.

“I can't imagine what would need all of us here” Shouta said, almost crossing his arms over his chest before remembering the bandages wrapping them, setting them back down on his lap. “It's a very random mix of people you called here, All Might”

“Ah, but it's not at all” Nezu said, smile on place. “We've all got something in common” He raised a finger for emphasis, and then gestured with the same hand towards Izuku.

“Zuzu?” Hizashi frowned. “Is this about him, after all?”
Tenya looked at his friend with concerned eyes. “Is everything alright?”

Izuku looked around the table, meeting everyone's eyes as they looked back at him. “Yes? I-I don't know why we're here either” He looked at his father, then at Nezu. “Is this about me?”

“Partly” Toshinori sighed. “It has to do with you, and also with me”

“Ah” Nezu said simply, smile turning knowing. “I see now”

“All of you know that since my last battle with All for One, I've weakened considerably and can only use my quirk for increasingly short periods of time”

Down the table from his spot, Naomasa sighed, finally catching on.

“Yesterday was a crude reminder of how soon enough I might as well be rendered completely useless with how much my body and strength has deteriorated” Toshinori continued. “I didn't expect this day to come so soon, but it has become clear to me we're all running against something far bigger than we anticipated with this 'League of Villains' on the rise” He tapped his fingers on the table, going silent for a moment. Everyone remained quiet, hanging on to his words as they waited for him to find what to say next. “This is about me, because it's about the secret behind my quirk”

Inko placed her hand on her husband's. “Is this about what you told me yesterday?”

Toshinori nodded. He hadn't elaborated what he'd meant when he told her that after he arranged the meeting, but that's what they were all here for, after all. He directed himself to everyone in the room. He started telling a tale, of two brothers as similar and different as two sides of the same coin. One with a terrifyingly powerful quirk that allowed him to give and take other quirks at will, the other without quirk at all. He told them how the oldest, feeling pity of the youngest, gave him a quirk that would allow him to stockpile power; an insult if anything if one considered the younger brother's lack of power.

“But the younger brother wasn't quirkless at all” He said. “His power was just so subtle, so odd that it didn't display as anything. He had the quirk of giving his own quirk to others. Useless in its own account, but added to the second quirk he was given...” Toshinori linked his fingers together slowly, like puzzle pieces coming together. “It became something with a great potential if in the
right hands. This power has since been given from one user to the next, each time accumulating
strength from the previous wielder and making it into one of the most devastating quirks the world
has ever seen. This power has been called ‘One for All’

It was at this point the ones out of the loop understood what he was heading towards; it wouldn't be
a coincidence that this power just so happened to be called like the exact opposite of All for One,
whose own quirk had never been disclosed to any of them who didn't already know.

Who was All Might's nemesis.

“You don't mean...” Tensei whispered.

Toshinori nodded. “The oldest brother was none other than All for One himself. And the power of
the younger brother, One for All, is my quirk. It was given to me” He looked to his right where
Izuku was sitting and staring back at him, jaw slack in shock at the revelation. “The same way I
will give it to you, Izuku”

A second of silence.

“You're out of your rocker” Shouta growled, standing up as his chair wheeled away into the wall
behind him. “I'm still digesting this, this whole mess about a transferable quirk, and you just spring
it out you want to give it to him?!?”

Hizashi stood up as well. “Shou, calm down—”

“No!” Shouta exclaimed. He turned back to Toshinori. “Did you even hear yourself? A stockpiling
quirk! You're like” He gestured at the man wildly. “A fucking tree! And built like a brickhouse! Or
at least you were. And you want to put all that power inside a five-foot-three child?! He's gonna
tear himself apart!”

Nezu hummed. “That's quite true”

Shouta whirled around, pointing an accusing finger at the principal. “You knew. Of course you did,
you're always behind all of this man's messes”
“I knew as well” Recovery Girl said, smiling as calmly as usual.

Naomasa raised his hand. “Me too”

Shouta looked at each of them, trying to find the words to express just how much he wanted to wring their necks but finally opting to just go back and fetch his chair to sit down on it. He looked at Izuku's form, shell-shocked and seemingly unable to so much as blink, much less speak. “Have you even asked your own son what he thinks about all this? Are you gonna tell us all the training and preparation he's gone through all his life to be a hero even when quirkless was for nothing?”

Toshinori shook his head frantically. “Of course not! I would never look over his efforts like that”

“Then what's all this about!”

“Precisely what you just said, Eraserhead!” Toshinori shouted, loud enough to make Shouta lean back in his seat, surprised by the sudden outburst. “You are correct, this amount of power in someone so small would be catastrophic, might even tear apart their limbs if not properly trained” He looked at Izuku who was now looking at his own hands, seemingly lost in his own mind even through the constant shouting going on in the room. “But the thing is, he is. And you've made sure of it yourself, Shouta”

Shouta huffed. “You can't possibly believe my training can hold a candle to whatever it was you did”

“I sure can” Toshinori assured him. “The fact I got an advantage in the size department meant I was able to use my quirk immediately when it was given to me, but even if it didn't break me, I was still completely lost as to how to use it. I had to go through hell training all my years in UA aside from the normal classes” He shivered at the memory, not elaborating any further. “But Izuku has been preparing pretty much since he could hold himself steady in his own two feet. I'd even dare say he's in better shape than he'd be had I started training him myself”

“And how are you going to explain his suddenly getting a quirk at fifteen-freaking-years old? He can't just appear in class one day and go 'hey guys I got my quirk after all!'” Shouta said.

Nezu chimed in. “We could say it has been dormant all these years since he's been living a pretty peaceful life since his kidnapping; it wouldn't sound too strange to say the stress of the battle at USJ triggered it. It's the main reason why everyone in this room was called here today; we are the
only ones who know Izuku is clinically quirkless, his classmates don't know about his double joint

Tenya lifted his arm straight up. Then slowly lowered it to a more normal position as he got everyone's attention. “I, uh, I didn't know he was...clinically quirkless”

“Yes, but you're his best friend; you're as involved in all this as everyone else” Toshinori waved him off like it was obvious. “It would be unfair to keep you out of the loop. You're practically brothers at this point” He declared, internally grinning at the pink hue Tenya's face acquired as he nodded and lowered his hand.

“What about the medical staff at the hospital where he was diagnosed? Or the police with the reports of his case?” Nemuri asked.

“I already took care of that” Naomasa said. “The doctors who know it said they never told anyone, and swore to keep it a secret from here on out as well. They were telling the truth on both accounts; these are people who are thoroughly checked to make sure they are fit to work with heroes who need privacy, they are professional enough to know this kind of secret needs to stay a secret for reasons above themselves. His double joint was never recorded either in his medical file or the police report, as it was considered inconsequential”

As Naomasa's words finished echoing in the room, there was a moment where no one spoke, too busy trying to get all the massive influx of information to make any sense. Shouta was staring at the ceiling, Hizashi's face was planted on the table.

“What about Izuku?”

Everyone turned to stare at Inko, who was slowly making her way to her feet and going to stand behind her son, carefully placing her hands on his shoulders. He jolted in surprise, so lost in his own thoughts he hadn't noticed anything going on around him.

She looked at her husband, even when Izuku's head came to rest on her stomach as it lolled back, her hands running through his hair. “All this talk about passing quirks around and unfathomable power—Toshi, you can't just decide to do something like this without even talking to him first”

“Inko, I—”
“It’s not me you should be talking to” Inko interrupted him. “It’s our son”

All eyes turned to Izuku, still looking lost in his own mind.

Toshinori stood up as Inko slowly turned Izuku's chair around so there was enough space for Toshinori to kneel in front of him.

He reached for Izuku's hand, and the contact seemed to be enough to finally get Izuku back to the real world, blinking as his eyes cleared of the mist clouding them. “Izuku, did you hear what we just talked about?”

Izuku licked his lips, his throat feeling dry. “Yeah”

“I'm sorry for pulling this on you so suddenly” Toshinori said, lowering his head. “Everything happened so fast yesterday, it didn't even cross my mind I should've talked with you first before calling everyone here” He knocked on his own head, grinning halfheartedly. “I can be a real blockhead sometimes, yeah?”

Izuku giggled softly, and it was enough for Toshinori to feel like he hadn't at least completely fucked up.

“I've done all the speaking I needed to do. Now I want to hear what you have to say to all this”

Izuku took a shaky breath, steadying himself and trying to forget about all the other people in the room. He still took a second to gather his thoughts before speaking. “Why?”

Toshinori blinked, tilting his head not unlike a cat.

Izuku breathed a laugh through his nose, a bit amused, a bit self-deprecating. “Why would you want to give me your quirk? Why now, when I've been quirkless my whole life?” He looked out through the window, watching the clouds move lazily across the sky, the sun not even out at this hour of the morning. “Is this because I almost got killed yesterday?” He whispered. “Do you think I can't defend myself?”
“No!” Toshinori blurted out, then collected himself. “No, of course not” He assured him, softer this time as he enveloped Izuku's tiny hand in both of his own larger ones. “Izuku, I have been looking for a successor ever since my last fight with All for One, and one of the first things I decided was that I wouldn't give it to you. Not because I didn't believe in you” He clarified, noticing the hurt flashing through Izuku's eyes. “But because I didn't want to put this much weight on your shoulders, what with everything you've already gone through”

Izuku sniffled. “But now you think I should?”

Toshinori shook his head. “What I think at this point is irrelevant. I'm still human, I've been wrong before” He tightened his hold on Izuku's hand. “I know how strong you are. I know how hard you work, and I honestly think there are few people worthier of this power than you are” He said. “Many great heroes have said that, before they became who they are, they felt their bodies move without thinking; just like you did when you saved me”

Izuku could feel a 'but' coming.

“But” There it was. “As everyone has pointed out, this is not something I can decide on my own. It is, at the end of the day, your choice”

Izuku bit his lip. “This is...this is a lot” He breathed out a laugh. “I...I can't...”

“You can think about it, all you need” Toshinori assured him. He stood up, slowly pulling Izuku along with him by the grip he still had on his hand. “How about you go back home with your mother and think it through? Classes have been canceled today after all”

Izuku wiped at his eyes, nodding and looking to the world as if he'd missed a month's worth of sleep in a second. Inko wrapped an arm around his shoulders, picking up his free hand and guiding him out of the room under the concerned gaze of all its occupants. Tenya stood up and followed after them after a second of hesitation.

Toshinori sighed heavily and sat back down on his chair, rubbing at his forehead as his mind ran a mile a minute. He'd truly been an idiot, hadn't he? Just up and springing the offer to Izuku without even talking to him first. Inko was truly half of his common sense. He was so used to working alone as a hero, sometimes he forgot his family was there for him to work together as a unit.

Shouta broke the silence once again. “If this quirk is as powerful as you say, and it only gets
stronger with each user, what makes you think Izuku could handle it?”

“He's trained his entire life to be a hero, his body can take it. It would just mean he'd need more specific training regarding how to use the quirk. I can teach him that”

“But why is it so necessary for him to be the next wielder?” Shouta insisted. “Are you implying you're gonna let him go off and start fighting villains left and right now that he's finally been outside just once? Is that why you're doing this?”

Suddenly, Toshinori slammed his hands down on the table, smoke surrounding him as his body muscled up and a terrifying snarl took the place of the iconic smile that had become his image as a hero. It was frightening to say the least, to see such an expression on his face. “I'm doing this because that son of a bitch already took someone I loved from me!” He growled. “I won't let him do it again!”

Naomasa stood from his chair, hurrying to his side to calm him down. It was almost as if Toshinori had been holding what he'd been really wanting to say, and had only allowed himself to let loose now that the children and his wife were gone from the room.

“I trust in my son's abilities, I know he could hold himself against a stronger opponent, but I'm not taking any chances with his life now that there's an entire group of people out there actively going after him!”

“We're just saying, it's all a bit too impulsive” Hizashi stepped in. “It's not like we're going to let Izuku out of our sights and throw him outside to fend for himself”

Toshinori shook his head. “This is out of our control now” The smoke thickened once more, his form shrinking back into his thin self as he coughed, blood dripping down his chin. “Even if we hadn't been attacked by villains, if the rescue exercise had gone on as planned, I don't think I could've kept him locked up any longer” He accepted the handkerchief Naomasa handed him, wiping the blood off his mouth. “Letting him have his first taste of freedom only to lock the lid once more on his little box of a life...I'm not that cruel”

“And what about the villains?” Tensei asked. “How can you know the ones from yesterday really are going after him?”

This time it was Shouta answering him. “The leader, the one covered in hands” He said. “He called
Izuku felt like crying.

Oh wait, he was crying.

The whole way home it was as if his brain had been set on autopilot, all the way through until reaching his bed where he'd fallen onto face-first. It was as if coming into contact with his pillow had turned off said autopilot, letting all thoughts flow unbidden through his head. Seemed the whole situation had been way more stressful than he originally thought, because his eyes started leaking of their own volition and soon had turned his pillow into a sponge. It wasn't the kind of crying that had him gasping for air and wailing loudly; just the kind of relieving one that helped flush out the metaphorical excess of emotions quietly while he processed everything.
Tenya had followed in after taking a second to properly take off his shoes and hang his coat, not skipping on his manners even when wanting to keep his friend company. He knew Izuku appreciated having someone around, even if he didn't feel like talking or doing much. It made him feel better, he'd say, to know there would be someone there to talk to once he'd gathered himself.

Tenya knew Izuku would absolutely do the same for anyone that had ever crossed two words with him, so it was just fair to do it for him as well.

Izuku was a bit of a crybaby by nature, to put it mildly, and he had been encouraged all his life to just embrace his emotions and let them out, that it was better for him, body and mind. All this made Izuku not the least bit embarrassed by how much he would cry, even with Tenya's weight sinking the end of the bed where he'd sat, the mattress shifting in a familiar way beneath him.

Tenya knew this game well enough, and knew to play by the rules. While Izuku released all his pent up tension he would sit there quietly, providing his presence and silent support. He'd look around the room, taking note of every new figurine and poster, every shiny piece of hero merchandise in its proper place. There was a brand new limited edition All Might figurine on the desk, most likely given to Izuku by his father, considering it wasn't even out in the market yet. A special edition poster of up-and-rising hero Hawks, and a hand-drawn portrait of Inko framed on the bedside table, done by Izuku himself with all the experience his notebooks had given him through the years of drawing heroes.

“I finished that one last week” Came Izuku's muffled voice. He was still lying down, face half buried in the pillow but still being able to notice what Tenya was seeing.

Tenya hummed. “It's really good” He said. “I still have the one you made for me”

Izuku groaned, trying and failing to hide himself any further in his bed. “That one was terrible. Throw it away”

“No way!” Tenya laughed. “It's hanging right in the middle of the wall. No one has touched it in the years it's been there” And it had been a good five years since Izuku had presented him with the drawing as a late birthday gift. It had been unpracticed and messy, and it was Tenya's most prized possession.

Silence fell once more over them, comfortable and enveloping like a warm embrace. Tenya brought his feet up and leaned back against the wall, hugging his knees to his chest as he breathed in and
out, slow and measured. His slippers fell to the floor somewhere around him.

“You know, you have to give him your answer soon” He said, seeing Izuku wince.

Izuku dragged himself into an upright position, fumbling for something underneath his bed covers before pulling out his old bunny pillow, turning around to sit cross-legged facing Tenya, hugging the plushie tight to himself. “I-It's too much, too soon” He said. “I can't...I can't even begin to digest all this yet”

“What part, the one about your dad's quirk being inheritable or that he wants you to have it?”

“Both!” Izuku cried out. “I—All my life, all these years knowing I would never get a quirk, that I would have to work harder than anyone else to even survive without one if I wanted to be a hero” He let out a shaky breath. “This would turn my life around completely”

Tenya scooted closer, sitting down next to him to grab one of his hands and drag it away from the pillow to hold it. “That doesn't have to be a bad thing, you know” He said. "Your life is already quite, ah, peculiar as it is"

Izuku sniffed, looking at his hand in Tenya's hold.

Tenya continued. “Listen, I know it's not my place, but you should at least consider it. See the good and bad that could come out of your decision”

“You're pretty good at that” Izuku laughed. “Debating with yourself”

Tenya huffed, pinching one of Izuku's fingers in retaliation. “And you're very good at muttering everything you think”

“Touché”

“What I'm trying to say, as much as a neutral party as I can be, is that this could be beneficial to you” Tenya said. “I know you well enough to know it's not just you being scared of something so big and important being dropped on you so suddenly; you're also feeling bitter that he didn't tell
Izuku sighed. “Tenya...”

“Whether it's because you feel he didn't trust you with his biggest secret, or because you wanted to know you could've had a quirk sooner, I don't know” Tenya interrupted him. “What I do know is that he's giving you this chance now. And you should at least consider it before you get too scared to actually think about it well enough, before it's too late to change your mind”

“I just can't help feeling, if I do accept it, it'd mean all I've done up to this point would have been useless” Izuku mumbled. “All that time training specifically to learn how to fight quirkless, not to mention how long everyone born with one train to master them...and just getting something so powerful out of nowhere? Sounds pretty unfair”

“I'd say all the training you've done is more than enough to master it on time to keep up with everyone else” Tenya said. He squeezed Izuku's hand one last time before moving to the edge of the bed, looking for his slippers where they'd fallen before standing up. “And think about it this way. If you have a quirk to defend yourself to the point of fighting off villains, you might just be let outside more often and sooner than you think” He smiled at him. “Just think about it”

Izuku stared at him, not moving as Tenya ruffled his hair before walking out of the room. He wouldn't leave yet, Izuku knew. He'd most likely stay around with his mother for a few more hours, at least until Izuku had made his choice. But Tenya was, as his dad had said, practically like a brother to Izuku; he belonged in their little home as much as any of them.

A knock on his open door broke him away from his daydreaming and his eyes focused enough to see Shouta standing by the hallway, sleeves pulled down and covering the very bandaged arms underneath.

“Hey kiddo, how you holding up” He said as he walked in, going to the desk to pull out the chair and set it down next to the bed, turning it around to sit backwards on it, crossing his arms on top and resting his head on them.

Izuku groaned, drawn out and suffering as he fell back on the bed. “I'm so confused”

Shouta snorted. “Yeah, no kidding. I'm surprised you didn't punch him in the face right there”
“He’s my dad!”

“I mean, I would’ve done it”

It made Izuku snort, and he was glad Shouta had found the energy to drop by after the chaos of the meeting. “Do you know where he is right now?” His father hadn’t arrived home yet, and Izuku was dreading it was because he was mad at him for not accepting the offer immediately.

“He said he wanted to give you space. He asked me to tell you to call him when you’re ready”

Izuku grinned. “I thought you didn’t want him to think he could ask you favors?”

“I never told him I would do it” He shrugged. “But I guess he knew I’d come anyway” He closed his eyes, and Izuku wasn’t sure if he’d fallen asleep or not. Shouta tended to take micro naps anytime he was still for more than thirty seconds. Until suddenly he spoke again. “So what’s got you so conflicted? I thought you still wanted a quirk”

Izuku blinked, surprised. “Huh?”

“Come on now” Shouta chuckled. “I have eyes, you know. There’s a longing in your eyes when seeing everyone train in class. Those notebooks of yours are way too detailed for someone who just sees quirks as a hobby”

Izuku remained quiet, twiddling his thumbs. His tongue would poke between his lips to wet them every few seconds. “What about you?” He said softly, almost a whisper in the stillness of the room.

Shouta opened an eye. “Hm? What about me what?”

“You were the first one to trust me, to support and tell me how I could be a great hero even while quirkless” Izuku explained, still not looking at him. “Accepting a quirk like this, out of nowhere...I can’t help but feel like I’m betraying that trust”

It was Shouta’s turn to remain quiet. Then he sighed heavily, and stood up from the chair to sit
down on the bed in front of him. “So many years ago, when you were barely a bumbling baby, I asked you if you were a dummy. You told me you weren't”

“I'm not!”

“Then why do you insist on acting like one?” He snapped, surprising Izuku. “It's not and it has never been about quirks. I never trusted you could become a hero because you were quirkless; I trusted you could because you're you” He reached for Izuku's hand, the same one Tenya had been holding moments before. “When I told you you could be whoever you wanted to, I had never before met someone so brave, so determined, so willing to do anything to reach their goals...and you were two years old”

Izuku let out a breathy laugh, halfway insecure, halfway self-deprecating. “I like to think I'm a bit more conscious of myself now, though”

“If you really are then you should know your answer already” Shouta said with finality. “You're a smart cookie, Izu. I know you'll take the right choice, whichever it is; just know, I'll be with you either way, because at the end of the day it's your life, and no one can force you to do something you don't want to”

As he left Izuku with his thoughts once more, the boy could feel the dread coiling and twisting in his gut, slowly detangling and getting into a semblance of order.

He wanted to think it over for another while, but he was pretty sure, deep down, he'd had the answer from the very beginning.

“He has to what your what?!!”

If it weren't for how serious this whole subject was, Toshinori would be glad to have managed to make Shouta lose his composure so many times in a day.
“He has to ingest my DNA somehow to receive the quirk” He explained. “All things considered the most feasible options are blood and hair, but blood is just unsanitary”

“And swallowing your hair isn’t” Shouta deadpanned.

Toshinori shrugged.

“Shou, it's fine” Izuku assured him. “I'm sure it's not that bad?” He asked more than said, looking at his father, hopeful.

“I mean, it's how I got it” Toshinori said. “It's best to just get it over with fast, not gonna lie”

They had gathered at Gym Gamma for the transfer, everyone present at the meeting standing by around them as All Might explained how it would happen.

“You won't get the power until my DNA has been digested, so it will take a while” He said. “And it's better to test it before you go all out; just to see how your body handles it”

“But he'll be alright, won't he?” Inko asked, worried as she hadn't been in years. “All that talk about it tearing him apart, oh Toshi...”

“He'll be fine! Everything will be alright, I'm positive” He waved his hands at her, trying to repel all her doubts. “Izuku's a strong boy, he can handle it”

Izuku held up the long strand of bond hair he'd been given, looking at it with poorly veiled distaste. “So I just...swallow it”

Toshinori hummed, nodding and looking at him expectantly. Izuku resigned himself to his fate, closing his eyes and bringing his hand up as he opened his mouth.

“Now wait a goddamn second” Shouta huffed, marching forward and snatching the hair from Izuku's hands. Toshinori gasped, instinctively reaching out for it. Shouta kept it at arms distance. “I'm not gonna take it, calm down”
“Be careful! If someone else took it--”

“I don't think normal people's first reaction to finding a strand of hair is to eat it, Yagi”

“It's 'Midoriya', you know that”

“You're ridiculous, is what you are” Shouta said. He twirled the hair between his thumb and index. He called out to where the others were standing. “Hey, Tsukauchi, where is DNA in the hair?”

Tsukauchi tapped his chin. “The root, if I recall. I'm not forensics though”

Shouta waved him off. “It's fine” He said. The he twirled both ends of the strand of hair around his fingers and pulled, effectively breaking it apart.

Toshinori gasped, alarmed. “What are you doing?!”

“If DNA is only on the root then he doesn't need to eat the whole thing, you psychopath” Shouta explained as he handed Izuku the significantly smaller part of the hair containing the root.

Toshinori looked like he wanted to say something, but then conceded defeat, bringing his hands up to his face.

Nemuri appeared behind him and patted his arm in comfort. “You ate the entire thing, didn't you”

He just sighed.

All eyes shifted back to Izuku, who met everyone's gazes one last time before deciding to just get it over with, and quickly swallowed it. Grimacing at the feeling but thankful it wasn't the whole thin he had to eat, he accepted the bottle of water Tenya handed him, and downed it in one go.

Inko came forward to hug her son, patting his hair as he panted to catch his breath after drinking so
“Now what?” She asked her husband.

“Now” He said. “We wait”

It would still be a few hours before it took effect, so some had decided to go get something from the cafeteria to bring over, while others just sat down and took a nap—Shouta—or engaged in some impromptu battle training—Tensei and Nemuri. Izuku and Toshinori had started walking circles around the gym in the hopes it would speed up the process, and had started talking about anything that crossed their minds.

“You should become mom's permanent assistant in class” Izuku commented. “It would be fun to be all together like that during the day”

“Ah, I don't think I'm cut out to that kind of teaching” Toshinori chuckled. “I mean, I barely can teach Heroics without anyone getting terribly hurt; I'm a complete disaster at domestic stuff”

“I'm sure you'd do fine” Izuku said. “You can make a pretty mean pie”

“If by 'mean' you mean it makes you cry then yes, I can do that” He laughed at his own joke. “I actually thought about bringing one to Thirteen during the field trip; I'm glad I didn't, wouldn't have wanted to give them any more reason to be sick that day...”

They stayed quiet after, remembering just how bad things had gone at the USJ. It was the main reason why Toshinori had decided to give Izuku his quirk, after all. He had explained how Izuku's jump into action the last seconds of the fight had made his heart still in shock, seeing someone so clearly overpowered by his opponents not think about it twice before throwing himself into danger to save someone else; it was reckless and irresponsible and dangerous, and absolutely was innate heroes did when in need to help.

Seeing his son act so heroic, so selfless and brave, it brought a memory to Toshinori's mind that he knew he couldn't keep quiet. “Son, I want you to forgive me” He said out of nowhere.

Izuku stopped walking, looking up at him curiously. “What for?”

His father sighed. “When you asked us many years ago if you could be a hero without a quirk, if Shouta hadn't spoken first, I might have said something stupid” He said, coughing a bit of blood into his hand. “Something like how you can't be a hero without one, that it would be too dangerous.
That would've been completely hypocritical of me”

Izuku offered him one of the handkerchiefs he always carried for exactly this reason, lips pulling down into a frown. “W-Why?”

“Because before I was given One for All” Toshinori explained, solemn and serious. “I was quirkless as well”

Izuku's heart skipped a beat. “What?!”

“I mean, I should've mentioned it during the meeting, probably, but it didn't seem important at the time?” Toshinori scratched the back of his head. “It's been so long, it sometimes slips my mind. I'm sorry I kept you and your mother in the dark for so long, son”

Izuku's head was still reeling. His dad? His favorite hero? Nay, the greatest hero in the whole world, quirkless just like him?

Toshinori eeped and jumped away when suddenly green lightning enveloped Izuku, crackling and twisting up and down his limbs as the colorful energy emerged from his body. Izuku looked down at his hands, open-eyed wonder and astonishment filling his face.

“I-I” He stammered, watching the electric lines twirl around his fingers, tickling his skin as it ran over him. “Is this...is this it?”

“I-I think so?” Toshinori said, unsure. He reached to touch Izuku's arm slowly with a finger, feeling the power pulsing through the lightning grazing him. “I've never seen it like this before...”

“Izuku, holy crap!”

They turned towards where Hizashi's cursing had come from. Everyone was staring at them, gaping at the light show on Izuku's body. Not even Tenya could stop staring long enough to chastise Hizashi for using language improper of a hero and educator.

As the others ran up to meet them, Toshinori finally grinned, full of pride and, secretly, relief at
seeing his son still in one piece. Of course, a good start didn't guarantee a flawless performance, so there was only one thing left to do now.

“So, kiddo” He said, draping his arm around Izuku's shoulders and pulling him along to keep walking. “What do you say we start punching some stuff?”

Izuku grinned, jumping in place and almost launching himself up to his father's height with his newfound strength. “Let's go!

Breaking the news to his classmates had gone as well as they had expected, which meant, it was chaos.

The story about how Izuku's kidnapping had been so traumatic it had rendered his quirk dormant until the do-or-die situation at the USJ had triggered its awakening was accepted well enough, but the mere fact of something as odd as someone getting their quirk at fifteen years old, and said quirk being something as big as strength enhancement was huge in itself. Everyone kept raining questions on him, asking him to demonstrate; Bakugou straight up yelled at him to meet him 'in the pit', wherever that was.

“That's enough already” Shouta called to regain order. “You can't expect him to know how to use it properly after a day. Let's wait some time until he gets a hang of it and then you can duke it out all you want” He was about to say something else when Shinsou raised his hand. “Yes?”

“Sensei, are you really alright after fighting all those villains?” He asked, eyes wandering sharply over the areas he could see bandages peeking from under his sleeves and collar.

Shouta turned around to the whiteboard, starting to write something. “Nothing a hero couldn't deal with. Could've been worse had All Might not been there, though” He said. “Regardless, you lot have more important things to worry about” He turned around, eyes scanning over the class as the air turned heavy.

Something more important? Did the villains plan to attack again? Would they have to get ready to fight again so soon?
“Your battles are only beginning” He said, and moved away to reveal what he'd written on the board behind himself. The words bright and clear to everyone's stupefaction. “The Sports Festival is around the corner, people, look alive!”

Chapter End Notes

the sports festival is gonna be really short bc i only care about tododeku bonding like the first two games izuku did quirkless so there's nothing to do there jsdhgfjhsdf

this chapter was p much completely about izuku finally getting ofa but i had to get it out of the way and so many people had to know and it somehow ended up taking up the entire chapter sorry lololol

also before you ask at least for this story i consider 'midoriya' to be inko's last name and idk hisahi took it when they got married???? whatever the important think is toshi is now midoriya toshinori to keep dat secret identity locked down

i work 6 days a week yall sorry it takes me so long asgfdgjfkgh

no breaking bones here no ma'am our boy is well trained and is gonna have a lot of people teaching him the actual proper way to do it, no eggs in no microwaves here--at least until IT'S YOUR POWER TODOROKI
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

this chapter is just an excuse for the first stages of tododeku bonding, that's literally it

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Objectively speaking, I think I'm stronger than you”

Everyone in the room fell silent at Todoroki's words. It was surprising because they had come from absolutely nowhere, but also because they were directed at Izuku, who everyone knew had only gotten his quirk two weeks prior and had only seen him seldom use it in training exercises in class only to increase his speed or perform evasive maneuvers, jumping around like an over-caffeinated rabbit. They had yet to see any displays of destructive force, and it seemed this festival would finally be it for that.

Truth was, Izuku wanted nothing more than to actually start punching and kicking like his father did, but everyone else had insisted he worked his way up slowly, upping the percentage of energy he used little by little to give his body time to adjust. They also wanted him to have some time to himself out of school and training, emphasizing the importance of enjoying his youth while he could before he had to spend his every waking moment doing hero work after graduation. Izuku didn't think they understood training and quirks were his hobby.

“All Might seems to have a soft spot for you. I don't why that is, but in the end it means I have to beat you” Todoroki continued, firm and looking at Izuku in the eye, completely ignoring the existence of everyone else in the room.

Now, the past two weeks had been significantly busy for Izuku.

He'd gotten One for All and had immediately been thrown into training himself to learn to use it. At first Toshinori had tried to explain how it felt to use the quirk, but his explanation had left Izuku comparing the surge of energy as something similar to an egg cooking in a microwave, and Toshinori had agreed to an extent.

At least until Shouta walked up and revoked all of Toshinori's training authority after he dared agree to such utter bullshit.
“First of all you do not cook an egg in a microwave, under any circumstances, ever. They always, always explode!” He chastised them, quirk activated for added intimidation. Toshinori and Izuku both kneeling on the floor with their heads tilted down as they were scolded in front of everyone present. “Why would you even choose that for an analogy in the first place? Eggs need to be cracked. You don't want to be cracked, do you?”

Izuku squirmed under his piercing gaze, even if he couldn't see it directly. “No sir”

Shouta continued. “The only time you don't crack them is when boiling them, and even for that you start with cold water and let it boil; you give the egg time to adjust to the change in temperature and let it be surrounded by it as a whole instead of just focusing it on different spots at a time” He sighed, rubbing between his eyes as he fumbled around in his pocket for his eye drops. “And now you have me talking about food like it's the secret of life, christ”

“You make a good point though” Nemuri said as Shouta busied himself with hydrating his irritated vision. “Letting the energy cover you fully and gradually instead of just jumping at it at full power from the get go”

“Focusing your power only where it works instead of training yourself fully can have terrible repercussions” Tensei agreed. “The first one in our family to develop the engine quirk thought it would be enough to train the limbs holding them alone; they then lost balance while going top speed and crashed into a building. Lots of broken bones”

“It's why we train in a balanced way!” Tenya joined, chopping the air with his hands. “Focus on surpassing your own limitations first, and your quirk second!”

Toshinori felt like crying, shoulders slumping as he kept his face down. “All of you make a better teacher than me” He whined.

Shouta snorted. “Of course, we weren't born with a natural talent like you did”

Toshinori's head snapped up this time. “But I wasn't even born with a quirk in the first place! That's unfair!”

“And because we were, we know how difficult it is to get them under control!” Hizashi jumped in. “I already tore my parents' eardrums and I'm going deaf myself! You have to take measures to avoid hurting yourself or others with your quirk; you think Thirteen wears that suit for fun?”
Izuku squirmed in his spot. “I mean, yeah?”

A moment of silence.

“Okay” Hizashi agreed. “They do. But it's also because it contains them and keep others from being sucked in on accident!”

“End of the line here is, your quirk is too powerful to go on about it as lightly as you two wanted to, so we'll make it a group effort to train you, alright?” Shouta asked, getting nods from father and son. “Good. And now stand up, it's making me mad how you still are face to face with me even when kneeling, All Might”

Back in the present, with Todoroki standing expectantly in front of him, Izuku clenched his fist.

“I'm still training to learn how to use my quirk” He started, staring down and to the side as he picked his words. “And even before I had it, I'm clearly no match for you, from what I've seen” He looked up, eyes locking on dual-colored ones staring back with determination. “But that doesn't mean I'm going to give up or back down from a challenge” He clenched his fist, squeezing the fabric of his pants as he felt the eyes of everyone around boring down on him. “So come at me with everything you've got, Todoroki-kun! I'll meet you head on!”

Todoroki maintained his unblinking gaze on him for a moment more before nodding once. “Good”

The events that followed went by in a blur. Being introduced to the public and having Bakugou gather everyone's ire towards their class with his starting words was a peculiar way to start, and Izuku didn't want to know what effect it would have on their performance now that all the other classes were glaring daggers at 1-A as a whole. Not knowing the full extent of his quirk when used in an all-out battle since he was still getting used to the distribution of energy, Izuku didn't want to risk injuring himself uselessly before the third round. He had refused to use his connections with the staff to learn what the first two tests would consist of in spite of his classmates pleading, so he was just as lost as them when it came to what they would be doing.

The first test was hard to run quirkless, but not impossible as he showed everyone just how far quick thinking and an absolute disregard for his integrity could push him forward—or blow him ahead, more like. He managed to snatch first place despite going head to head with Todoroki and Bakugou. He couldn't help squirm a bit in place as he noticed the stares and whispers from the public, people having recognized his name and blatantly taking pictures or videos of him as he
tried to calm down for the next event. All previous years he had watched the festival from the booth with Hizashi and Shouta, so this was his first time under the scrutiny of so many stranger eyes. He didn't know how to feel.

Once Nemuri’s announcement of the second event made Izuku realize he was royally screwed as his head was now worth ten million points, he managed to get a team put together that eventually made its way through to the final round thanks to Tokoyami’s quick thinking. He had almost thought it was all over when a bit of his quirk had activated while trying to snatch Todoroki’s headband from him, only to have the other flame up his arm, looking as shocked as Izuku felt about it.

Hizashi had quickly sent everyone out for their lunch break after the points had been given, and Izuku was about to find Tenya and Uraraka to make their way to the cafeteria when he was stopped by a hand on his shoulder.

He’d stared into heterochromatic eyes, a silent request in Todoroki’s eyes as he walked away for Izuku to follow.

Now, with the sheer number of outsiders and civilians moving freely in and out of UA for the festival, Izuku had to have one of the school’s teachers following him around at all times when he wasn’t participating in an event, according to the rules Nezu had set after the infiltration of the media the weeks prior. He’d looked into the questioning eyes of his impromptu bodyguard in silent request, getting a nod in response but knowing it just meant the hero would be within reaching distance, allowing him a bit of privacy but near enough to be at his side in a second if Izuku called out.

Izuku hesitated for all of a second, and followed Todoroki.

He was led to an empty hallway letting out to the forested area surrounding the arena, the sunlight filtering at an angle from where it crashed with the edge of the gate.

Todoroki was staring at him with an intensity Izuku had never felt before, and it was such a far cry from the friendly boy he’d chatted with on the bus trip to the USJ, that he almost got the whiplash he’d somehow avoided the whole festival up to this point.

“Is...Is everything alright?” Izuku asked quietly, afraid of breaking the silence and set off something in the other that could end bad for him. He’d witnessed enough of Todoroki’s power to know that at the level he was currently in he would be no match for the boy if he decided to go at him.
Todoroki slowly raised his left hand, the one that had been set aflame as Izuku reached for him in the last event. “You made me break my oath”

Izuku blinked, tilting his head. “An oath?”

Todoroki nodded minutely, an almost imperceptible tilt of the head. “All my life, I've vowed to never let him have the upper hand” He clenched his fist, dropping it limply to his side. “That included using his power”

His words brought forth a memory for Izuku; one of a hulking man marching towards them as they made their way out of the forest line, flames covering his body as he chastised his son for getting lost.

“We were face to face so I was the only one of my team who felt it” Todoroki continued. “But during that last second in the cavalry battle, what I felt...” He stared at Izuku, a twinkle of curiosity sparkling and dying so fast Izuku almost missed it. “I've felt that kind of pressure before...seeing All Might fight in the USJ”

Izuku gulped. “O-Oh yeah?”

“And he has obviously spent quite some time with you these past years...it's clear he has a great interest in you” He pushed himself off of the wall he was leaning against, taking the few steps it took to cover the width of the hall and stand in front of Izuku. Izuku, barely tickling Todoroki’s chin with the top of his hair, had to crank his neck back to meet his eyes. “So, what I want to know is” He leaned down the slightest bit. “...are you All Might's illegitimate child?”

Huh.

“...What?” Izuku could only ask. His brain seemed to have stopped working from the question. “Todoroki-kun...you've met my dad”

Todoroki thought for a moment, humming as he stood up straighter and took a step back, letting Izuku breathe in relief at having recovered his personal space. “I've always wondered about that, actually” He said. “The first time we met I thought it was surprising how little you look like him. Now, having met your mother, I guess you just got all your looks from her”
“Well, yeah, mostly”

“Mostly?”

Ah, shit. Why did he say that. “I mean, I don't really, I don't-” He scratched the back of his neck. “I might have some looks from my father, but I don't know since my dad is not my biological father?”

That caught Todoroki's attention fully back to him, making him take back that step into Izuku's space. “Seriously?” He sounded actually curious now, eyes a bit wider and frown softening almost into a neutral expression. “You sound pretty at ease with that”

Izuku laughed. “Ah, well, I mean, he met my mom and married her after we came live here, and I never met my birth father so it wasn't hard to accept him into my life. I was actually really happy because at that time I had already known him for a long time and I really admire him so it was really great to have him officially as my dad. I never had a father figure before him so I don't really have anything to compare it to so I guess that helped make the transition easier and besides—”

“You're muttering” Todoroki interrupted him. “It's not like I want to stop you, but I can't really understand what you're saying anymore” He clarified.

“S-Sorry” Izuku apologized, wringing his hands together as his eyes burned holes into the floor.

Todoroki shook his head. He moved to lean with his shoulder against the wall next to Izuku, angled to be facing him. Izuku didn't know if the change in position actually made him feel better, since his front was now free and he had more space; or more caged since now Todoroki was closing off his side that led into the forest with the fastest escape route.

“It's funny, bringing up fathers into this” He said cryptically. Izuku tilted his head in a silent cue for him to continue. Todoroki tapped his foot on the floor as he tried to find his words. “You remember who mine is, correct?”

Izuku nodded. “Endeavor” He mumbled, somehow feeling in his gut this would turn into a sensitive subject really fast.
He seemed to be surrounded by a lot of those lately.

“Yes” Todoroki said. “The number two hero, which means that by association, if you or your quirk are somehow related to All Might after all” He locked calculating eyes on Izuku's once more. “It just means I have more motive to crush you”

Izuku didn't really know how to answer that. It was all just really unexpected, from Todoroki pulling him aside to have this kind of conversation, to the strange way he started connecting points to reach that conclusion. “What does this have to do with anything?” He asked. “What does Endeavor has to do with All Might? With me?”

Todoroki pursed his lips. “No matter how strong he is, how powerful his quirk might be, Endeavor could never beat All Might on his own to reach the number one position. So he came up with a plan of his own” He let silence follow his words for a moment to put more emphasis on what he was about to say. “Have you heard of quirk marriages?”

The question brought Izuku a memory from long ago, during one of his private lessons with Nezu. The principal would stop his program on Quirk History to delve into more curious bits of it that he knew would be of Izuku's interest, and this had been one of those cases in particular.

“Quirk marriages are not common, but also not strange” He'd said, leaving his pointing rod aside as he walked away from the whiteboard. This was not included in the class so there was no need for it. “They became more popular in the later years after quirks first started appearing. Heroism was a novelty and so people were a bit obsessed with the idea of creating the perfect hero” He shook his head. “Nowadays they're difficult to find, but it still happens. It's hardest on the children born of them, since they have the weight of the world on their shoulders”

Looking at Todoroki now, after remembering the principal's words, Izuku felt like things were starting to make sense.

“My father was already a renowned hero, and he had the status, power and money to buy my mother” He spat the words, fists clenching as he looked away. “Their marriage has been nothing but torture on my mother and me, and all because I was the unlucky one to be born with both their quirks. She tried to protect me, but all her efforts were useless”

Izuku had remained against the wall even as Todoroki moved to stand next to him, but now had shifted to be facing the other boy. “Todoroki-kun—”

Todoroki interrupted him. “He ended up driving her insane” He said. “To the point she couldn't
stand to see the left side of my face that reminded her so much of him, even as she threw scalding water at it”

Izuku took a step back so suddenly it actually pushed Todoroki to stop leaning on the wall, instinctively reaching for him to steady him with a hand on his shoulder. Izuku's face openly displayed his horror at the revelation, his entire body shaking and eyes wide as they stared at the scar on Todoroki's face. All this time Izuku had thought, maybe it was an accident from overusing his quirk, the flames they all knew he had but never used. He thought maybe he'd scarred himself and was afraid of using them anymore.

But this?

“Shit” Todoroki hissed, measuring his movements to not startle him further as he settled both hands to Izuku's arms this time. “Sorry”

“Y-Your mother?” Izuku shakily asked, voice fine as a thread in the silence of the hall. “She did that?”

Todoroki shook his head. “I don't blame her. It was that man's doing that we ended that way. It's why I wanted to reach the top without using his quirk.” He said, calmer now after Izuku's freak-out. He slowly released Izuku once he was sure he wouldn't keel over from shock, but as he slowly slid his hands down Izuku's arms, Izuku reached out at the last second and held Todoroki's hands in his. “Midoriya...”

“I'm so sorry” Izuku said. “I-I don't even know what to say. No one should go through something like that”

“You went through some pretty bad stuff yourself—”

“That doesn't matter!” Izuku snapped, pulling on Todoroki's hands to bring him down to his height, making Todoroki stumble in surprise as he was forced to lean down. “I went through something, you went through something, they don't negate each other! They both happened!”

“You almost died”

“And you've lived your entire life up to this point like that” Izuku pointed out. “If anything, I'd say
Todoroki blinked owlishly at him, clearly not having expected this kind of reaction. He'd brought Izuku here with the intention of releasing some of the pressure that had built up after mindlessly using his fire. He had always known of Izuku's story since he'd been moved to UA as a kid, mostly because Endeavor would never shut up about how disgraceful it was that All Might had become a glorified babysitter. He always felt a sort of kinship to Izuku despite having never met, liked to think they were similar enough that he would understand Todoroki's point of view. Finally being face to face had him wondering; if Izuku looked so happy living like this after his kidnapping and torture, did he even have a right to feel the resentment he did towards Endeavor, considering he'd been relatively safe and at home with his family in his own life?

But Izuku was quick to shoot that doubt down without even knowing of its existence.

Izuku seemed to have started panicking again, staring at Todoroki with wide eyes and brows pulled back in concern and fear. “Oh god, what I said that first day of class to Shinsou-kun, about not using your full power—that's why you were mad at me!”

Todoroki shook his head. “It doesn't matter anymore” He sighed. “I'm sorry, this conversation didn't go the way I planned”

Izuku sighed, closing his eyes and trying to relax from the shivers running up and down his body. He pursed his lips. “I don't know what you were expecting, but at least I'm glad you got it all out somehow”

Todoroki chuckled, catching Izuku's attention with how out of place the sound was coming from him. “I think it might have something to do with this” He brought up their hands, still holding each other since Izuku had latched onto them a moment ago.

Izuku tried to let go, suddenly feeling embarrassed at having forgotten he was even doing that, but Todoroki only tightened his hold. “W-What are you doing...?”

“It's curious” Todoroki said simply, leisurely rubbing circles on Izuku's hands with his thumbs. “Now that I think about it, I don't think I've held anyone's hands since my father sent my mother away after she burned me” He carefully released Izuku's hands, letting them hover in midair between them before Izuku slowly curled them against his chest. “Must've made me lower my defenses there for a second”
“I'm sorry, I'm just used to it” Izuku said, scratching the back of his neck with his right hand, the one that had been holding Todoroki's left. It was warm. “I always end up holding people's hands when I'm overwhelmed” He laughed. “Can't promise it won't happen again”

Todoroki huffed a laugh. “I'll have it in mind” He stood up straight, wiggling his fingers while the sensation lasted. “Sorry for wasting your time”

Izuku shook his head. “Don't think about it that way” He smiled. “Think of it as...a bonding experience! We got to know each other a bit better”

“Even if it was just me unloading my problems on you?” Todoroki said, half-smiling.

Izuku shrugged. “You seem to know all my problems already, it seems fair enough to me” He rolled up his sleeves, letting the ink on his arms drag Todoroki's attention away. “And you're not the only one with scars as a reminder. I'd say we have more in common than we realize”

Todoroki kept silent before sighing, crossing his arms over his chest as he smiled at Izuku. “You know, I wanted to make it clear I would not go easy on you if you really do have a connection to All Might” He said. “But after all this, I think I'll go even harder, just because it's you” He offered his open hand. “I'll crush you”

Izuku didn't doubt in accepting the gesture, shaking Todoroki's hand in turn. “You know, I have a lot of people who helped me get where I am right now. I owe it to them to give it my all” He smiled brightly up at him. “I'm gonna beat you for sure!”

When the promise was uttered, none of them would have guessed they would end up actually facing each other in the second round.

Izuku almost didn't make it, forgetting to be careful about Shinsou's quirk and almost walking out of bounds. He managed to break out of it by literally breaking a finger after feeling a moment of clarity in his mind that he couldn't explain, but it was enough to turn around and bodily throw Shinsou out of the ring.

Izuku had helped him up afterwards and Shinsou had apologized about the unsavory comments he'd made about Tenya to get him riled up. Izuku was sure he would go straight to apologize to Tenya as well after this; he had made some choice comments about his undercut with a creativity Izuku hadn't thought possible.
Todoroki on his part had made quick work of Sero, encasing him in ice in a second and effectively preventing him from further movement. Something must’ve happened in the time between their chat and this fight, because Todoroki was clearly angry and more pent-up that he’d been when they’d walked their separate ways. The ice he’d used was an iceberg by all rights, covering half the arena and reaching all the way to where class 1-A was sitting. Izuku could feel the cold brush of the ice against his nose.

Even Hizashi’s unending commentary had been rendered into silence.

Izuku sat through a few more matches afterwards, including Tenya and Uraraka’s, until it was his time to go get ready in the waiting room. He had been pretty confident after his chat with Todoroki, but after seeing his sudden and extreme change of attitude he was doubting the outcome would be as good as he’d been hoping.

The teacher that had been escorting Izuku around let him go on his own, saying the way he was going was well guarded by someone he trusted enough to keep Izuku safe.

As he made his way through the familiar halls of the arena, his worries started overwhelming him, making him feel like every step he took made him break into a cold sweat. His clothes stuck to his body and his hair became even messier, the halls feeling like an oven as he fanned himself with his hands. He wondered if he had a panic attack coming his way with the way his body was reacting.

Until the sweat wasn't as cold anymore.

He stopped dead in his tracks as Endeavor himself rounded the corner, his towering figure filling the hallway with the heat of his flames as his eyes zeroed in on Izuku.

So this was the hero 'patrolling' the halls he was told about.

He almost preferred the villains.

“There you are” The hero said, and Izuku couldn't help shivering at the knowledge he had been looking for him. “I saw your fight against that purple kid”
“He has a name” Izuku muttered, unable to keep quiet. The short exchange of words he'd had with Endeavor during their first meeting had erased what little respect he'd had for the man.

Endeavor pretended he didn't hear him. “I thought you were quirkless. That's the word on the streets from all those loose-lipped newbie heroes” He shook his head. “Doesn't matter. What you did out there just now, that was some incredible display of power with just a flick of your finger” He pointed directly at Izuku's face, hand a hairbreadth's away from touching his nose. “I'd even say it's on par with All Might's in strength”

Izuku huffed, slapping the hand away. “That's ridiculous. It's a coincidence” He turned around to walk around Endeavor. “I have to get going”

“If this power of yours is the real deal, then beating you will be a fine test for my Shouto” The hero commented offhandedly. “I expect you to put up a good show against him”

“Show?” Izuku stopped, whispering the word to himself. “A show?” He asked again, louder this time for the man to hear him. “You talk about your own son as if his life was just following a script you set out for him”

Endeavor actually looked proud of the comment, a snide little smile pulling at the corner of his mouth. “It's his destiny to become the greatest hero in history. I'm just helping him follow the right steps”

“Your steps, I'd bet?”

The tone of Izuku's voice had turned so bitter it had actually made Endeavor turn around to stare at the boy. “I can hardly think of a better path to follow” He said. “He will surpass me, surpass All Might! I've made sure his entire life led to this moment”

“Right, but I'm not All Might” Izuku answered, still with his back towards the hero. How could it be possible to have such similar conversations with both father and son, yet with such a different energy behind them? “And Todoroki isn't you”

He didn't turn around nor wait for an answer before moving on, towards the arena, the public at the ready and waiting for him.
“It's your power, isn't it?!”

Izuku's hoarse scream managed to make its way across the entire stadium, echoing against the icy walls littering the ring and reaching Todoroki on the other side with a clarity that resonated into his very bones.

Frost covering half of his body and breath nothing but a misty whisper coming from his mouth, Todoroki could only stare at Izuku. His hand was a mangled, purple and bloody mess after breaking every single one of his fingers to fend off his attacks. Was this the first time he used his quirk this way? This overwhelming power he'd felt in the previous event, that made him instinctively lit his fire as a last defense recourse?

It was as if Izuku was holding back, refusing to actually jump in and attack. With the show he was putting and the skill everyone knew he had, Todoroki knew the fight would've been over in a minute if he'd actually gone all out as soon as they started. Now, even when Todoroki was frozen in place in shock, Izuku hadn't made a single move to take advantage of the moment to take him out. He was just staring, panting from pain and exhaustion as his arms hung limp at his sides. The few blows Izuku had dealt had been brutal enough on their own that his clothes were in tatters, the infamous tattoos covering his forearms taking some of the brunt of it as well.

“Must be funny” Izuku continued. “The quirkless kid gets a quirk, and has to break his arms to even be a match to you”

Todoroki's eyes widened. He tried to scramble away but his back met with the icy wall he'd set behind himself to avoid falling out of bounds. “No” He breathed out.
Izuku stopped, swaying in place. His ankle was twisted from having been caught by a frozen wave before. “Then give me your all!” He shouted. “Prove to me you're not tied to him!”

The public started whispering among themselves, wondering what was going on between them, who or what they were talking about. Among the stands, halfway down the stairs, the number two hero narrowed his eyes.

“SHOW ME WHO YOU ARE!”

Todoroki felt, if it weren't for the flames licking at his skin and turning the frostbite covering him into steam, that he might've ha a tear or two sliding down his cheeks.

Instead, he did what he hadn't done in as long as he could remember, and listened to someone else. He burst into movement and dashed forward, a quivery smile on his face.

And then, the place went up in flames.

Izuku didn't remember at what point he was carried off to the infirmary, only that upon opening his eyes he came face to face with the worry twisting his parents' faces.

“Izuku!” Inko cried, almost throwing herself at him before remembering at the last second to hold back least she wanted to break Izuku further. “Oh baby, look at you” She whispered, covering her mouth with her hands.

Chiyo shook her head, tapping her pen against the clipboard holding Izuku's medical chart and X-Rays. “It's no good. The bones in his right arm are shattered” She said, just calm enough to not send Izuku into a panic. “I can set them straight, but there's some fragments that need to be removed. It's going to be tough”

Toshinori tsked, looking away. He had many things he would've liked to say, but none of them were right for the situation, at least at this moment. He shouldn't have given him the quirk so soon.
He should've trained Izuku harder before the festival. Should've straight up forbid him from using it in any event; he'd done so well the first two on his own, why couldn't he have gone that way in the last?

But that wasn't something he could say with a clean conscience.

Truth was, he was proud. Damn proud of his boy, of what he'd accomplished today. Of what he'd done for his friend back there during the fight, even if no one else among the crowd realized what had just transpired between them.

He knew if he tried to tell Izuku he regretted anything of what had happened, his son wouldn't forgive him that easy.

The door slammed open and Tenya and Uraraka spilled in, Tsuyu and Shouta close behind.

Tenya practically flew across the room, skidding to a halt next to his bed. “Izuku! Oh god, what was all that?!”

Izuku gurgled something that might've been words, but the pain was too much for him to actually try and get his tongue moving.

“I don't think he can answer you right now, kero” Tsuyu pointed out, calmly walking up to the bed as well, Uraraka latched onto her arm as she looked in concern at the casts covering his arms.

Toshinori wanted to step aside and let the kids try to talk to Izuku, but a slap to the back of his head stopped his retreat.

Shouta was standing behind him, the patented frown he had specifically for him firm in place. “Don't think I won't blame you for this”

Toshinori gulped. “Wouldn't be the only one” He said, subconsciously patting at the scar on his side. Was it the curse of this quirk to tear its users apart, or was it just that the users all had this inherent heroic streak that made them forget their own fragile humanity?
Shouta glared at him a few more seconds before sighing. “Whatever. Figuring out who's to blame here won't un-break his arms”

Chiyo nodded. “And it won't make his surgery go by any faster”

“Surgery?!”

“You kids need to stop screaming! This is a hospital!”

As Recovery Girl herded the visitors out of the room, Izuku's grumbles got the attention of the leftover adults in the room.

“'m sorry” He managed to get out, eyes shut in pain as if every breath was the biggest effort he had ever made. Chiyo had only talked about his arms so far, but it was very likely he also had busted some ribs with the way the last explosion sent him crashing into the wall. “Guess I'm not...very good at this...yet”

Inko carefully reached to run her hand through his hair, barely daring to touch him as if a mere graze of her fingers would break him like a glass vase on the verge of the table. “You did so well honey” She reassured him. “Was that your friend? I heard what you told him” She smiled, or as best as she could with how her lips trembled. “I don't understand everything that happened there but...he seemed happy”

Izuku cracked open an eye, a slit of green finding her face. “Really?” He smiled a little, shivering in discomfort.

Chiyo stepped in and took Inko's free hand, slowly pulling her away. “I must start working on him now, I'll call you back when I'm done”

Inko nodded, leaning down to place a last, feather-light kiss on her son's forehead before following the heroine to the door.

Toshinori looked at Izuku for a moment more. “Wanting to help everyone, even at the cost of your own well-being and though it wasn't asked of you” He sighed. “I would call you an idiot, but that attitude is what makes a hero the most”
“You would know” Shouta said. “Guess the first impression you gave him left a mark, huh?”

Toshinori huffed a laugh, remembering that day as clear as if it had been yesterday. This very same boy, but so small he fit in the palms of his hands, tiny and weak and so, so happy to see him before passing out.

Shouta wouldn't know, but the mark Izuku left in him that very same moment was just as strong, if not more. The capacity to dump all his love and dedication to someone so dear in his life with the kind of intensity he hadn't felt since his master had passed.

“Alright, I let you play coy for long enough” Chiyo clapped her hands. “Out with you two as well!”

“Oh come on--”

“No, no, no Eraserhead, you're not staying! Don't think I don't know how worried you are. I'll let you in when he's ready. Go back to the festival and do your job”

“Zashi is the one who has to be there--”

“And I'm sending you off as well! Out of my office!”

And with a metaphorical kick to both their asses, both of Izuku's main self-proclaimed guardians were thrown out of the room by an old lady the size of a peanut.

“We should let her train Izuku” Shouta commented offhandedly, shoving his hands in his pockets and walking away.

Chapter End Notes

i wont delve into the subplot of OfA and the other users since it has no point in this story, and it doesnt really affect the plot so i'll just--shove it aside
when i said 'no broken bones here, no ma'am', i was mostly talking about broken bones under toshi's training. i DID say todoroki was gonna get izuku emotional enough for it though ksdjfkdsdjf

also, this starts and ends the sports festival arc!!! you already know what comes next :DDDDDDDDD
Chapter Notes

this chapter is a bit shorter but i wanted to post something

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Stain looked around the bar-turned-lair, noticing how despite the impeccable cleanliness and order of the place there was still something dark and suffocating crawling in the corners, making the space feel smaller than it really was. Being used to running through alleys and rooftops as he hunted his prey, he didn't really want to stay in this hole for much longer.

He stared forward at the man who had called him in—or more like the boy. He looked way too young to be pulling him aside just like that without fear of repercussions. “So, I'm here like you asked. Tell me what you want so I can leave already”

Shigaraki tapped a couple of fingers on the edge of the stool he was sitting on, his other fisted hand serving as a resting spot for his head as he looked curiously at the Hero Killer. “Sorry to interrupt your tour so suddenly. You were heading for Hosu next, right?” He stood from his seat and walked towards the other villain at a leisurely pace, shoulders hunching in a terrible posture as he went. “I wanted to ask you some things about your work”

“My work?” Stain snorted. “I'm a man on a mission, not some salary-man working a desk job”

Shigaraki waved him off. “Whatever you call it. I've seen the news, followed you as they did” He said. “You seem really good at finding and getting rid of heroes”

“Those weren't heroes” Stain snapped, tongue lolling out and hanging in all its incredible length before curling up to lick at his own cheek. “Impostors claiming a title they don't deserve”

“Hmm” Shigaraki reached into his pocket, fumbling for a bit to find what he was looking for. “If you feel that way, maybe you could help me with my own target” He pulled out a piece of paper, revealing the picture on it. “Have you heard of this kid?”

Stain stared at the picture of the green haired boy for all of a second before switching his gaze back to Shigaraki, not letting his guard down for long enough since the other, misty villain was standing
by behind the bar's counter, despite not having done anything yet. Stain didn't trust like that. “Of
course I have. He's the kid All Might rescued” He let his eyes slide to the screen behind Shigaraki,
turned on and set to a blinding white as the person on the other side listened in on the conversation.
“From you, if I have to guess?”

The static from the screen broke with a hum for a second, letting them know All for One was very
attentive at his words. And not very happy about them.

“I want your help killing him” Shigaraki said. “He's a bit of a thorn in our side as long as he's free
out there, but at the state the League is in right now, and how much security they have on him at
all times, it's impossible for us right now”

Stain snorted a laugh. He pulled a knife out from its sheath and twirled it around a couple of times.
“I don't kill civilians, kiddo. Maybe if you call me in a few years when he's actually trying to play
hero I will consider your offer and judge him properly” He changed his grip on the knife to plunge
it on the counter in one swift move, half of the blade buried deep in the wood.

Kurogiri narrowed his yellow eyes at him.

Stain didn't seem to notice the stare. “I've lost enough time here, you might have cost me my latest
target” He turned around and headed for the door. “I came here out of curiosity, but if this is the
kind of thing you need me for then don't bother calling again”

As he was about to reach for the handle, a new portal appeared right on top of it, making his hand
phase through instead of getting a grip on it. Immediately after he heard the familiar sound of a
knife cutting through the air.

He dodged in time for the blade he'd left stuck on the counter to dig itself deep into the wood of the
door right in the place his head had been in a second before.

Turning around, Stain was ready to rip into Shigaraki with his remaining weapons, but he found
the teen looking at the bartender, an unreadable expression on his face as it was covered by a
severed hand. Kurogiri was now glaring metaphorical daggers at Stain, cleaning a glass with more
force than it required but not enough to break it.

Stain looked at Kurogiri, then back at where the knife was sticking out of the door it had been
thrown at with deadly precision, the back at Kurogiri. His tongue peeked out and poked were his
nose would have been had he still had one.

“Alright, I guess I can at least hear you out” Stain drawled, dragging his feet back to the counter as he leaned on it. “Can I borrow your bathroom first though? Not much of it when running from the cops”

Shigaraki pointed at the door behind him, still baffled at what he just saw Kurogiri do. “Second door to the left”

“Right. I'll be back and you can tell me what you want me to do” Stain then leaned further, getting into Kurogiri's space. “And then you can tell me where you learned to throw like that” He winked, pushing himself off the counter and whistling as he disappeared through the door.

Kurogiri started wiping down the place the knife had been stabbed in with the rag he'd been using on the glass, as if he could make the gash disappear through rage alone.

Shigaraki stared at him a moment longer before speaking. “Was he hitting on you, just now?”

Kurogiri grumbled, rubbing harder at the slash on the wood. “I hate vigilantes so much”

All for One's laugh on the background was the only thing he got as an answer.

“So I didn't get any offers?”

Shouta hummed, going through the list once more. He had holed himself up in the Midoriya household for the evening, the Hello Kitty mug Izuku kept in the kitchen specifically for him holding his coffee nearby. “I'm afraid not. It seems everyone was either too scared about how willingly you busted up your arms on the fight with Todoroki, or they know a strong villain is after you and didn't want to run the risk”
Izuku sighed, falling back on the couch, his legs dangling over the armrest. “I guess it's better that way; I wouldn't want people to get in the crossfire if something happened”

Inko walked up to the couch Izuku was laying on, lifting his legs to sit in the place they were strewn over and setting them back down on her lap. “It's alright baby, you did great and you should be proud of what you've achieved this far”

“I am, I really am, it's just...” He tapped his fingers on his chest, staring up at the ceiling. “…I guess I'm kinda sad no one wanted to train me”

“You have plenty of volunteers here if you want to try” Shouta said. “Not me though, I'm busy”

Izuku blinked, springing to his feet—careful to not hit his mother with his legs—and bouncing up to Shouta. “No way” He gasped, eyes shining as if he'd just forgotten his own sadness over this new development. “You actually made an offer this time?!”

Shouta grinned, pushing Izuku away by planting his entire hand on his face. “You shouldn't be so happy about me training someone else, you know”

“But you never pick anyone!”

“No one has ever needed it before” Shouta picked up his cup from the table to gulp at what was left of his coffee. “Shinsou could use the help with the more physical part of heroic work”

Izuku sounded like a little teapot now, a squeal so high pitched Shouta was getting worried about the windows of the house and their crackability.

“Well, before you pass out from screaming, how about we go over who can take you up for the internship” Shouta said, pulling out a notepad and pen from the depths of his scarf. “However, I will warn you right now that whoever takes you up after that show in the festival has to be as batshit crazy as you”

“Shouta!” Inko chastised him. “Mind your language inside the house, you know the rules”
As Izuku pulled back a chair to sit next to the teacher at the table, the door slammed open, followed by a shout that was cut halfway through by a wet cough.

Toshinori halted on his way in, stopping to get his breathing back in check as blood spurted from his mouth and dripped down his once white shirt. With the ease of someone used to years of this, he took off the stained shirt and dumped it in a bin by the entrance filled with all the equally soiled garments of that week that would go through a deep cleanse later on. He pulled a clean one from the highest shelf of the little dresser next to the shoe rack and put it on before stepping into the living room.

“Izuku, my boy!” He finally got out, slamming his hands on the table. A single piece of paper crumbled beneath them. “You got an offer!”

Izuku’s chair screeched as he pushed it back to stand and reach his father as he handed him the sheet. A single line was written on it, clearly a hero name but curiously enough one that he’d never heard before. “Gran Torino? Who's that?”

Toshinori cleared his throat, scratching the back of his neck as cold sweat started making its way down his face. “He's...my old teacher” He gulped, frame shaking slightly. “The one who taught me to use One for All”

There was silence for a moment before Shouta snorted. “See?” He smiled, resting his face on his hand. “Totally batshit”

“Shouta!”

“Sorry ma'am”
“Gran Torino? No, never heard of him before” Tenya said.

Izuku hummed, tapping his pen against the open page of his notebook.

The page was almost blank save for the name on top, ready for him to jot down everything he could find about this unknown hero that had decided to take him under his wing for a few days to train him in the proper way to use his quirk. Izuku wanted to think he'd been doing good so far, with his fight against Todoroki being the first time he'd actually gotten hurt. Maybe Gran Torino thought he did that all the time and wanted to make sure Izuku wasn't misusing his power? From what little his father had told him he sounded like a tough teacher, a no-nonsense man who wasn't scared of beating you up senseless as long as it meant getting you to go all out on your training.

Well, he was kinda used to it with Shouta already. Maybe it wouldn't be that bad.

“Is he the hero who made an offer for you?” Tenya asked, a worried frown on his face. “And are you sure he's of trust?”

“My dad knows him, so it should be fine”

Tenya nodded, mouthing a little ‘ah’ of understanding. Clearly if All Might thought this hero was good enough then they didn't have to worry about him being a spy or someone looking to sell Izuku out to All for One.

“Why does your dad know an obscure hero?” A voice from across the table asked.

Ah yes, Izuku almost forgot.

Todoroki had taken to sitting with them at lunch after the festival, approaching Izuku before class and asking him if his injuries were better. He looked really worried and guilty as he looked down at Izuku's scarred hand, but Izuku assured him Recovery Girl had finished fixing him up after his little surgery.

That had apparently been the wrong thing to say, since Todoroki had not previously known about Izuku's medical procedure. He'd, to put it mildly, freaked out.
He had been almost stuck to his side since then, asking if they could train or study together, joining their little trio at their table during lunch. Izuku could not be more delighted of having a new friend to add to the list.

“Ah, he's worked with a lot of heroes in the past” Izuku quickly shot out. “I guess since he's been at it as an assistant for so long he's known heroes from before we were born that are not as popular anymore”

Todoroki tilted his head, considering it as he slurped the last of his soba. “I guess that makes sense”

“So you're going out again to meet this hero, Deku-kun?” Uraraka asked, leaning forward from where she was sitting in front of Izuku to be eye-level with him. She was almost steaming from how pumped her own internship with Gunhead would go.

Izuku pursed his lips, swirling his chopsticks around in the leftover broth of his lunch. “I...I don't know” He stared deep into the soup, as if it held the secret answers to all his predicaments. “After what happened last time...I don't feel ready to go back out just yet”

“But you have your quirk now” Todoroki said. “ Doesn't that count to make you feel safer?”

“Todoroki-kun” Tenya cut him off quickly, frowning. “Whether or not he has a quirk is neither here nor there. We can't presume to understand what or how Izuku feels about this. We shouldn't assume we know anything about his situation that he hasn't told us himself”

Izuku laid his hand on Tenya's shoulder. “Tenya, it's okay—”

Surprisingly enough, it was Todoroki who answered this time. “It's not. Iida is right; it's not my place to pretend to know how you feel” He met Izuku's wide eyes. “I'm sorry. I made such a fuss before about you not understanding my own reasons for the things I do, and now I'm doing the same to you”

The remaining three stared at him in silence, not knowing how to react. Maybe they didn't expect him to admit his wrongs so easily, considering the rather standoffish behavior he acted with towards everyone before he befriended Izuku.
Izuku realized he had remained quiet for way too long. “I-I...” He didn't know what to say. He wanted to say it was alright, but it really wasn't. Truth was, Todoroki's casual comment about his having a quirk had actually hurt a bit. It was a fight he had with himself often enough in private, how inadequate he felt even with the massive power he now wielded, with how his fears held him back from going all out. He felt he could only accept Todoroki’s apology, which he knew was sincere. “Thank you”

“I'll think my words better from now on” Todoroki nodded. “It's the least I can do, after all you've done for me”

Uraraka let out a little impressed whistle. “Oooh, did something happen here?” She asked, pointing her finger at Izuku and Todoroki.

“We just talked” Todoroki said simply, and left it at that. But there was a conspiring glint in his eyes as they met Izuku's.

Izuku bit his lip, trying to keep in his smile. “Yeah, just talked”

Uraraka huffed, crossing her arms across her chest. “Alright then, keep your secrets”

After lunch was over, Shouta gave them the next hour of class as a period for them to gather up all their doubts about the internships to bring to him, and left them be for a few minutes so they could gather whatever they wanted to bring up to him.

The first one to approach him was Izuku, not even five whole minutes after he'd sat down.

“I was expecting you” He said, already looking for Izuku's internship application among the pile of papers on his desk. “I assume you've had time to think over what you want to do with your mentor?”

“That's kinda the problem” Izuku said, tapping his fingertips together. “I don't know how feasible this whole internship thing is gonna be for me”

“Hmm?”
“It's just” He struggled to find his words. “I'm...I don't feel...ready”

Shouta leaned back on his chair, considering him. “'Ready' how? You don't want to use your quirk?”

“Why does everyone bring up my quirk?” Izuku huffed. “It's not that, it's me” He lowered his voice to not be heard over the chaos of his classmates behind him. “I don't want to leave UA yet. Not again, not so soon”

Shouta frowned, leaning into Izuku's space to make the conversation a bit more private. “Izuku, are you alright?” He asked. “We can talk this further after school if you need to. Have you talked to Saya about this?”

“I did” Izuku said. “She said I should do whatever makes me more comfortable, since it's still so soon after the villain attack and another shock like that could put me in danger if I'm in the wrong place” He sighed, rubbing his arms in an attempt at comforting himself. “I don't need to think it through any more than I've already have. I've decided it. If I have to leave UA to do the internship, then I'd rather just not do it”

Shouta looked at him in silence, something in his eyes making Izuku want to squirm in place. He felt like he was being dissected by that stare, as if Shouta was trying to pull his mind apart to find exactly how to fix this problem. The hero finally sighed, setting Izuku's application aside and nodding.

“Alright. I see what you mean” He waved his hand, shooing Izuku off. “You can go back to your seat. Keep your mind busy until class lets out. Maybe help the others with what they might want to ask me”

Izuku nodded, slinking away to his desk. Shouta subtly pulled his phone out of his pocket and shot a quick text before any student could see him and give him shit for not enforcing one of his own classroom rules of no cellphones. He just had to wait the answer.

He could not just let this fly.
When Izuku woke up that weekend to the sound of incessant knocking on the door in the morning, his first thought was who the hell could be bothering so damn early.

He dragged his feet across the floor, yawning as he made his way to the entrance. His parents' bedroom door was closed shut and they were at that age where they could ignore most noises for the sake of sleep, so it fell on Izuku to answer the door.

He wondered who it could be. Shouta and Hizashi were usually asleep after their long night shifts, and Nezu didn't bother them without previous notice. Maybe Tenya wanting to bring him out for a surprise training session?

He opened the door, and blinked when he came in front of...nothing. Was he still asleep? Did he dream the noise?

“You looked taller on TV”

He jumped at the sudden voice coming out of nowhere, and then he realized that 'nowhere' was right in front of him, just way lower than where his eyes were looking at.

An old man in a garish yellow hero suit was staring up at him, his cane holding him up as he wobbled a bit in place. “Who are you?” He asked, tilting his head and looking a bit not-all-there.

Izuku immediately felt panic rise in his chest. Was this man lost? Did he need to call someone? What could he do! “I-I'm...”

“Heh?” The old man said. “What was that?”

The soft swoosh of a door opening behind him got Izuku's attention, the sound of slippers sliding against the carpeted floor getting closer. He recognized his father's yawn as he approached, likely woken up by Izuku's voice. “Is everything alright, kiddo?” Toshinori said, blearily opening an eye to see who Izuku was talking to. “Shit!” He shouted in English, jumping back and nearly falling to the floor as he stepped on his own slipper. “What the hell!”

The old man huffed, hitting the ground with his cane once. He seemed suddenly way more stable
and alert than how he seemed when it was only Izuku in the room. “I see you're as rude as ever, Toshinori”

Izuku looked at them, wondering just what was he missing from this interaction. “Uh...I take it you know who this is, dad?”

Toshinori sighed, rubbing between his eyes in exhaustion. It was too early for this. “Please come in, I'll go change”

“If you're not already up you've lost half the day!” The old man said, making his way into the house at a brisk pace. “Though I guess I shouldn't be surprised; I knew the married life would make you soft” He poked Toshinori's abdomen with his cane. “Or I guess not. You've lost some weight, huh?”

Izuku closed the door, trying to make his messy bed-hair look presentable after the comment on being up early. “Is anyone gonna tell me what's going on now?”

Toshinori motioned for Izuku to come closer, wrapping an arm around him. “Izuku, this is Gran Torino, the hero who made you the offer for an internship”

Izuku gaped at him, then looked at Gran Torino, then back at his father. “Eh?”

Gran Torino hummed. “Are you sure he's not yours? He's as eloquent as you were at that age”

“Is everything alright out here?” Inko asked as she walked out of her room, having taken the time since Toshinori got up to get dressed.

Gran Torino nodded. “At least someone here is ready for the day! It's nice to finally meet you, Midoriya-san, I'm Sorahiko” He greeted her, offering his hand for her to shake.

She accepted it, offering him a welcoming smile. “Oh, so you're the Sorahiko I've heard so much about from Toshi? Please make yourself comfortable, I'll bring you some tea” She guided him to take a seat at the table, walking around the counter for the kettle. “I'll be honest, I was expecting to meet you at the wedding”
“I was thankful for the invitation, but and old geezer like me isn't fit for those parties anymore” He said as he took a seat, his short little legs kicking the air like a toddler waiting for his ice cream.

Inko hummed, flitting around the kitchen before she noticed her boys still standing stupefied by the door. “Well? Aren't you boys going to get dressed up?”

Father and son mumbled something in tandem, gesturing vaguely as they shuffled down the hall and into their respective rooms, the sound of a shower starting soon after.

Sorahiko chuckled as Inko joined him on the table with their cups and a plate of cookies, thanking her for the tea as he sighed, his eyes getting a faraway look. “I'm glad he's doing well. He looks happy”

Inko smiled as well, playing with the ring on her finger. “I'm happy if he's happy. He's done a lot for me and Izuku” She sighed happily, relaxing as she picked up a cookie to dunk on her tea, a habit she'd gotten from her husband. “I'm really lucky to have him”

“And he to have you, I'd bet”

When Izuku and Toshinori came back in record time, Sorahiko's attitude changed from the calm and polite he'd been with Inko to the merciless mentor Toshinori remembered that haunted his nightmares, shouting a quick goodbye to Inko as he dragged the boys outside with him.

They reached gym gamma in no time, the empty space perfect to do whatever Gran Torino wanted to do to test Izuku's prowess.

Izuku stumbled as he tried to follow the hero, in disbelief at just how fast he actually was. “I-I don't understand, I wasn't going to do the internship, I told Shouta I wasn't ready to go out again”

“And that's why I brought the internship to you!” Gran Torino said, throwing his cane away as he started stretching. “Young people like you have too much free time in their hands nowadays, I came here to keep you busy”

"Shouta texted me your concerns about not being able to do your internship, so I called Gran Torino and he offered to come spend the week with us to train you” Toshinori explained. “Please don't go too hard on him, he's just starting to get a feel for One for All” He pleaded, already
looking scared for his son's well-being.

That didn't reassure Izuku at all.

“I'll go as hard as I need to!” Gran Torino claimed loudly, hands on his hips as he stared up them. “Now son, let me get something out of the way first’

Izuku gulped. “Y-Yes?”

The hero let the silence stretch around them before speaking up. “What's your name?”

Izuku blinked, confused. “Midoriya Izuku”

“No!” Gran Torino said, and immediately after Izuku was eating his shoe.

He didn't even see the moment the hero moved, he was so fast. He could feel the weird texture of the sole of his shoe on his face and wondered if it had something to do with it.

Gran Torino jumped away and was once again out of sight, flying through the air and ricocheting off the walls at such speed Izuku could only chase his afterimage. There was a kick to his side and he was off again. Kick to his back. Kick to his leg. Kick, kick, kick, and Gran Torino could not be caught.

“Tell me your name!” He shouted as he flew by Izuku's head, slapping the crown of his green mop as he passed by.

“It's Izuku! What else do you want!” Izuku protested, letting One for All envelop his body as he made a run for it, trying to keep up with the old man and avoid his attacks.

Gran Torino stopped long enough for Izuku to pinpoint him, stuck to a wall as his fingers dug into the concrete with more ease that it should be possible. “You're going to be a hero, kid! I want to know whose name I have to remember!”
Izuku staggered as he heard the words, giving Gran Torino the chance to jump off again and bounce around him with renewed speed. “Deku! It's Deku!”

Sorahiko stopped dead in his tracks, looking as if he hadn't moved from his starting position at all. “Deku? Seriously, that's your hero name?”

Izuku nodded, wiping the sweat off his brow.

He'd gotten the same reaction from everyone in and out of class after he decided that was the name he wanted. It had been interesting to see the different reactions it earned him. Surprised glances from Tenya and Uraraka, curious ones from Shouta and Nemuri, an indescribable look on Bakugou's face that Izuku would try to dissect without results. It was almost blank, but there was something in the twist of his mouth and the glint of his eyes that told Izuku he wanted to be angry about it, but was just as confused as the rest at his choice.

Truth was, Izuku had chosen the mean nickname he'd been given for a very simple reason, one that he found out had been behind most events in his life. Turning something bad into something good.

Having lived a happy and peaceful life at UA, Izuku wasn't really ever exposed to negative interactions with anyone in over a decade, and so the first encounter he had with Bakugou during his middle school years had marked him deeply as the realization hit him that there were people out there capable of more than just smiles and hugs and unconditional support. The nickname had also ripped a hole into his confidence that had healed over time, but never completely closed; it had hit too on the nose that time, with him being quirkless and trying to ignore how useless he felt about it.

But then Uraraka had turned it into a friendly name, something he could hear without feeling his heart twist in his chest, and with his ever increasing group of friends reassuring him having no quirk wasn't a bad thing and how well he was keeping up with them he soon started feeling his confidence rise with time.

He had chosen Deku as his hero name, because he wanted it as a reminder than every weakness had its strength.

“Huh” Gran Torino said. “A bit unorthodox, but I think it'll do” He got into the proper stance again, legs firm on the ground and cape billowing behind him. “Now let's see if we can turn you into a proper hero, let's go!”
Izuku dodged the first attack, and soon enough was off himself, matching his speed as best as he could.

Toshinori stared from the sidelines, watching the blurry forms of his mentor and his son chasing each other around, and thought this was shaping up to be a good week for them all.

“Remember, we'll let you in, but after that you're on your own”

Stain grunted, trying his best to ignore Shigaraki and focus on the mission at hand. He could see the school’s main building from the rooftop of the building they were on. “Yeah yeah, just go in, find the kid, get out. Got it”

“We haven't tried to get inside UA yet because that annoyance All Might lives in there, but since you have no problem facing him we'll be leaving this to you” Shigaraki added. “Whether you make it out alive or not, I don't care. Just make sure to get the brat and finish him off”

Kurogiri lifted a hand and opened a portal big enough for Stain to step through. “This will drop you off in the forest for better coverage. Afterwards you must find your own exit”

Stain stepped up to the portal checking his blades one last time before getting in. He stopped halfway through to face Kurogiri. “Hope I'll see you soon, then. I still want to know more about you” He grinned letting his tongue poke out before disappearing into the portal.

Kurogiri closed it with a violent snap behind him, wiping his hand on his vest as if the mere contact of his portal with Stain left a mark on his skin. “Jackass”

“Aw, I think you'd look cute together” Shigaraki teased.

Kurogiri crossed his arms. “Just for that comment you're walking back”
tensei my love you will be safe with me

that whole,,,,, THING with stain hitting on kurogiri sjdsgjshdf it wasnt planned it literally just happened like first i know stain stabs the bar's counter and then kurogiri is throwing him the knife back and i was like oh shit stain would so bust a nut for that hsdgfjshd (nothing is gonna happen with them tho im just taking the piss, it's a fanfic i wanna have some fun)

i dont know if the whole reason why i let izuku chose his hero name was good enough, i just really wanted him to keep deku as his name but since katsuki is not his childhood friend here i had to find another way to sneak it in, and the concept of replacing bad things with good ones is a recurring theme in this story so i wanted to aim for that.

i know stain is an ex-vigilante but i imagine with his philosophy he still counts as one for full time villains

as always inko is the only one in this house always at the ready, shame on you boys
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

I canNOT be happy with this chapter but it's been too long since I last updated so uuuuh L for me I guess

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Being a lonely kid living in a lonely world, Izuku was never quite warned of the dangers of walking on his own at night.

Training with Gran Torino proved to be way more difficult than he expected because, as it turned out, it didn't matter if you had the strength of a thousand gods at your disposal when you couldn't reach what you wanted to punch. Gran Torino would bounce around the walls like a pinball ball and occasionally kick him in the face if he decided Izuku wasn't putting enough of an effort. One of those kicks had eventually busted his nose hard enough to make him bleed, and Toshinori had halted the day's training so Izuku could go get it fixed up.

It was supposed to be a short trip, just a walk around the gym to the bathrooms nearby to wash off and then come back. No one thought he would need to be accompanied for the five minutes it would take.

Shouta would've killed them on the spot had he been there to witness that decision, but it seemed great heroes shared a single brain cell, and none of them had been on their turn with it when it happened.

Izuku was just two steps away from the bathroom door when he heard the voice come from behind him.

“That's a nasty hit you got there”

He wasn't fast enough turning around before something warm and slimy swiped at his face, and the next second he was paralyzed, quite literally dropping to the floor like a rock as the silent figure approached him from the dark.

“Don't worry, this won't take long”
Now if you asked Chizome, he would tell you he thought this job would've been harder.

He had spent a few hours hidden in a tree, planning the different ways he could go about snatching the kid away from his guards. He had no problem fighting off a few heroes, but the only ones he saw with the kid were a little old man playing dress-up, a skeletal blonde guy towering over everyone else, and the nice looking green haired woman talking cheerfully to them before she went her own way.

He thought they had more security around the place and more heroes inside the building they were in, that they would come out together as a group and he'd need to create a distraction to separate them--

When the kid walked out of the gym, all on his own.

And he was already bleeding, too. It's like they wanted him to be kidnapped.

He picked up the paralyzed boy and made his way through the brush, silent as a cat as he scanned the area. Shigaraki had told him of some of the old, unused buildings in the school grounds he'd gotten information about during their first infiltration. He spotted one of them and calmly walked to it, letting the door open effortlessly as he made his way in.

It seemed to be some sort of storage room, empty shelves lining the walls and layers of thick dust and cobwebs wherever his eyes fell. The floor was plain concrete so he had half a mind to be careful when lowering the boy to the ground. He pulled a heavy-looking set of massive, metal box handcuffs and locked them around Izuku's wrists, caging his hands in. “Just in case, they warned me you were pretty strong” He commented casually. “I took them from Shigaraki’s hideout when I took the chance to snoop around a bit. They look like they can withstand a nuclear bomb. Wonder why they had them around”

He hadn't trashed around, petrified as he was by his quirk, but they always retained the capacity to talk, so he'd wrapped one of his scarves around his mouth like a makeshift gag just in case. He had tried to scream out for help at first, but his voice could not be heard through the fabric and they were far enough from the gym that no one would hear him. It had been a good while since then,
too, so it was very likely they already had the search for him on the go.

“You're a bit of a celebrity, I hear” Stain said, leaning against a wall and crossing his arms, staring at Izuku as he lay still on the floor. He'd stopped trying to make noise a while ago and was now just staring at him, a mask of determination trying to cover the fear in his eyes. It was failing. “Not quite what I expected you to look like”

Izuku kept watching him, eyes following him as Stain started to walk around the room.

“Now don't get me wrong” He said. “I'm a hero killer. Nowadays anyone thinks they can just put on a mask and pretend to be one. I take care of showing them the truth” He stopped in front of Izuku's face, squatting to be more at his level. “That's not what I'm here for, though. I was asked to come, find you, and eliminate you once and for all”

Izuku wanted to move, try to squirm around and find a way out, but he was completely paralyzed, the only movement he was capable of was the blinking of his eyes and the useless attempts of his gagged mouth to produce words. Was this it? Was it all going to end just like that, after years of hiding away to protect him; killed for a stupid mistake in his own backyard?

Stain sighed, standing up without laying a finger on him. Izuku was awfully conscious of how the paralysis prevented him from properly expanding his ribs, feeling his lungs burn as his body wanted to hyperventilate but without being able to accommodate. He tried to relax as he watched the retreating back of the villain, thinking that, at least for now, he didn't seem too keen on finishing the job just yet.

“This place is awfully dirty” Stain said, dragging a finger on one of the shelves. “You'd think a bunch of heroes would be more careful with keeping track of things under their care”

Izuku felt he wasn't just talking about the dust.

Turning around once more, the villain wiped his finger on his clothes absentmindedly, approaching Izuku again. This time he sat down fully in front of him, cross-legged and hunching forward to loom over him. “Hey kid, you want to be a hero, don't you?”

Izuku didn't know how he expected him to answer.
Stain seemed to realize it as well. “On your honor as a wannabe hero, if I let you talk, will you hear me out before calling for help? I don't have much time before I'm found out anyway. Blink once for yes, two for no”

What did he mean by that? Wasn't he going to kill him? He was all defenseless and ready to be disposed of, and this guy wanted to talk?

Izuku was a smart kid, but he also was a curious guy. He blinked once.

Stain took out the gag from his mouth and Izuku smacked his lips, trying to get rid of the awful feeling it left on his tongue.

“Alright, before you start screaming, I'm not gonna kill you” Stain clarified. “I told those guys I don't kill children or civilians and I meant it”

Izuku still had to force his voice through some strain the villain's quirk put on his body. “Then...why...?”

Stain shrugged. “I was curious” He said. “You're known well enough, but no one outside of heroes really know what's your deal. Why they keep you here” He leaned forward even more, red eyes focusing on his face, sharp as his daggers. “Why All Might of all people is your own little bodyguard”

Izuku gulped. Was he going after his dad after all? He couldn't have chosen a worst moment. Weak and quirkless, he was rapidly losing whatever leftover strength he had left as the weeks passed.

“The only true hero in the world has decided you're worth keeping an eye on, and I, for one, want to know why” His tongue lolled out, absently licking at the stump left where his nose used to be. “What makes you so special that the worst of all villains wants a little kid dead so much?”

Izuku felt his breathing turn a bit easier, and belatedly realized he could feel tingles on the tip of his fingers. Was this man's quirk losing effect? “I-I don't know either” He grunted, eyes locked with the villain's as they had nowhere else to focus on. “No one...knows”

Stain hummed, tapping his chin. He could tell the kid wasn't lying, but that answer just didn't satisfy his need for information. He had accepted to hear Shigaraki out on a whim, only actually
agreeing to carry on the job when they mentioned to him if he got rid of the kid, it was pretty much secured All Might would go after him, maybe even kill him for his troubles. The idea was tempting, but he had a moral code that he abided by; it would be terribly hypocritical of him to kill someone without motive just to lure out the hero.

“Why do you want to be a hero?” He finally asked.

Izuku blinked up at him, confusion clear on his face.

“I could very well just get some work done ahead of time” He explained. “Weeding out the fakes before they make their way through the ranks, trying to take All Might's spotlight. Whether you are worthy of being kept alive or not, I will be the judge of it, right now” He pulled out a hunting knife from one of his many sheaths, casually throwing it up and catching it by the handle each time without even looking. “Speak”

Now, Izuku knew he didn't owe this man anything. There was no way of knowing if he was just playing cat and mouse with him and just wanted to have some fun and lull him into a false sense of security before delivering the final blow. He also had no way of knowing if his answer would actually save him. He could feel his body slowly regain mobility, but not fast enough to activate All for One and break free from the cuffs. The space they were in was also too small for him to dodge if the villain decided to attack him back once he activated his quirk, and he was clearly more experienced.

That only left him one choice, really.

“I-I want to be a hero” He started. “Because I know...what it feels like”

“Hmm? What 'what' feels like?” Stain urged him on, attentive to his words.

Izuku gulped, his throat hurt from the effort. “Being...helpless” He breathed out through his nose, grounding himself. “To be hurt, not knowing what will happen next...waiting and...laying still so they don't see you...so they don't harm you...” His eyes stared far into the distance, unfocused as memories blurred through the corners of his mind. “Knowing you can do nothing else but wait to be saved...I know what it feels like...and I don't want others to feel like that”

A hint of a smirk pulled at the corner of Stain's mouth.
“A hero’s job is to help people, even when they don’t ask for it” Izuku continued, his voice turning surer as he went on. “Not everyone can call out for help, not everyone wants to, even when they need it” He said. “A great hero always knows when to help, and does so without question”

Stain sat back, hands behind him as he leaned away, the knife thankfully put away from Izuku as well. “Ah, seems I can't do it after all” He said, but didn't sound disappointed at all. He was even smiling, a distorted grin splitting his face. “I thought you would be a spoiled brat, wanting to be a hero just for fame and money like all the rest, but it seems you've got a good head on your shoulders” He hummed. “Must be from growing up around All Might”

_He wasn't the only one raising me_, Izuku wanted to say. He didn't like how this man talked about heroes, deciding by himself who was the real deal or not. What about Hizashi, who was a celebrity on his own right but was one of the most hard-working, selfless heroes he knew? What about Nezu, who was known world-wide for being the only animal with a quirk and who held a lot of power from his position, but faced backlash and discrimination just for what he was? And Shouta, who was by all means exactly what Stain classified as a true hero, even more so than All Might by virtue of completely avoiding the media and forgoing all popularity, but wasn't considered by the villain precisely because he was too underground for him to even know about?

Izuku felt his body move before his mind had time to catch up with it, sitting up shakily under the considering gaze of the villain.

“Ah” Stain said casually. “You must be type O” He stood up as well, patting the dust that had settled on his clothes. “Pity we can't keep this going for a bit longer. Talking with you is really entertaining, kiddo” He pulled out a katana with his free hand, swapping the knife he was already carrying for a longer dagger as well. “But it seems we've finally run out of time”

Right as he said that, the wall holding the door was smashed in, crumbling to pieces as the muscled and irate form of All Might burst in, Gran Torino hot on his heels with Shouta by his side.

“There you are” Was all Toshinori growled out, before he jumped.

Izuku couldn't say he knew how the fight went, as he was picked up by Shouta and dropped back to the gym were Inko and Nezu were waiting before he went back to help fight the villain. Nezu had
managed to unlock the shackles, and Inko had wrapped him in her arms as soon as he was free. She was like a vice around him, warm and soft but secure and unyielding; nothing like the frozen helplessness of Stain's quirk holding him down.

He let himself melt in his mother's embrace just as the severity of the situation finally sunk in. He had been kidnapped, again. Taken away from his caretakers' sight by someone who could've killed him had he not given the appropriate answer. There hadn't been a cage, or a hulking monster with penetrating yellow eyes staring at him through the dark. No one who woke something deep in his memory and made his skin crawl.

Just a man, and a knife.


Everything could've been over so fast, just like that.

When the ambulance took the unconscious, battered from of Stain out of UA and towards the maximum security prison they would hold him in, Izuku was safe and sound at home, the shock of it all just settling in as his mother refused to separate from his side. Toshinori, Shouta and everyone else involved in the case had gone to an emergency meeting as soon as Naomasa had arrived, not wanting to stress Izuku out any further with the inevitable yelling that would ensue from the fact this all happened right under their noses.

Inko didn't release her hold on him for hours, both sitting there in silence as they replayed the events of the day over and over again. In the corners of their minds they were vaguely aware of multiple shadows walking by the windows in constant vigilance; every pro hero in the staff not privy to the secrets in the reunion was posted around the house.

Izuku remembered how it all had been going so well, how much fun he was having with training, when all of a sudden it all got turned upside down and it would've been over if not for the frankly incomprehensible mindset of the villain. How he had been on the verge of a panic attack right then and there from the feeling of his body not responding to his brain's orders to move. It was somehow worse than a cage, something constricting and intangible wrapping him up tight and leaving him at the mercy of the villain. He barely managed to stay conscious through it all, the burning in his lungs and adrenaline shooting through his bloodstream forcing him to stay wide awake as he waited his fate.

Inko thought about how it was just a regular day for her, going about her chores and planning her classes for the week when suddenly Nezu came for her, taking her with him to the gym as a
prevention while he explained to her Izuku had gone missing and they were searching for him. How dread had settled in her very soul, cold and heavy while she could only wait for them to bring her baby back safe and sound.

Right now, just holding him in her arms was enough.

None of them realized it had gotten dark until the door creaked open, snapping them out of their trance as Inko jumped to her feet, standing in front of Izuku. She let her tense shoulders drop when she saw Toshinori carefully making his way inside.

He hurried in, grabbing her hand and pulling her along as he dropped to sit next to Izuku, gathering both of them in his arms; an easy feat with how small they were against his long limbs.

“Are you alright?” He asked them, his hold almost crushing but somehow careful at the same time. “I'm so sorry I had to leave you alone like that, it was an emergency and I tried to get out earlier but--”

“Toshi, it's alright” Inko interrupted him. “We're fine. We didn't go anywhere”

Izuku squirmed in his hold. “W-What's happening now?” He asked.

Toshinori sighed. “Shouta tried to rip what organs I have left out, for once” He laughed humorlessly. “I don't blame him. I should've been more careful, should've gone with you”

“That doesn't matter now” Izuku mumbled, looking at the floor. “You all looked so...angry when you went with Nezu. What happened there?”

“There was...a lot of shouting” Toshinori said, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “No one could decide what to do, now that we know they actually can get inside, just didn't do it before for some reason” He sighed once more, sinking into the backrest. “We all reached the same conclusion though; it doesn't matter what we do or where you are or who is with you, we cannot keep you completely safe”

Izuku gulped. The carpet looked awfully interesting all of a sudden.
“We didn't want to take any big decisions without you there, but it's agreed that the way you're going right now is the best one. Train and train and train until you can fend for yourself in case we're not there to help”

“So I just” Izuku said, shrugging one shoulder. “Keep going”

Toshinori ruffled his hair. “Pretty much, yeah”

“Oh boys” Inko muttered. She rested her head on her husband's shoulder, reaching her hand to hold Izuku's. It really spoke of how deep in his thoughts he was, that he had not reached to hold theirs yet as was his custom.

Izuku squeezed her hand once before abruptly standing up. It was all too much. He needed his space for a moment. “I'll go to bed now, I'm...I'm really tired”

His parents shared a surprised look before slowly nodding, standing up as well to give him a last crushing hug each before he went to his room.

Throughout the years, Izuku had accumulated a number of hero merch, but as any kid, he also had regular toys. Multitudes of stuffed animals and hero-themed plushies were strewn around his room, resting on shelves or placed in a specific order over his pillows. He went around gathering all of them and throwing them haphazardly to his bed. When he was done, he pulled the curtains of his only window closed tight and shut the gaps by sticking them to the wall with tape. He lied in bed and buried himself in the toys, making sure not a single inch of his body wasn't surrounded.

He just couldn't lay still if he wasn't completely blocked to the open air right now.

No weak spots.

To the silence of the night and the soft shine of his nightlight, he fell asleep.
He couldn't tell what time it was when he woke up, but it must have been either really late, or really early. He could hear frogs croaking outside his window, and no light was visible through the fabric of the curtain.

He could, however, tell what woke him up.

Behind his closed door there were voices. Quiet, but loud enough he could hear them through the wood.

He sat up, stuffed animals cascading down his body and to the floor. He was silent as his bare feet touched the floor, foregoing slippers in case he tripped and gave himself away. He took a few steadying breaths before turning off his nightlight, blinking rapidly to get used to the darkness surrounding him. He gulped as he put a hand over his mouth as he tried not to hyperventilate, reaching around for anything that could help calm him. His hand came in contact with one of his figurines and he grabbed it firmly, the round form of Fatgum comforting him as he padded around the darkness. The soft carpet beneath his bare feet in place of cold, sterile tiles helped ground him and remind he was fine, he was safe.

His door miraculously cracked open an inch without creaking, no light breaking apart the stillness of his room as the house was drowned in darkness. He couldn't see into the living room from the end of the hallway where his room was located, but that also meant they couldn't see him.

Carefully stepping over the carpet, he managed to get close enough to listen without being noticed.

“I just don't understand” He could hear his mother's soft voice. “I can't even imagine what this is all about”

“That's what we're working on” Toshinori said, his voice soft as he tried to calm her down. “It's taken us this long because he's really good at covering his footsteps, but there isn't a single day we're not following his trail”

“But why!” Inko cried out, voice breaking on the last word before she covered her mouth, realizing how loud she was being. It didn't even matter, Izuku thought, he was already wide awake.

For a moment there was only the sound of her deep breathing evening out, and the rustle of her robe as Toshinori rubbed her back soothingly.
“I can't stand it anymore” She finally spoke. “Years of hiding, of pretending everything is alright for Izuku's sake—I just want him to have a normal life! This is not his fault, he shouldn't have to suffer for it!”

“It's not your fault either” Toshinori replied. “It's no one's fault but his”

“But when will it end?!” She whispered, almost a screech with how high her voice turned. “Every time it seems everything is finally fine, under control, every time it looks like Izuku can start a new stage in his life something happens!” She sniffled, wiping away stubborn tears. “He finally has friends and a quirk, and is training to become a hero! And just when things start looking up he, they--” A shaky inhale. “Villains coming from everywhere! Trying to get him for something he doesn't even know what it is!”

Izuku took a deep breath himself, unused to the sound of his mother's voice filled with sorrow. They were a family of crybabies, it was in their genes; but every time they cried like this it was usually out of overwhelming joy or the usual levels of worry a mother feels when her son is fighting friend and foe every day.

Never like this.

“I'm just so tired” She whispered, her voice muffled as if her face was buried against her husband's chest. “He doesn't deserve this...I-I don't deserve this either” She sighed. “I haven't seen my parents in so long...”

“I'm so sorry love” Toshinori muttered just as quietly. “If I had been stronger, I would've gotten rid of him that very first day”

“It's not your fault either” She shushed him. “You said it yourself; it's only that man's fault”

There was silence once more, just the ticking of the clock on the kitchen wall breaking the deafening quiet of the night. Izuku carefully turned around to go back to his room, only having taken a couple of steps before he heard his mother's voice for the last time.

“I just want us to be free”
Her words made him pause, turning to his parents' bedroom in a spontaneous move. Their door had been left wide open—most likely his dad following after his mom after she went to the living room to order her thoughts, her stress-induced insomnia coming back from the recent events—and Izuku was nimble enough to snatch his dad's phone from the bedside table before any of them even moved. It was at times like this he cursed the fact his phone could only reach the pre-approved ones that remained inside UA. He'd just make sure to return it after he was done; he had the feeling his parents would spend quite some more time sitting out there together, talking the night away.

With the soft click of his own bedroom door closing behind him, Izuku hurried to turn his nightlight on again, fumbling with the borrowed phone for the contact list. Hoping the caller ID with his father's photo would not deter the recipient of the call and, disregarding what time of the night it might be, he hit the call button and brought the phone to his ear, pacing around as he waited.

Finally after what felt like forever, a groggy voice on the other end answered.

“'llo?”

“Tsuchi’” Izuku sighed relieved. “Can we talk?”

“And this is all there is on the case?”

Naomasa nodded, dumping the last of the folders on the table. Nezu jumped on the piece of furniture, humming as he walked through the piles of papers towering over him in their stacks.

When Izuku had requested Naomasa to meet him at UA the next day—after waking him up at ungodly hours of the night—the detective had agreed, but made it very clear he could not keep it a secret from Nezu, since he was aware of every person in the property and would likely incur his particular brand of wrath on Naomasa should he try to keep secrets from him.

And no one wanted that, right?
Izuku had let his parents know he'd spend the day with Nezu in his office to have a quiet day in after the events of the day before. They were rightfully concerned, of course, but understood that at times like these, Izuku needed his own space to breathe and gather himself. They didn't know Naomasa was here, nor what Izuku had asked him in the dead of night after hearing their emotional talk.

“I still don't understand what you're trying to get from all this” Naomasa said, gesturing over the numerous files filling the table. “Most of those papers are from when the case was just beginning. Many trails dried up a long time ago and the new ones are the ones connected to the League, so they're fairly new. There's really not much you don't already know”

“But I've never been allowed to go through the whole thing. Dad doesn't let me” Izuku argued.

“That's for your own good” Nezu said. “You often say yourself that you don't remember much of your time in the lab, other than what you were feeling. I'm sure your parents only want to keep you away from unsavory memories”

“Well, I'm having a pretty unsavory present right now” Izuku grumbled, picking up a random folder. Before he could open it, however, it was snatched out of his hands. “Hey!”

“They're right, you know” Nezu said, folder in paw. “I have no problem in letting you go through the case if you want to, but I'll read over everything first and write you summaries so you can go into them better prepared”

Izuku blinked at the principal, falling back into his seat. “Oh...that makes sense...thanks”

Nezu only smiled, eyes glinting as he sat down on the other end of the couch to start reading.

“Well, all this reading will probably keep him busy for all of twenty minutes, so let's talk a bit, you and I” Naomasa said, and Izuku couldn't help his laugh. Nezu was an awfully fast reader. Naomasa pulled closer the eternal tea tray sitting in the middle of the table and dragged it closer, setting up two cups for them. “So, mind telling me what brought all this up?”
Izuku accepted the cup, twisting it this way and that and peering at it as if the tea would tell him what to say. “Uh, I’d rather not” He took a long gulp to pace himself, almost burning his nose in the process. “It’s...kinda private”

Naomasa raised his hands. “Alright, I won’t intrude. But I have to know this; whatever you find here, are you planning on doing something with it?” His face had turned dead serious now, and Izuku knew whatever he said right now would be dissected with his Truth Detector.

He sighed. “I don't know” He said sincerely. “I just...everything is happening so fast, but at the same time...” He looked off to the side, out the window to the seemingly never ending grounds of the school. If he tried hard enough, he could see his mother's empty classroom from here. “It's like nothing's moving forward. Like we're stagnant here, waiting for the next big thing to happen”

Naomasa hummed, sloshing his own drink around the cup.

“I don't know what I'm looking for, exactly” Izuku continued. “I just know I want to make sure nothing's escaping us, something that could help us find All for One and end this at last” He looked Naomasa in the eye. Faintly, he noticed Nezu's ear was also pointed his direction, despite his eyes scanning lightning fast over what had to be his tenth folder. “I can't promise I won't do something reckless. I'm sorry”

The detective sighed, downing his cup in one go before standing up. “Alright then. If you're gonna do something that'll make your mother skin me alive, let's at least do it right” He turned towards Nezu, picking up the first folder with its summary already written and stuck on top. He handed it to Izuku with a smile. “Let's get to work, kiddo”

“Oh, can I help?”

Izuku and Naomasa jumped in surprise from the new voice coming out of nowhere.

Nezu didn't even raise his head.

“Good morning, Sorahiko” He said casually, writing his notes at the speed of light. “Took you long enough. Age catching up already?”

Gran Torino, dressed in civilian clothes but with what seemed like custom made dress shoes to
accommodate his quirk, laughed heartily and tapped the floor noisily with his cane. “Look who's talking! You have to be the oldest rat alive”

Nezu nodded. “Second only to your bitch ass”

Izuku, who had been politely finishing his cup of tea, spit everything in his mouth plus a bit of his soul.

Nezu kept his smile on without missing a bit, a clear message of 'no one will ever believe you' in his eyes. Naomasa sighed deeply and rubbed his eyes, exhausted already.

Sorahiko burst into an even bigger chortle. “Ah, I missed this” He plopped down next to the principal, picking up one of the finished folders and leafing through it. “So, what's the plan? We hiding things from your old man now?”

Izuku stammered, trying to speak through his coughs and the uncomfortable feeling of quickly cooling tea drenching his shirt. “I-It's not like that!” He said. “I just don't want to worry him or mom any more than they do”

Sorahiko hummed, throwing the folder back on the table with a flick of his wrist. “Don't think that's possible, kiddo” He settled more comfortably, his cane resting on his knees. Izuku's eyes were drawn to the holes in the soles of his shoes. “But I'm with you”

“Eh? Really?” Izuku blinked. “You're not...gonna tell them what I'm doing?”

“Pffft, of course not” Sorahiko waved his concerns off. “Had it been any other situation, then maybe. But you have to remember why I even bothered to come all the way here; you are the wielder of One for All now. I'm here to make sure you can properly use it to protect people and yourself, it doesn't really help me to keep you in your little shell” He patted the spot next to him, gesturing for Izuku to sit down. “Well then, let's not lose anymore time! Pick your poison, boy”

Izuku complied, sitting down and choosing the folder with the oldest date, planning to go through it all in order so as to not miss anything. He read over the summary Nezu had prepared on top of the cover, and swallowed down a lump in his throat at the mention of the months of search the heroes and police department had conducted with little to no progress until the accidental finding of the hideout by Ragdoll. A little foot note mentioned this archive included many transcriptions of interviews and discussions Naomasa had had with Inko, and Izuku almost felt like an intruder at
the idea of delving into such a vulnerable stage of his mother's life.

“If you have any questions, I'm right here” Naomasa's voice startled him from his thoughts. “I remember pretty much everything really well, so if you get lost or too overwhelmed and need me to go around the facts in a way it won't bother you as much, you just need to ask”

Izuku nodded. “Thanks, Tsuchi. But I'll try on my own for now”

Naomasa smiled at him, encouraging him before setting himself up at Nezu's desk with his laptop to keep busy.

With the rhythmic sound of Nezu's pen scratching on paper and Gran Torino reading what he picked up at random, Izuku took a deep breath to steel himself, and opened the file to the first page.

Chapter End Notes

Alright, I know, no big fight for Stain BUT!!! I never planned for him to have one because his fight was mostly because Tenya, and Tenya was completely because Tensei, and like I said Tensei is safe with me hagsdfhagsd. I pulled him out of Hosu before he could lay waste to my boy so there was no need. Also the reason Stain was mostly chill is he wasn't in Hero Killer Mode, just asked to kill some kid he had no intention of hurting in the first place. He just REALLY wanted to fight All Might and Izuku was the surest way.

I realised a while back I had never given Inko the chance to release what's bothering her and I wanted to give her some time on the spotlight so there, midnight talk. Originally it was gonna be during the day so she could really let loose and they just didn't know Izuku was home but it didn't seem Dramatiqué enough so.

Nezu: "I'm rude now"

lmao

Also that little nod to the handcuffs at the beginning (Stain stole them when he went to the "bathroom" at the bar lol), y'all know which ones they are.

OH!!!! before I forget: reading this over again I realized I said, when Inko first pitches the idea of Home Econ, that Nezu mentions having 1-A and 1-B share the class. I had completely forgotten about that, so I went back to chapter 13 and added it. Not much change, just both classes mingling a bit, if you wanna go back at some point.
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

today's chapter was brought to you by italicization and the overuse of ellipsis
extra long because im a busy bitch and wanted to make it up to you

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku felt a bit bad with the fact he was spending valuable time just sitting around reading when he knew his classmates were out there with their chosen heroes, training and earning experience with the kind of real life situations they would face once they graduated. Having his tutor next to him being supportive of his last-minute decision helped a lot in calming his mind, but what truly made him put his thoughts at ease was the fact he was digesting so much information at once, everything else was automatically put in the back burner.

He knew there was little he would find among the mountain of papers that Naomasa wouldn't already know, but his curiosity felt like a gaping maw needing to be fed, and finally having what he craved within his grasp was keeping his mind in one track.

Reading the files proved to be more time consuming than Izuku thought, particularly because every time he hit a paragraph describing the facilities or remnants of the “research” instruments, he would slam the folder shut and throw it across the room, papers flying as it sailed through the air. Naomasa would casually pick them back up while Nezu helped Izuku calm down, talking him through the panic attack that would leave him curled into a ball with his knees drawn up to his chest, head tucked against his chest and hands clutching at his hair as he mumbled nonsense. It was just necessary to talk to him constantly about anything that came to mind and helped ground him; his parents, school work, his friends. He would eventually come out of it on his own, a bit disoriented but already reaching for the documents once more.

Time flew by and Nezu got up and disappeared through the door before coming back a while later with a sizable bag. Izuku only registered it fully when a bento box was shove under his nose. Naomasa snatched what he was reading from his hands and banned him from picking up anything else until he'd eaten.

“And if you just inhale that to get it back faster I’m putting you on time out” Naomasa threatened, making his point further by dragging the entire table away from Izuku.

So he sat there and ate his food, but made it very obvious he would rather be doing anything else.
Gran Torino, from the perfect place to get all of Izuku's frowning and pouting, sneakily snapped a few photos for safekeeping when they could talk to his parents about this little secret investigation they were running behind their backs.

It was a good thing they had so many files to get through, as it had given Izuku enough time to digest as much of his lunch as he could by the time he reached the last ones.

Seeing the folder in particular Izuku was reaching for, its pages carefully separated and classified with colored post-its along the edges, Naomasa quietly got up and picked up the waste bin sitting by Nezu's desk, bringing it with him as he sat down next to Izuku, who was looking paler and paler as he read through the summary on the cover. Naomasa heard him audibly swallow before getting on with it, carefully reading each line as he approached the most complicated subject.

Naomasa knew the moment he'd reached the page describing the findings about the exams run on the USJ Nomu, as Izuku gagged a couple of times before finally putting down the document, covering his mouth with both hands and looking around with eyes wide in distress.

Naomasa quietly handed him the bin and rubbed his back in comfort as Izuku returned what little was left of his lunch.

"Your mother had the same reaction" He said, accepting the bottle of water Gran Torino handed him wordlessly. "I guess there's not really an easy way to tell you this kind of thing"

Izuku gasped, wrinkling his nose as he set the bin down least the bitter smell of his own vomit made him sicker. He took the bottle from Naomasa and gulped the water greedily, desperately trying to wash out the acid taste of bile from his mouth.

"If you want" Naomasa continued. "You could stop now. That was the most recent one and you pretty much already know the rest" He smiled reassuringly at Izuku, taking in the bags under his eyes and the trembling of his mouth from the leftover sensation of throwing up. "You don't have to push yourself so hard"

Izuku looked like he wanted to protest, but his throat was still sore and ended up coughing into his hand. He sighed and nodded, slumping back on the couch.

Naomasa stood up and started picking up the folders, bringing them back to the boxes waiting for
them on Nezu's desk. “Do you have any questions, before I drive back to the station?”

Izuku thought back on everything he'd learned today, clearing his throat as he tried to find his words. “Is...Is that all there is?”

“Yeah, it's all we could recover from the lab” Naomasa nodded. “There was a lot of information that was permanently lost when they started burning the place down during the rescue, but we had enough to build a base to work up from”

“So there's no info on why...why I was there?”

Naomasa sighed, placing the lid on the box. “Everything about the--” He stopped his train of thought, picking his next words carefully. Izuku knew, though, what he was trying to say. *Test subjects*. Not a good term to use considering two of the people in the room. Nezu was already eyeing him sharply. “The people in there, were one of the first things to be destroyed, including anything they had about you”

“As far as we know” Nezu joined in. “You were just a convenient target. A low risk person at the wrong time and place. All exams that were run on you at the hospital back then didn't reveal any anomaly”

Izuku stood up straighter. “B-But then why” He pushed up his sleeves, letting his arms on sight. The ink covering them was faded but still did its job of hiding the puncture wounds, with the bright new addition of long, jagged scars encompassing from the back of his right hand to halfway through the parrot tattooed there. “What were they doing to me?!“

“You were critically anemic by the time we got you” Naomasa said. “For all we know they were just taking blood from you”

“The Nomu seemed to be highly unstable, genetically speaking” Nezu said. His hands clasped and covering his mouth as he stared off into the distance from his desk chair. Seemed all this talk was also stirring something deep inside of him. “If I were in charge of that operation, I would try to eliminate all variables before trying for the final product. You might've just been a source of material for them to run tests on”

Izuku sighed deeply, rubbing his eyes. “I'm so tired”
Sorahiko jumped up from his spot, having chosen to remain silent. He hadn't been directly involved in the case back in the day, but had followed up closely after Toshinori had joined in, so he didn't feel it was his place to add to the exchange. “It's pretty late, kiddo, let's get you back home”

Izuku stood up sluggishly, picking up the waste bin on his way out. “I'll, uh, get you a new one, Nezu”

The principal waved him off. “Don't worry about it. The school budget will take care of that”

Sorahiko grabbed Izuku's elbow, softly pulling him along to get him going. They were almost to the door when Izuku stopped and turned around, zeroing in on Naomasa once more.

“So...there's really nothing more”

Naomasa smiled sadly, as if he was used to those same words swirling around his mind more often than he cared for. “If there was, you'd know by now”

Izuku held his gaze for a couple more seconds before finally nodding, turning around to leave. He bid goodbye to the detective and the principal, allowing himself to be lead by Gran Torino. It was a good thing there was a firm grip pulling him forward, because his thoughts were running and crashing all over his brain.

No more information, no further answers, nothing that could put him at peace.

All this had helped him reach a single, final conclusion. If he wanted a normal life for him and his family...

He had to get rid of All for One, once and for all.
Izuku was welcomed to the classroom by the raucous laughter of Sero and Kirishima. Upon setting his eyes on Bakugou's hair he understood, and had to hold in a snort himself. He looked extremely odd with his blond spikes tamed down in what he recognized as Best Jeanist signature style.

He quickly walked around them to avoid getting blasted in case Bakugou caught him almost laughing, and made his way to his own desk. Yaoyorozu next to him had her head down on the table, and Izuku would've thought she was sleeping if it wasn't extremely out of character for her.

"Yaoyorozu-san? Are you okay?" He asked her, poking her shoulder a couple of times.

She groaned, sitting up straight. "I'm fine Midoriya-san" She smiled, but it didn't quite reach her eyes. "It's just that my internship wasn't, ah, quite what I was expecting"

Izuku hummed. "Yeah, I know what you mean"

Tenya walked up to him, followed closely by Uraraka. Izuku noticed she looked as if she'd gone through a life-changing trip, her eyes unfocused and movements fluid with purpose.

"Izuku, how was your week?" Tenya asked him, trying to ignore Uraraka as she went through a few fighting poses, completely absorbed in her own thoughts.

Izuku breathed a little laugh at her antics, smiling at Tenya just the tiniest bit tiredly. "It was...enlightening, I guess you could say" He said. "How's Tensei?"

Tenya smiled wider this time, relaxing the usual squareness of his shoulders. "He's doing great, we spent the week patrolling Hosu and fighting off villains in public areas" He brought a hand to his chin, suddenly remembering something. "He told me when we started that he'd been following the trail of that villain who was attacking heroes in different cities, the Hero Killer" He didn't notice Izuku suddenly stiffening at the mention of the man. "But a few days later we got the news he'd been captured somewhere else, so he was left with a lot of free time to reschedule more patrols all of a sudden" He smiled at Izuku, who had managed to hide his previous reaction with a smile of his own. "He said he hopes you're doing alright"

"Ah, thank you. I'll have to talk to him when I get the chance" Izuku moved his attention to his other friend. "Uraraka-san, how was your internship?"

Uraraka stopped her motions, slowly turning to face him with her hands still in attack position. She
looked serene and terrifying all at once. “It was...how did you put it...? Enlightening”

Yaoyorozu laughed into her hand, looking happy that at least Uraraka seemed to have enjoyed her internship. “Gunhead, right?”

She nodded, striking a last pose so suddenly it made Tenya jump before going back to her normal attitude. “Yep! I learned so much”

“Excuse me” A voice behind her made her step aside quickly to clear the way, Todoroki nodding at her as he walked past to his desk. “Good morning”

He was answered by a choir of greetings back from the little group. His eyes strayed for a second to the hand Izuku had lifted in greeting, brandishing the scars he'd given him during their fight. Their eyes met for a tense moment before Izuku gave him a wide smile, meant to put all his leftover doubts at rest. Todoroki felt his shoulders slump in a sense of relief he didn't know he needed, and took his seat at the same moment Shouta entered the classroom.

“On your seats, now” He ordered, setting down his stack of papers for the day and ruffling through them as the stragglers shuffled to their places. “Alright, let's start with the pressing matters. But before that, I hope all of you had a productive week in your internships”

Yaoyorozu once more sighed and sunk her head on her desk, Bakugou opting to express his own frustrations with blowing up the pen in his hand.

Shouta kept going. “As you know, summer's almost here” A few started chattering excitedly among themselves until Shouta raised his hand. “Of course, there's no such thing as free time for a student in the hero course, so the usual for this time of the year is to go on a training camp to hone your abilities”

“Oh!”

“For real?!”

Shouta activated his quirk, easily managing to make Kaminari and Ashido go quiet. Once they settled down, he cleared his throat. “This year, however, we've come across some difficulties”
All the excitement previously running through the class froze immediately, the kids looking at each other with concern at the wording of their teacher.

“As you know” Shouta continued. “During our last outing this class was attacked by the so called 'League of Villains'. While not their primary target, all of you were put in a precarious situation where you were forced to defend yourselves in a way you were not prepared for. And despite the fact you all performed admirably, you're nowhere near ready to go through it again” His gaze swept across the room, taking in the faces of these students, these children looking at him with worry etched on their features. “Villains are unpredictable and single-minded, there might exist the possibility they will relate their previous defeat to you and try to attack again. We can't chance moving you too far away from where we can call for immediate help in case it came to it”

Tenya raised his hand. “But sensei, what will we do then? As you said, taking the entire summer off is a waste of valuable training time”

“I'm getting to that, Iida” Shouta assured him. “UA's grounds are extensive enough we can plan something. We'll be calling a team specialized in practical hero training and we'll set up the regular schedule right here”

“W-Wait a second” Uraraka stammered. “How much of the day does this take?”

“Since everything is planned out meticulously to fit a specific regime, we need you all to have not only the same training hours but also the same rest and meals” Shouta explained, looking for the sheets holding the schedule. “You'll have to be here for breakfast at around 7 a.m., and then activities will begin around 9 a.m.” He started walking around the room, leaving copies of the schedule on every desk. “Then is training, lunch, more training, dinner, and you can go home. Rinse and repeat”

As he set down the paper on Uraraka's desk, she turned pleading eyes on him. “B-But sensei, I live outside of town. It takes me too long to commute here every day as it is, I wouldn't be getting enough sleep” She read over the timetable. “Could it be possible to arrive and leave just for training time? I could have breakfast and dinner on the train”

Shouta stopped in his tracks, eyes looking into the distance as he thought her words over. “I see. It's a logical request” He went back to his desk. “I'll have a talk with the principal. Don't worry about it too much; we'll work something out” Uraraka sighed in relief, and Shouta went to the next order of business. “We also have the final exams coming, so obviously whoever doesn't pass them has to go to Summer School Hell to make up for it”
And just like that, he lost control of the classroom once more.

“You don't think I'm troubling Aizawa-sensei too much, do you?” Uraraka asked her friends as they sat down on their usual table at the cafeteria. She'd been feeling worried ever since she'd told their teacher about her concerns.

“I don't think so” Izuku reassured her. “He might look tough and rigid but Shouta is actually pretty good at accommodating requests if they have a good reason behind it”

“Yes, he's most likely thankful you told him so soon” Tenya nodded, carefully setting down his tray as squarely as possible in his chosen seat. “It wouldn't do if you didn't take advantage of training as much as everyone else from exerting yourself on missed sleep”

She sighed in relief. It was actually really calming to hear it coming from the two of her classmates who knew their teacher the best.

“During the internships he was very adamant on following a schedule so I could get home at a good hour” Shinsou added. “He's pretty cool, actually”

Izuku laughed, overjoyed at the idea of Shouta getting his true reputation spread among his classmates. That laugh soon turned into a hiss of pain, however, when something sharp and hard slammed into his head from behind.

“Oh, I'm sorry, your big head was on my way”

Izuku rubbed the back of his head where the tray had hit him, looking up at Monoma who had stopped there after very clearly hitting him on purpose.

“Monoma, what the hell?” Shinsou said, standing up from his seat to check on Izuku.
Monoma pursed his lips at him, but quickly went back to his haughty smile. “I heard this year's summer camp had to be moved to be held here at UA because of the villain attack at the USJ. Guess it wasn't enough to hoard all the winning spots in the sports festival, huh?”

“What are you talking about?! It's not like we asked to be attacked!” Uraraka shouted, slamming her hands on the table as she stood, quickly releasing her quirk as the table started to float, everyone's plates clattering as it fell.

“But it has brought so much attention to your little class, has it not? Must be nice” He hissed the last part. He addressed Izuku directly next. “You in particular, Midoriya. One would think you would be tired of being in the spotlight so often. Guess it's just not enough to be the heroes' favorite pet, is it?”

Izuku felt more and more people noticing the exchange, their eyes quickly finding him and staring as it went down. He felt his heart clench in his chest; he really didn't like feeling eyes on him. “No...of course no—”

“You want us to believe it's a coincidence, that everything happens wherever you are?” Monoma said, leaning into Izuku's space and making him feel smaller than he already was. “Are you enjoying all this, hm? Bet you were getting tired of having to share all the heroes' attention with the school. You must enjoy once again having all eyes on you—”

His words were cut short by a white ribbon wrapping around his body, holding him in a tight cocoon and lifting him off his feet right there in the middle of the cafeteria. His tray clattered loudly to the floor.

Footsteps echoed in the room, slow and purposeful. “You think it's funny?” Shouta said, walking closer with an aura that killed every single sound around. His red eyes locked onto Monoma's and his hair floating around him added weight to his words. “You think being attacked by villains, held hostage and having your life at stake is a joke?”

Monoma struggled in his binds, looking pained as the scarf wrapped tighter around him, enough to be uncomfortable but not enough to actually hurt him.

“I don't think you'd be saying the same had it been your class in there that day” Shouta kept going. “Would you be so sure of yourself in that situation? Would you be making the same smart comments?” He pulled on the capture weapon, bringing him down to be at eye level with him.
“Would you even be alive?”

“I-I...” Monoma tried to speak up, but he couldn't tell if his words were cut by the pressure on his chest, or the sharpness of Shouta's own words.

Shouta set him down contradictorily carefully, and let him go as the rest of the school looked on. “I'll ask you once more; do you think it's funny?”

He swallowed, looking at the floor. “N-No sir”

“Do you have something to say?”

Monoma looked at the members of class 1-A that were at the table he'd just antagonized. Everyone was standing up, looking shocked at the development. Izuku was the closest one, as if he'd tried to reach over and stop what Shouta was doing. “I...I'm sorry...”

Shouta looked at him for a second longer before sighing, deactivating his quirk and placing a hand on Monoma's shoulder. “Come on, I'll buy you another lunch”

Monoma just nodded and let himself be guided by the teacher, eyes on the floor.

As the noise in the room picked up after the show, Tenya carefully grabbed Izuku's arm and pulled him back towards the table. “Izuku, sit down”

Izuku let himself be dragged back to his seat, still a bit shell-shocked at how fast everything had happened. He wasn't that familiar with Monoma outside of seeing him occasionally during Home Econ as their classes shared that period, but he didn't expect that level of animosity against himself or the class out of absolutely nowhere.

“I don't understand what's his deal” Shinsou said. As the one usually paired off with Monoma during their common class he was the one who probably knew him the best of 1-A. “I'll have a talk with him later”

“T-That's not necessary, I'm sure he was just frustrated about the summer camp being moved over”
Izuku said placatingly. He didn't want to start fights among his friends.

“That doesn't mean he has the right to be so nasty” Uraraka huffed. “And he had it against you for no reason! It's not like it was your fault we got attacked”

“Midoriya’s just an easy target” Todoroki said surprisingly. He stared at Izuku from across the table. There was a suspicious scorch mark on the table right next to his left elbow. “You just so happen to be the most well known of us, so I guess he found you a convenient escape valve for his discontent”

Shinsou snorted. “Cool motive, still a jackass”

Izuku was quiet for the rest of lunch, and found that his stomach was feeling too heavy all of a sudden to finish his food, so he excused himself to use the rest of the period to take a walk outside. His classmates looked at him worriedly, but didn't object.

After the encounter with Stain, it had been deemed that they could drop the whole bodyguard issue inside UA, considering Izuku now had to learn to defend himself for anything that could happen, and it would only be deterring to him to have someone looking over his shoulder all the time when he could be using that chance to hone his own perceptiveness.

He sighed in relief as he stepped outside, taking off his jacket with the sun warming him quickly as he walked down the paths around the school. Many older students preferred to take their lunches in the gardens away from the noise of the cafeteria and also as a chance to get some fresh air and calm from the intensive training they underwent most days. Most of them waved as they saw him walk past, ignorant of what had just transpired moments ago that had set turmoil to Izuku's mind. He smiled and waved back, not letting his thoughts betray his smile.

Monoma's words sent his thought in a spiral of doubt. Was that how people thought of him? Did they actually believe he enjoyed being well-known? Did they think he enjoyed the reason he was famous?

Thus far, Izuku had only left UA to go to the disaster training, and even then all the people involved were ones he knew and trusted. They knew the real him. But, how would the actual public react to him when—if—he made it out there as a hero?

Stain came to mind. He'd thought at first Izuku only wanted to be a hero for fame and glory like
many others, that he was spoiled from his time living under the constant coddling of the pro heroes. Would people think that too? What if they didn't take him seriously as a hero because they thought he was handed everything out of favoritism, out of pity?

He stopped at a little piece of garden off the side of the path, sitting down on a boulder covered by so many vines it felt more like a pillow than a rock. He remembered playing here as a child, way before his parents got together as they all went out to let him get some air when he still couldn't fend for himself. He liked this place because it was quiet, peaceful and private.

And also, Monoma had been following him for a good while now. It was a good place to rest.

“Come on, you must be tired” Izuku turned around to face him, surprising Monoma who was starting to step behind a tree to keep his presence unknown.

Monoma gulped and hesitated before walking up to Izuku, joining him on the garden and settling down on the stone bench across the boulder Izuku was on. He looked around the place, at the blooming flowers, the bees flitting over them, the soft whisper of a stream nearby keeping the plants alive. He looked everywhere but at Izuku's face.

“Did you eat?” Izuku tried to make conversation. “I'm sorry Shouta dropped your tray”

“Shouta?” Monoma finally spoke, chancing a look at him.

Izuku stood up straight, catching his slight. “Uh, I mean, Aizawa-sensei. He got you another one, right?”

Monoma nodded. His fists were clenched on top of his knees. “...You must be close, to have come to your defense so fast”

Izuku bit his lip. “I mean, yeah. But I know he would've done that for anyone” He pursed his lips. “Well, maybe not the whole thing with” He gestured around his neck. “the scarf. But he always steps up to trouble”

Monoma breathed out a laugh. “Yeah, I could tell” There was a moment of silence. Izuku didn't feel like forcing conversation would work right now, and he didn't know what Monoma was thinking.
“Why did you follow me here?” He finally asked, deciding to just go straight to the point.

Monoma looked surprised at the direct question, and dragged a hand to his hair self-consciously. “I wanted...to apologize”

Izuku tilted his head. “But you already did”

Monoma shook his head. “Not like that” He sighed, slumping forward. “I didn't want you to think...that I only apologized because he told me to, in front of everyone” He locked eyes with Izuku. “I really am sorry”

Izuku mimicked his position, leaning forward and resting his arms on his knees. “Why are you sorry?”

Izuku was expecting his shocked face, but it was something he wanted to know. He'd learned through experience that people were truly sorry for their actions when they understood what they did wrong, and not just because they wanted to be forgiven. He had accepted many apologies from people who weren't really sorry, and he wanted to change that.

“I'm sorry” Monoma started. “for having said something so horrible to you” He rubbed the bridge of his nose. “I was looking forward to the summer camp since some upperclassmen told us about it weeks ago, and turns out we actually have to hold it here because of the villain attack, so I was mad”

“You have to understand that was not our fault though. It was not my fault”

“I know, I know” Monoma sighed. “I guess I thought, in a really messed up way, that since you're so famous you were used to taking that kind of comments, and I wanted to let out some steam”

Izuku wrinkled his nose. Todoroki had been right. “That's...really awful to think about a person, Monoma”

“That's why it's messed up, I know” Monoma agreed. “That's why I wanted to apologize again, in private. I wanted you to know I'm truly sorry, after I stopped to think about what I actually let out
“You should really work on thinking your words through beforehand” Izuku said. He hummed in thought. “You spend a lot of time with Shinsou-kun, right?”

Monoma blinked in surprise at the question. “Mostly in Home Econ, but yeah we talk sometimes. Why?”

“He has a similar problem” Izuku explained. “Since his quirk works better when he riles people up enough to answer him, he's used to making biting comments, so he doesn't always think things through and what he says ends up coming out ruder than he means to” He looked at Monoma meaningfully. “Maybe you two could help each other out in that aspect”

Monoma smiled, a tiny thing that didn't reach his eyes. “Yeah, maybe”

There was silence once again, and Izuku didn't think the chirping birds were making it any less uncomfortable.

“Do you know why the hero course is divided in classes A and B?” He suddenly blurted out. He really didn't like prolonged silences.

Monoma held a hand to his chest, right above where his heart almost jumped out from Izuku's outburst. “Uh, because class A is for the favorites?” He said, like it was obvious.

Izuku shook his head. “Everyone thinks that, but there's actually thought put behind it” He said. “Class A is for those with great quirks, but who don't have yet the maturity to properly use them. It's very common that kids with powerful quirks think they're too good already and don't train, so by the time they make it to UA they don't really have control over them. 1-A has always been given harder training because of the untapped potential of the students, and it's also why Aizawa-sensei is so harsh and expels so many; it's here where they realize if they're cut for the job or not, and he sees it before they do”

“Wouldn't it be better to give those a chance first before expelling them?”

“He thinks the entrance exam is enough chance. If you can make it in, you should know better already” Izuku shook his head. “There's also many cases where students do train all their lives to use their quirks, but even then their priorities are a bit skewed and need more guidance. They are
selected because they need to be balanced out by the proper teaching. I've seen it many times"

Monoma looked entranced by his words. “And what about class B?”

Izuku chuckled. “You should be proud to be there. Class B is the complete opposite; students who clearly have spent great time and effort in reaching their potential, those who have worked hard to get where they are and don't need so much advise as they need experience. You don't see it, but class B actually has much more practical training hours than class A. You're a force to be reckoned”

“But you said 1-A gets harder training”

“Quality, not quantity” Izuku clarified. “Often the practical classes are so harsh everyone needs a longer recovery period before the next one. For every practical class we have, you guys get three” He raised a finger, pulling out a little notebook from the pocket of his jacket, shuffling through the pages until he reached a specific one. He turned it around towards Monoma. Sekijirou’s drawing stared back from the page. “Take our teachers as example. Vlad King's quirk allows him to control his own blood to use as a weapon, correct?”

“Right”

“The thing is” Izuku continued. “he actually has a very peculiar kind of anemia, caused by an autoimmune disease that prevents his body from absorbing a particular vitamin. It's why his hair is white” He gestured vaguely at his own hair. “He has to take supplements and eat a lot of meat to make up for it. That's why he's so buff”

“I feel like you're telling me the secrets of the universe here” Monoma said in awe.

“He'll tell anyone who asks him, it's no biggie” He waved him off. “The thing is, since his quirk forces him to expel blood from his own body to be used, he has to act particularly fast to get the job done and get it back inside his body, or the toll plus his sickness will risk both lack of glucose and oxygen to the most vitals part of his body. He's had to deal with that drawback since the beginning, so he had to learn to work in the most effective way to become a successful hero, which is why he was made head of class 1-B”

“What about Eraserhead?”
“Oh, he was a disaster” Izuku covered his wide smile with a hand, looking around as if to make sure Shouta wasn't around to hear him. “Despite how good his quirk is, when he was moved to the hero course he had a lot of trouble finding a proper use for it, he was basically quirkless for the most part if you didn't count his scarf”

Monoma winced at the memory of said scarf squeezing him moments before.

Izuku smiled sympathetically. “It took him a lot of time and effort to finally learn how to use it to his advantage, mostly because he spent his first year in Gen Ed where there's no quirk training. He was really behind everyone else when it came to physical prowess as well. He learned to fight properly so he could have a chance when erasing enemies' quirks and bringing them down to his level. And look at him now”

Monoma tapped his chin in thought. Izuku really had a lot to say once you opened the correct tap. But it wasn't a bad thing. “Why do you think I was sent to class B?”

Izuku was ready for that. He leafed to another page of his notebook, where a basic sketch of Monoma lay along some information about his powers. “Your quirk needs you to work with others, right? I can tell you already know, but you have to be prepared for the off-chance that one day you might be fighting alone, so you've probably prepared a lot for it and are balanced well enough, you just need to get better at getting along with others for when the need arises to find a quirk to copy, so that’s the experience you need to work on. I don't know if you knew this, but I was a late bloomer; didn't get my quirk till just before the sports festival”

Monoma snapped back in surprise, almost falling off the bench. “So you were gonna go through the hero course completely quirkless?” He whispered, disbelief in his voice.

Izuku felt like he was being looked at under a completely new light all of a sudden. “Yeah, that was the plan” He laughed. “But as someone who had to learn to fight with no quirk I know how hard it is, and can imagine how it must feel, the idea of being so helpless in a situation where you have no other choice” He smiled. “Your efforts must've showed during the entrance exam for Vlad King to notice”

Monoma smiled. “Yeah, it took me a while to find someone to copy the quirk of; everyone was just running off or laughed at me when I asked”

“They must've seen you stand up for yourself all that time. It's always appreciated to see prospective students taking themselves seriously”
"So class A has experience but lacks maturity, and class B has maturity but lacks experience"

Monoma sighed, letting his head drop back to stare at the clear sky above them. “Why are you
telling me all this?”

Izuku shrugged. “I felt like you might've needed it”

And it seemed he really did. Or at least for the heroes jumping all over each other to get a clear
view from the teacher's lounge. Shouta was just ignoring how Nemuri was trying to use his
shoulders as leverage as she jumped to try and catch a glimpse from behind him.

They hadn't intended to keep an eye on Izuku, it just so happened that Hizashi caught sight of him
in the garden being followed by Monoma and alerted Shouta in case more trouble arouse after the
little show in the cafeteria. They decided to see how it all unfolded first as they saw Izuku inviting
the other boy to sit with him and started talking. If anything went sour they could just jump down
and hurry over.

As their chat progressed it was amazing to see how both of them visible lowered their defenses and
their body language, their postures becoming less tense and more trusting until it was only Izuku
mostly talking and Monoma leaning into his space, hanging onto every word earnestly.

“It's nice to see they're getting along at least” Sekijirou barked a laugh, planting a hand on Shouta's
shoulder with enough force to make him stumble.

Shouta grumbled but didn't bother removing his hand. “That's kind of Izuku's thing, isn't it? I don't
think he's realized yet the only reason our classes have even gotten along so many years is because
of him and his mother, not the class they're sharing”

“Is that why you two still fight so much? Since you didn't have the class when you were
babysitting?” Nemuri asked, somehow having managed to convince Hizashi to let her sit on his
shoulders to see the boys still in the garden.

“We don't fight” Sekijirou defended himself. “I just try to remind Aizawa my class is obviously
better in comparison”

“It's useless to try to compare classes when they're both still so new to hero business” Shouta
waved him off, turning around to go back to his napping corner. Hizashi took the chance to
unceremoniously dump Nemuri to the ground now that the spot next to the window had been vacated for her. “Besides” Shouta said. “you wish you had my kids to train. They're a riot”

“Ohoho! We'll see about that yet!”

Hizashi sighed contently, ignoring Nemuri as she stood up with a groan. “Brings back memories, doesn't it?”

Nemuri answered with a sucker punch to the gut.

“A-Against All Might?” Izuku stammered, feeling the eyes of his classmates and teachers on him at the announcement.

The only one not looking at him was Bakugou, seething as he was at having to be paired off with him to fight the hero for their practical exam.

“That's right” Shouta said. “You'll just have to try your best, I guess”

After that he kept listing off the students' team-ups and the heroes they'd be fighting, as if he hadn't given Izuku the shock of having to go against his own father in what would be a no holds barred battle.

He was so out of it, he didn't even realize his own feet were already moving on their own, making him follow All Might all the way to the bus taking him and Bakugou to the zone designated for their battle.

“It is expected you will work together to take me down today” His father's voice brought him back to earth. It was still so weird to hear him act louder than usual while in his muscled form. “So don't hold back! I know I won't!”
He laughed his boisterous laugh to set the mood, but was met with nothing but silence from his charges. Izuku was too busy wrapping his head around all this, and Bakugou was glaring at him as if he was planning the demise of whoever picked the teams.

Toshinori cleared his throat and guided them into the bus.

For professional reasons he wasn't allowed to sit near any of the them during the trip as to not seem he was showing favoritism, but when he turned around from his spot in the co-pilot seat to try and make casual conversation, he found both boys seating in completely opposite extremes of the bus. The atmosphere was already tense and Izuku was doing hand gestures as if he was riffling through his notebooks and taking notes while muttering a mile a minute, already trying to figure out how to get through this.

Toshinori turned back around and sighed. This was going to be a long day.

Upon arrival to the site, Toshinori left them alone for a few minutes so they could plan and get ready for their battle. He would've liked to sneak off to Recovery Girl's medical tent to sneak a peek at them through the cameras she had set up at her station, but Shouta had been very strict about the students having their privacy to gather themselves.

And Chiyo would most likely kick him out herself.

That woman really had it against him.

Back at the site, Izuku was doing his best to break through Bakugou’s barriers as they walked through the battle zone.

“Please, just stay still a minute! If we don't figure out what to do now we're gonna get our teeth bashed in!” Izuku pleaded, scrambling to match Bakugou's pace as he stomped his way through the empty streets.

He scoffed, waving him off with his grenade gauntlet. “I don't need a plan. It's all about how much damage you can do before you get damage yourself”

Izuku stopped dead in his tracks, looking bewildered. He picked up his half-jog to be at Bakugou's side. “Are you kidding me? This is hero training! We're not talking about dealing damage; we'll be
evaluated over how much structural damage we do and how mindful we are of our surroundings! We need a plan befo—"

He barely managed to dodge the gauntlet flying his way as Bakugou turned around to face him.

“Listen up, nerd, we're gonna make this clear right now” He hissed. “I don't care who you are, I don't care who the hell do you think you are. I'm doing this my way and that's final”

“What's your problem with me?” Izuku muttered, tapping the part of his cheek where the metal tip of the grenade had grazed his skin. “You've been like this since we met, and I haven't done anything to you!” He shouted, getting louder than he intended with the buildings echoing his voice and bringing it back to him. “I know you're not the kind who hates everyone just because. You get along just fine with Kirishima-kun, and Jirou-san, and a bunch of others as well! So there has to be something about me you don't like, and I'm not gonna stand here and let it ruin the exercise, so tell me!”

“Maybe I just don't like your face, how about that?” Bakugou said, not liking how Izuku was standing up to him.

“Please, I'm not an idiot” Izuku huffed. “And I know you're not one either. I've been enough at the shrink to know you've got some walls up for some reason”

“Who do you think you—”

“You don't have to spill your life story to me” Izuku interrupted him. “I just want to know what is it about me specifically that makes you so mad”

Bakugou stared at him, eyes blazing in anger that shone brighter against the black of his mask. He stalked forward like a cat on the prowl, shoulders swinging in a way it was meant to make him seem bigger by occupying more space.

He got up in Izuku’s face, looming over him as Izuku had to take a step back to look properly up at him. “I don't like you” He said. “because you're you”

Izuku barked an unbelieving laugh. “What? What does that even mean?”
“You know who you are” Bakugou continued. “You know everyone knows who you are. Everyone in the streets has your name in the tip of their tongues, heroes and civilians alike.”

“You can't blame me for that”

“No, but it's infuriating all the same” Bakugou brought a hand up, and Izuku almost thought he was trying to hit him again. Instead, the hand went to grasp Bakugou's own hair in exasperation. “Do you have any idea what it's like, having people use you as an example for everything we should aspire to be?”

Izuku was taken aback by that. “Example?”

“It has been going on ever since your rescue” Bakugou said. “I was just as old as you were, but I can remember everything. And so I can also remember everything that came after” He started counting on his fingers. “My parents, my teachers, patrolling heroes, clerks at stores. No one would shut up about you and how brave you were and how we should be like you” He laughed, turning around to keep walking away. “What do I care about some random kid dumb enough to get kidnapped? You're not brave for managing to survive that long, those villains were just dumb; a two year old can't do much other than cry and shit themselves in that situation” He didn't stop walking even when he didn't hear Izuku's footsteps following after him. “You were so hyped up by heroes as well, meeting you in person was just disappointing”

Suddenly a cloud of dust rose around him, and from it emerged Izuku, green lightning crackling around him as he jumped straight into Bakugou's face. Bakugou didn't have time to react before Izuku grabbed him by the front of his shirt and lifted him off the ground, taking a single leap towards the nearest building to press his back against the brick with a slam that was hard enough to get his point across without hurting him.

Izuku glared up at him, the red lines of energy crisscrossing his face giving him an edge he wouldn't normally possess. “Listen here” He muttered, dangerously soft. “I didn't ask anybody to talk about me. To use as example of anything. That's out of my control and I know you're smart enough to understand that”

He pressed him further into the wall, and Bakugou groaned as concrete scratched his shoulders.

“But what you're not going to do is try to pin the blame on me for what happened” The words leaving Izuku's mouth were now low, a growl similar in pitch to the grinding of the metal parts of
Bakugou's suit against the wall. “I try to live my life despite my past. I try to not let it get to me, but I can't escape it” His voice cracked on the last word, arms shaking as self-hatred started tainting his mind. God, he seriously didn't want to have this train of thought right at this moment. “I'll never grow more than this size because of it. I have to sleep with a nightlight on or I'll have nightmares or-or hallucinations. I have been outside once since then, and I almost died”

Bakugou stared wordlessly at him as Izuku let him go, his feet meeting the floor with a dull 'thud'. Izuku was breathing heavily, tears flowing down his cheeks

“But you know what the worst part is?” Izuku asked him in a whisper.

Bakugou shook his head, slowly.

Izuku took a moment to breathe deeply, putting himself together. “My mom has had to endure the same as me, with none of this being her fault” He said, clumsily trying to dry his eyes with his gloves. “She could be out there, living her life, making friends, visiting her family. But she can't, because the moment she steps outside they'll go after her because they know I'll go after them as well. She has no options in this. Not like me”

An alarm rang through the city, letting them know their time was up.

“I'm not asking you to be my friend” Izuku said through the siren. “I'm just asking you to not blow this up for us. This is getting us one step closer to being heroes, and I don't have time to waste”

He turned around and marched off, very much like Bakugou had done before.

Izuku was almost thinking Bakugou would go his own way after a while, but then he was by his side, catching up at matching his stride. Izuku looked at him, surprised.

“I was thinking we might have better luck if we overwhelm him” Bakugou started, looking ahead. “He might be fast but he can't multiply himself if we go at him from two sides”

If All Might hadn't appeared right then and there with his starting attack and effectively sidetracking them, Izuku might've smiled.
“Can't you hold yourself back for five minutes?!”

If every bone and muscle in Izuku's body wasn't in complete agony he would have been inclined to laugh at the rage Recovery Girl was raining down on his father.

Bakugou was laying passed out in the cot next to him, while he himself was lying belly down with a pillow holding him up to rest his lower back. He'd known as All Might his father wouldn't have held back but it exceeded all his expectations.

He was kind of embarrassed to admit he was a bit exhilarated at having fought him all-out like that.

“I'm sorry, I'm sorry!” Toshinori coughed, a drop of blood dribbling down his mouth. “I had to go hard enough to make it a challenge, you know how it is!”

“You almost broke your son's back!” Chiyo chastised him, and she was only saying such because Bakugou was absolutely unconscious and had been and would be for quite some time with the amount of damage he'd taken.

“I wouldn't have gone that far...” Toshinori tried to justify, but he didn't sound so sure himself.

Chiyo huffed and smacked her cane on his leg for good measure. “Just hurry and take them back to the school already so they can rest. And no Izukkun, you can't stay” She said before the boy could even ask her, seeing his mouth already opening. “You stay and watch every year, but now you were the one in the line and I want you to rest, understand?”

Izuku sighed, nodding defeated. “Yes Chiyo-baachan”

She stood there in all her authority before sighing and stepping closer to kiss his forehead. Izuku started to feel better immediately, but oh so terribly tired. “I'll save the recordings of their exams for you. Why don't you ask your friends about their battles yourself? Todoroki and Yaoyorozu are at the infirmary back in the main building”
“Yeah, that sounds good” Izuku agreed as he saw a couple of med-bots wheel in with a stretcher. Toshinori carefully lifted the entire mattress off the bed and set it down on it to avoid jostling Izuku too much, while he picked up Bakugou to carry him back to the bus.

As they finally got positioned comfortably for the ride back, Toshinori laid his charge down on a second stretcher waiting for him inside the bus, scratching the back of his neck and stuttering out a nervous laugh.

“What's wrong?” Izuku asked him groggily, starting to feel the typical drowsiness following Recovery Girl's kiss.

Toshinori looked at him, more blood slipping past his lips. “Your mother is going to kill me”

With a tired laugh at the truth of the statement, Izuku slipped into a healing sleep.

When he woke up his back felt a lot better, and he realized he was actually lying on it as opposed to on his stomach. There were also voices around him, not too loud so it wasn't bothersome. The bed he was on was soft and familiar, and only the barest whiff of disinfectant tickled his nose.

His eyes fluttered open to the white lights of the infirmary coating the room and bringing out the colors in the walls, painted with charming designs of fauna and flora. He tried sitting up but a sting in his back had him groaning and dropping back down, hissing as his eyes closed.

Immediately there was a hand holding his, another one slightly sinking the mattress. The pain went away fast enough he could open his eyes again and see Todoroki hovering over him with worry on his face.

“Are you alright?” He asked, bringing up his free hand to brush back Izuku's hair and feel his forehead.
“Fine” Izuku said, sighing at the coolness of the hand on his skin. Must've been his right one. “Muscles are a bit sore still, ’s all”

“I see” Todoroki nodded, looking around the room. “Give me a second”

He left his side for a moment and Izuku could see him go around the other beds, picking up the pillows and bringing them back. He carefully lifted the pillow already beneath Izuku and put the new ones underneath, effectively lifting him so he could be half-sitting.

“Sorry, these beds don't have an elevation system like hospital ones”

“Thank you” Izuku said, glad that he could sit up without having to pull any muscle. He could see from his spot the two other beds in front of his, on one of which Yaoyorozu was sitting with her legs over the edge, Bakugou standing in front of her as they talked.

Yaoyorozu noticed him looking and smiled at him, standing up to walk closer with Bakugou following close behind. She took a seat at the end of the bed. “I see you finally woke up, Midoriya-san. How are you feeling?”

Izuku stretched his arms, wiggling his fingers as his joints popped. “As one would feel after getting blasted by All Might, I suppose”

Bakugou snorted, crossing his arms. “What a baby”

Todoroki glared at him, but was taken by surprise when Izuku blew him a raspberry, sticking out his tongue at the end for good measure.

“At least I didn't pass out before it was over”

“Say that to your broken back, dumbass”

“It's not broken—”
“Girls, girls, you're both pretty” Yaoyorozu gestured for them to calm down, smiling fondly as she did. “Right now you should both be in bed”

“I can be up just fine, see?” Bakugou started walking off towards the door to demonstrate, but halfway through his ankle gave in and he stumbled before holding onto the closest bed for support. “Fuck”

“I'll make you some ice for that if you lie down” Todoroki suggested, watching Bakugou glare at him before awkwardly half-hopping his way to his bed, sitting down but refusing to lie down like Izuku was. Todoroki sighed but went to encase his ankle with a thin layer of ice anyway.

Izuku chuckled at their antics before turning back to Yaoyorozu. “So, how was your exam? I heard when you guys passed”

She huffed, blowing a strand of hair off her face. “Aizawa-sensei really knows how to play their students' weaknesses” She smiled. “But his methods are effective, and I have to say he really knows what he's doing” She leaned closer to whisper as if it was a secret. “He actually structured the whole thing to help me beat my own insecurities, and I'm terribly grateful for that, but please don't tell him”

Izuku made a zipping up motion over his mouth, chuckling afterwards. “He's a softie, don't let him fool you”

“Wouldn't it be funny if he walked in just in time to hear you say that?” Todoroki said as he came back from helping Bakugou.

“Yeah but that would be too predictable” Izuku waved him off. “Besides teachers have to write a report after each exam, he'll be busy for a while” He sighed and leaned back against the pillows. “Do you guys know how longer we have to be here?”

“Oh, me and Todoroki-san can leave any time, but we wanted to wait until both of you guys were awake” Yaoyorozu said. “When All Might brought you in he asked us if we could make sure you remained here until Recovery Girl came to check on you” She looked at him and Bakugou sympathetically. “I can only imagine how tough your fight was”

Bakugou tsked. “Fight shmight, I can take him on any day”
Izuku hummed. “You can, but whether you come out alive or not...”

“Hah?! Got something smart to say, Deku?!”

Izuku pulled out a pillow from his pile and threw it with brutal precision at his face from across the room. Then he hissed at the strain it put on his back. Todoroki was sitting down on the bed next to him in an instant, sliding his right hand beneath him to cool down the spot.

Izuku sighed in relief. “Thank you, Todoroki-kun. We shall have a summer wedding”

Todoroki snapped back bewildered, his left side steaming up slightly. “Huh?!”

Izuku shook his head. “Don't worry about it, just a meme”

Todoroki tilted his head. “Meme?”

Everyone in the room went silent, until Bakugou broke the silence with a chortle. “Icy-Hot doesn't know what a meme is!”

When Recovery Girl finally made her way in after the exams were over, she arrived to the image of Bakugou with both feet encased in a block of ice as Yaoyorozu tried to break it off with a chisel and mallet, while Izuku showed Todoroki something in the latter's phone.

She professionally ignored the kids and their antics and made her way to her office across the room, closing the door to the madness outside.

Chapter End Notes

was this chapter for the monoma stans? an excuse to throw around my own hcs without anything relevant to add to the plot? getting conflicting relationships out of the way in one go?

yes
it's not a complete redemption or fix-up of bakugou's character but it's a beginning, at least we know why he's so angry about izuku in general. someone as perfectionist as him probably couldn't stand being told to shape up to some kid he didn't even know, least of all when he finally mets him and all he gets is this tiny quirkless mess who cowers behind trees

and yes he is indeed completely passed out after the exam, he did not hear chiyo call toshi izuku's dad, i know you might be wondering that

im glad we got confirmation in the last manga chapter that shouto is indeed a dumbass lmao keep cranking that brain cell shocchan, you're doing great

a lot of the chapters end with recovery girl ignoring the bullshit around her for some reason

no mountain camp because im still figuring out what to do with the league of villains but i still want kouta, also we're getting the dorms earlier since no camp=no bakunapping

for those of you who don't read the manga, class B is BRUTAL, it's amazing they're not given more spotlight

also adding some aizawa lore from the vigilantes manga

and im posting a mini extra scene right after this chapter so there should be a "chapter" 20 but it's really short i just didn't want to add it along with this chapter in the same page
Izuku had many activities he greatly enjoyed to do on his free time. He liked to read, to explore, to run. He would occasionally indulge in videogames and TV shows during bad weather. He’d spend hours writing up his notebooks.

But what he most enjoyed by far was visiting the hero courses during their training exercises. He would follow them around and chat with the students as they marched off to the gym or fight zone they would be using that day, and then he’d find the best spot on the bleachers or follow the teacher around as he watched them train and battle each other, taking mental notes of their quirks and any way he noticed they could improve themselves, to later share his ideas with them in hopes of being part of the process.

His thoughts were always greatly appreciated, as they’d proven to be highly accurate and helpful in the past, and it was one of the main reasons he was allowed in despite some reluctant heroes not feeling comfortable with a little kid running around where he could get hurt.

Luckily Shouta was not one of those teachers, and he had no problem with Izuku running around to catch a better glimpse at the students.

Specially with what he had planned today for them.

“All right, gather around everyone” He called out, mentally counting the seconds it took them to obey and silently nodding to himself when they were all at attention in 2.3 seconds. “Today we’ll shift the focus of your training away from villain fighting and more towards rescuing, so the rules are the usual in these circumstances; minimal structural damage, no civilian loss if possible”

The class shouted their understanding, waiting around for instructions about the exercise.

Shouta looked down to where Izuku was standing at his side, his unbound energy contagious and making everyone in his vicinity more excited than usual. Unfortunately those happened to be Mirio and Nejire, so he was in for far too much enthusiasm at an already too early hour.

Oh well.

“Today we’ll try something new” He announced, dropping his hand on Izuku's head to ruffle his hair. “Izuku here will be helping us out”
Izuku looked up at him with stars in his eyes, jumping up and down in excitement. “Really?! I can help?”

Shouta nodded. “Absolutely, we couldn't be able to work today without you, so I hope you're ready for anything”

“I am, I am!” Izuku cheered, fists moving up and down along with him. Shouta smiled and nodded.

“You won't regret this”

He regretted it.

Ten minutes later, he was tied up and dangling on top of a mechanical pit filled with rolling metal pipes covered in sharp spikes rotating around each other like a glorified paper shredder.

“Um, Shouta?”

“Don't worry, it'll turn off before you fall in, we've tested it” Shouta shouted from the distance.

“What do you mean fall in?! How did you test this thing?!”

Shouta ignored him, turning around to face his students as Izuku kept flailing in the background.

“Alright, today's exercise is called 'Save The Citizen'. You'll be divided in heroes and villains and the heroes will try to save the citizen, played by Izuku, before he gets torn to pieces. Any questions?”

Nejire raised her hand. “Sensei, isn't this from—?”

“This is a completely original idea and I am not breaking any copyright laws” He quickly walked off and pointed at which students would play which role before setting down on the bleachers and starting the timer.

With Izuku still screaming as he was slowly lowered down into the pit, the students hurried in and started fighting.

Mirio, Nejire and Tamaki looked worriedly between Izuku and Shouta, casually sliding closer to the teacher as their classmates stayed near the battle.

Tamaki, surprisingly, was the first to break the silence. “Um, s-sensei, are you sure this is...safe, for him?”

“He'll be fine” Shouta reassured him. “I meant it when I say we tested it; I was dropped down in there myself” He chuckled at the bewildered faces of the trio. “Besides, those spikes and pipes are made of paper. Power Loader is just really good with paint”

They sighed relieved, and couldn't help but think, as they saw Izuku finally give up and just hang in there limp as he kept being lowered by the second, that whatever waited for the boy once he was a student himself would be no walk in the park.

Chapter End Notes

look me in the eye and tell me sky high and bnha aint the same
Not having to hear from Stain anymore after his arrest was certainly a blessing for Kurogiri, if only because it left him free to focus on the moody teenager bonking his face on his bar counter.

“You're going to scratch the wood if you keep that up” Kurogiri advised, eyeing him like a hawk in case Shigaraki decided decaying the entire place was the next best option.

“I'll scratch you up” Shigaraki muttered, groaning as he pulled himself to sit straight. “I can't believe that guy; he stole from us! Right from under our noses!”

“I don't see what's the big deal with that. That plan wasn't going to work anyway”

“Of course it was!” Shigaraki shrieked, slamming his hands on the counter, pinkies carefully raised as Kurogiri's eyes narrowed his way; he didn't want to be on the end of whatever he had within throwing distance. “That kid is clearly villain material, we would've had a competent recruit in our hands if only that fucker Stain hadn't swiped those stupid handcuffs from us” He huffed. “And then the stupid 'camp' or whatever is gonna be in UA instead of the forest. I swear they're doing this just to piss me off”

Kurogiri hummed, absently thinking he was running out of absinthe as he ran the numbers on the bar's current stock. Lord knew he needed it. “There's plenty of villains out there, it's really more trouble than it's worth trying to turn someone from the hero side”

“Yeah, but they're all stupid”

“Aw, you break my heart kiddo” A voice coming from the doorway interrupted them. “And I went through all this trouble to get you a leverage”

“Giran” Shigaraki breathed out tiredly. The broker liked to pop in unannounced, but he couldn't bring himself to be mad at him. There was something about his happy-go-lucky, playful uncle personality that made the air around him as fuzzy as the smoke of the cigar permanently fixed in his mouth.

Giran opened his arms wide in a grand gesture, as if giving himself the warm welcome he knew he deserved. He walked inside casually, leaving the door open behind him. “Long time no see, kiddo. Heard the stunt you pulled at UA” He paused to blow a puff of smoke from his mouth without even taking his cigar out first. “Gotta say, not a bad plan if you had considered the circumstances a bit better before throwing yourself in all willy nilly”

Shigaraki sighed. “Are you here for something or just to run your mouth? I’m not in the mood for this shit right now”

Giran smiled wider, moving to slide onto one of he empty stools next to Shigaraki, casually slipping his phone out of his pocket. He set it down on the counter after a few taps and swipes so
Kurogiri could see as well.

The video playing on the screen was unmistakable; what appeared to be a fixed camera dutifully recording an old little building hidden in the middle of a forest, everything quiet and peaceful until the shaking of bushes gave way to the form of Stain carrying a paralyzed Midoriya Izuku over his shoulder, easily opening the door to the abandoned storage and trudging inside as if he owned the place.

Shigaraki leaned further into the counter, eyes stuck to the phone as the camera kept recording nothing but the quiet woods for a few minutes, until the hulking figure of All Might ran into frame, followed closely by Eraserhead and the old man in the garish yellow suit. All Might didn’t even bother opening the door; just straight up swinging his fist back and bringing it down on the wall. It fell apart as if made of wet paper, and there was but a beat of stillness before he jumped to action, going straight for the Hero Killer while Eraserhead snatched Izuku and ran away.

The next few minutes felt like hours as the fight went down, with Stain skillfully dodging All Might and grinning as if he was having the time of his life, while All might snarled as he landed the first hit and the many more than followed.

The extent of his injuries didn’t kill Stain as Shigaraki would have wanted, but it was satisfying enough to see him absolutely wrecked to the point of unconsciousness.

“Where did you get this?” Shigaraki asked breathily, the hand covering his face muffling his voice.

“I have some contacts who can work their way around electrical devices” Giran said simply, shrugging. “This camera wasn’t really in use, but they don’t really disconnect them in case they need to cover some extra terrain in situations requiring extra surveillance”

“And what do you plan to do with this? Just show us for fun?” Kurogiri asked, not mentioning how satisfied he felt after witnessing the beat down. He slid a drink towards Giran, a silent thanks for the show.

Giran took the glass and sipped at it. “You lost your entire squad of pawns at the USJ, I thought you might want to thicken your lines a bit more”

He half-turned towards the still open door at the entrance of the bar, making an oddly rhythmic clicking with his tongue.

Two figures walked in, one apparently very disinterested in everything he was seeing, and the other extremely excited judging the murderous gleam in her eyes.

“Seems enough people out there are willing to help you out to further the ideologies Stain has been pushing for the past weeks. These two are just the beginning” Giran grinned at Shigaraki, hands in his pockets and looking very satisfied with himself. “So?”

Shigaraki narrowed his eyes at the newcomers, glancing between them, Giran and Kurogiri. He was awfully low on players after the last attack, but was he that desperate?

“Get me to like you in the next ten seconds and we’ll see if I don’t kill you” He finally said, getting in turn only an exhilarated squeal from the girl—who somehow, at some point, had pulled out a knife—a raised eyebrow from the guy, and an even wider smirk from Giran.

“I knew you’d like my idea, Tomura” Giran said, casually moving aside before the three youngsters jumped at each other with killing intent.
Ah, to be young again.

“The principal has taken your concerns into account and we have figured something out” Shouta addressed the class as a whole. “There has been plans to do this for a while, but now it’s as good a time as any to put it into motion” His eyes drifted towards Uraraka for a split second before continuing. “Starting from the first day of summer, UA will count with a housing system for the students. Dorms, to put it more simply”

Excited voices broke the silence as soon as the announcement was made, the kids being kids and not waiting until their teacher was done to start turning around to start chattering at each other. Uraraka collapsed on her desk, relieved that she could take one worry out of her list at least.

“Keep it down already” Shouta ordered, satisfied enough that they complied almost immediately. “Construction is underway, but as it is being overseen by Cementoss who also must worry about his own classes, they will not be ready until the first day of summer. The school will be contacting your parents soon about your moving into campus”

Even though he couldn’t feel exactly the same level of enthusiasm as his classmates since he already lived there, he felt incredibly pumped at the idea of them living here with him.

“Alright, alright, enough free time, let’s get back to business” Shouta clapped his hands, calling the kids back to order. “Iida, Yaoyorozu, come here and start today’s schedule”

When Yaoyorozu stood up to take her place at the front, Izuku’s view of Todoroki became clear. For some reason he seemed…relieved? There was a slump to his shoulders that wasn’t common in him, and his face had an expression as if he’d just released a huge breath he’d been holding his entire life, leaving him loose and relaxed, slumped a bit against his chair. It was all very subtle, but Izuku had an almost pathological need to analyze people, and could tell the little differences easily enough.

As Tenya went on about the day’s planned activities and other class-related issues, Izuku thought it could be something to talk with Todoroki at a later date.

“Kaminari-kun, could you swap seats with Kirishima-kun please? I’m afraid the breaker will short-circuit if it keeps zapping you” Inko asked the boy as she approached the back of the classroom, pointing at Kirishima’s seat on the bench on the other side of the room.

Kaminari blinked at her, then turned around to see that, effectively, there were little bursts of electricity jumping from the circuit breaker on the wall nearby to him and vice versa. “Uh, I didn’t notice I was doing that”

As he dutifully complied with Inko’s request, Izuku was giving the final touches to the busted up washing machine he was bringing back to life at his own station. His father was sitting by the windowsill nearby while Inko walked around the classroom.
“So Shouta already gave you the news?” Toshinori asked him.

“So about the dorms? Yeah, this morning” Izuku replied while fumbling with the plug. He connected it to the nearest outlet and turned on the machine, only for the drum to spin a couple of times before halting with a metallic screech. Izuku turned it off and hung in head in shame. “I forgot a screw”

Toshinori chuckled and handed him the piece Izuku was missing, the one he’d left forgotten on his bench while assembling the machine. “Are you excited to have your friends so close?”

“Yes!” Izuku exclaimed, his voice echoing as he leaned further into the drum of his project.

“Uraraka-san is happier than I am, though”

“Oh? Is that so?” Toshinori asked, turning his eyes to said girl who was busy fixing an old toaster in the station next to Izuku’s

Uraraka had apparently been listening on in the conversation as she smiled at the hero immediately after being addressed. “It’s a relief! I was wondering if I was going to be able to keep up with everyone if I had to spent so much time travelling to and from home every day” She set down her wire cutter and started reading over the instructions on the manual provided for her work. “Though I’ll still probably mess up a bit on day one, since the dorms won’t be ready on time for us to spend the night before here. I’ll be a bit sleepy still for sure”

“Oh no, that won’t do” Inko’s voice reached them as she approached, pulling her safety goggles down to her neck. “I know Shouta would be understanding of your circumstances but it’s still unfair only you have to go an extra mile”

Uraraka flushed, waving her hands around. “Ah, it’s really no problem! It’s just for the first morning, after that we’ll be all here so…”

Inko shook her head vehemently. “I insist, you’re still growing; you need to rest properly” She tapped her finger to her chin, humming in thought. “Why don’t you stay over at our place the night before summer camp starts?”

Izuku’s head shot up, almost clipping his forehead against the metallic edge of the machine. “S-Stay over?”

Inko nodded. “Of course! You two are friends, right? You could have a good time. Tenya could come too!”

“Honey you might as well invite over the entire class then” Toshinori chuckled.

Inko clapped her hands together, gasping in delight. “That’s a great idea! Think about it Izuku, it could be so much fun!”

“R-Really, I could have everyone over?” Izuku asked in awe, screwdriver falling from his hand to get lost in the guts of the machine. Inko easily pulled it back out with her quirk and handed it over to him.

“Of course, dear. The house might be a tight fit but that’s just part of the fun”

Izuku couldn’t believe it. He had only had Tenya and occasionally Shouta and Hizashi for sleepovers, so the idea of having all of his friends staying the night at once was making him giddy. He could already predict the sheer chaos that would ensue and it was scary how much he was anticipating it. It would be childish, and noisy, and unpredictable.
And so, so utterly *normal*.

A shaky smile split his face and he nodded, laughing at the squeal Uraraka was releasing behind him as she patted his shoulder like an excited puppy, careful to not send him flying.

Toshinori coughed into his fist, his own smile distracting from the string of blood staining his mouth. “I’ll inform Shouta and Nezu as soon as you ask everybody if they’re up for it”

And up for it they were.

Surprisingly enough, everyone had agreed, even Shinsou, still getting used to getting along with people; and Bakugou, with a silent nod after staring for an unnervingly long time at Izuku. Nezu had reassured them UA would take care of bringing their stuff for when they would be officially moving into the dorms, so they only had to bring what they would need for the night and the next day.

Toshinori offered to be on snack run duty while Inko and Izuku figured out how to fit twenty kids between the living room and Izuku’s room. They finally decided if they moved the couch against a wall and the dining table to the kitchen they would all fit snuggly.

“I wonder if we could just put all the furniture in the storage” Inko said, talking about the old house next to theirs that used to be Toshinori’s before he moved in.

“Everyone still thinks dad lives there, we can’t do that without them asking too many questions” Izuku sighed, finishing putting the table in a corner where it wouldn’t bother or block the way.

Inko chuckled. “Oh well, we can make it work. You know, you’re always welcome to slip in with us if it gets too stuffy” She teased. “It’s been too long since we had our own sleepover. Remember when you used to sneak under the blankets and stay by the foot of the bed because you thought we wouldn’t notice you?”

Izuku flushed to the tip of his ears. “Mom! I can be with my friends just fine” He huffed, then paused when he realized what he’d just said. The usual wobbly smile that wormed its way onto his face when he was embarrassed was back with a vengeance, accompanied by a lighter blush than before.

Inko gazed at him, a soft pride in her eyes as her son let it sink in that yes, he had *friends*, people he’d shared experiences with who liked him as much as he liked them, who would be spending an entire night messing around and just being *children*.

A knock on the door brought their attention back from the little cloud of fuzzy feelings they were floating in, and Inko hurried to welcome their visitor. Tenya was awaiting on the other side, bag at the ready and standing firm and square as always.

His face melted into a smile and his entire posture relaxed upon seeing the two people inside the house, bowing in a much more casual version of his typical 90° greeting. “Midoriya-san, good evening”

“Tenya, you’re quite early!” She said with an easy smile, stepping back to let him in. Honestly, she was expecting this from him, if not an even earlier arrival. He had stayed over so often that she was tempted to just ask for an extension to the house so he could have his own room, but knew the poor boy would suffer a conniption at the mere idea of her going so far for him.

Tenya nodded, carefully dropping his bag in a corner where it wouldn’t bother. “I wanted to help get everything ready for tonight. I know All Might is out getting supplies, so it would’ve been rude
“You’re a guest too, you know” Izuku laughed, patting his back with just a bit more strength than intended, making him flinch almost imperceptibly. Oops. “But since you’re here, let’s, uh…” He stopped, pulling at his lip in thought. “Actually…what does one do at a sleepover, anyway? With so many people, I mean. Ours usually are just eating and studying before sleep”

Tenya lifted a finger and opened his mouth, then promptly closed it and scratched his cheek in thought. “Now that you mention it…I’ve…never been in a sleepover with someone else. I’m not sure what’s the custom for these kind of gatherings”

“Well then, it’s a good thing mama’s here to help!” Inko claimed, clapping her hands and grinning widely. “I had my fair share of parties in school, I imagine they haven’t changed that much since those times”

“Mom, don’t talk like that, you’re not that old”

“You’re supposed to say I’m not old at all, sweetie”

With her in charge, things moved swiftly. Every couch, loveseat and bean bag in the house was arranged in a circle round the TV, even bringing the ones that were stored away at Toshinori’s old house. Nezu had provided futons for everyone so they could rest comfortably, and they were all rolled up and at the ready in Izuku’s room. They would decide once they were all there who would be the ones staying in his room, since Ashido had insisted that the host of a sleepover couldn’t use their own bed, so Izuku would be staying with everyone in the living room, which was perfectly fine with him.

Shouta had warned them not to do anything that would keep them up till late, since they still had to follow a strict schedule the next day, so any activities had to be finished and everyone asleep by midnight. This would also serve as a test to see how well they could mix together when living alone in their own building once the dorms were ready.

Toshinori had just returned to ask Izuku and Tenya to help with unloading the bags he’d brought when Tenya received a text from Yaoyorozu saying they had all arrived and were waiting by the entrance gates. Since the house was in the middle of a forested area not concurred by students, none of them really knew how to get there, so they’d agreed to gather and wait for Izuku to guide them all at once.

“Alright, careful with where you step, that root has tripped me more than once” Izuku warned them as they approached his house, his classmates obediently following in a rather unexpected order. No one complained about the long walk, or got separated and lost in the forest. Kouda had been steadily accumulating more and more birds on his shoulders and head as they walked.

Uraraka was the first to see the house as she was walking next to Izuku, Todoroki on his other side. “Whoaaa Deku-kun, is that where you live? It’s so cute!”

“It looks like a fairytale!” Hagakure agreed loudly, jumping in place in excitement. Izuku wondered if she was so exuberant on purpose so people could read her mood by the movement of her clothes.

And it truly looked like something straight out of a children’s book. When they had arrived, the place was simple and cozy, but through the years Inko had turned the immediate area surrounding the house into a garden of wonders, with bushes in bloom and tall, swaying plants that waved calmly in the breeze. There was a patio table set surrounded by a semicircle of rose bushes where
they would spend the hottest days of summer since it was at least a bit fresher than inside the house. Birds would stop by to bathe in the fountain set by a corner of the white fence and their singing was almost deafening.

“Hey, what’s with that other house?” Kaminari asked, pointing at the identical unit off to the side. Toshinori’s original house had been empty of people for years, but it was still maintained to keep up appearances that All Might still lived there, but since ‘he’ wasn’t around as often, the newest generations of students didn’t really know that fact.

“That’s All Might’s house” Izuku answered, ready for the avalanche of questions and shouting that would ensue.

“Eeeh?! No way, man!”

“Is he there? Can we stop to say hi?”

“I would’ve thought his house would’ve been larger”

“Haha, yeah” Izuku waved his hands around, trying to gather their attention and calm them down. “This is just his temporary place when he needs to crash at UA. He’s not here right now!”

Many hung their heads in disappointment, whining at the missed chance, but perked up when Inko walked out of the door with Toshinori and Tenya behind them to greet them.

“Midoriya-senpai, good afternoon!” Kirishima greeted first, followed by a chorus of the same words from the rest.

“Hello everyone, I’m so glad you could make it!” She answered gleefully, stepping out towards them and letting herself be surrounded by the kids. “Now, I imagine all of you want to have as much time to have some fun before bedtime, so let’s not lose any more time, come on in, come on!”

She ushered them inside with the practiced ease of herding students around her classroom. Tenya made sure to direct them into the proper place to drop their bags while Izuku and Toshinori finished putting snacks in bowls to spread around the group.

“Midoriya-chan, do you need some help?” Tsuyu asked, eyeing the wide array of food waiting on the counter.

Izuku wanted to tell her not to worry and to go sit with the others, but on second thought he realized it would take forever to move everything towards the circle of pillows where Jirou was helping Tenya set up a movie. “Yes please, Tsuyu-chan”

“It’s a good thing I have big hands, kero” She said while casually picking up more bowls that should be possible in one hand and carefully making her way towards the group. Seeing her had many more standing up and rushing to help, others following Inko to fetch some blankets for them now that the sun was setting and it was getting colder.

Izuku eyed through the crowd how Bakugou was somehow piling up even more plates than Tsuyu had, strategically placing them along his arms like how waiters in TV did. “Ah, you don’t have to take so many at once, it’s alright”

Bakugou glared at him while picking up even more things without breaking a sweat. “Shut up, Deku, don’t tell me what I can’t do” He said, surprisingly devoid of any swearing. But then Izuku
remembered his mother was around and Bakugou seemed to have an odd respect for her, even going as far as wearing his uniform properly during her classes, tie and all.

Izuku raised an eyebrow, deciding to try his luck given the circumstances. “Okay, Kacchan”

Bakugou stumbled and almost dropped everything he was carrying, but righted himself up almost immediately. “What did you fucking call me?!”

“Bakugou-kun, we have a rule about swearing in this house” Inko chastised him gently.

Bakugou clicked his tongue, looking constipated at the choice between speaking his mind, or not disappointing her. He ultimately turned around and kept walking, ignoring Izuku while grumbling out an apology.

Izuku allowed himself a little evil chuckle until his mother turned her eyes on him. He gulped, already feeling the beginnings of his own reprimand on the tip of her tongue. “I’ll, uh, take the rest over” He hurried to run out of the kitchen, leaving Inko to shake her head with a smile on her face.

He took his place next to Tokoyami on the floor, handing around snacks to the ones empty-handed as Tenya started the movie now that everyone was there. Some had wanted to see a horror movie, but others complained they wouldn’t be getting enough sleep if they were too scared to close their eyes, and Izuku silently agreed; there was no need to get anymore nightmares than usual.

They had settle in for a comedy, which seemed to be the correct option as the raucous laughter filling the house seemed to give the entire place life, Inko working on her laptop on the kitchen counter with a smile on her face while Toshinori sat next to her to catch the movie the kids were watching as well. At some point it was too much and Uraraka had rolled from her spot and half-fallen on Izuku, shrieking in laughter as she hid her face in his shoulder to control herself.

Once that was over they reorganized the room to push the couch against the wall to make space to lie down the futons now that it was dark. The adults excused themselves to their room for the meantime and Izuku and Tenya dedicated themselves to preparing rounds of hot chocolate while the rest argued about the next activity.

“We can’t tell horror stories, we agreed on no scary movies for a reason!” Jirou argued, poking at Tokoyami’s beak where his cheek would be as he huffed in annoyance.

“How about an arm wrestling tournament?” Kirishima proposed. “Winner gets the bed!”

“Now that’s just rigged” Hagakure huffed. “Not everyone here has rocks for arms!”

Kaminari jumped in. “How about truth or dare? It’s a classic, come on”

“You’re not fooling anyone, Pikachu”

“That sounds fun, actually” Izuku said, stepping around the futons carefully to not spill anything as he lowered his tray on the floor to let everyone pick a mug. “We have an empty bottle we keep as a flower pot in the kitchen”

“Oh, my dear sweet Midoriya” Ashido cooed, hugging him and rubbing their cheeks together. “Your pure soul is not ready for what this game entails”

Izuku let her, smiling as he leaned further into the contact. It was nice. “What do you mean?”

“We won’t let any of these beasts steal your first kiss if they dare you!” Uraraka declared, fists up
in determination. “That’s the only reason anyone wants to play this game”

Izuku tilted his head. “I already had my first kiss, though”

Mina stopped, moving to hold Izuku from the shoulders at arm’s length. “You what?!!”

“Midoriya you dog! Who was it?” Kaminari asked. “Was it an older student? When id you pull that off?!!”

“It was a long time ago, actually” Izuku said, rubbing the back of his head. “It was Tenya”

“Eh?!” Everyone said in unison, turning to the unassuming boy sitting prim and proper on his own futon. He blinked at them, finishing handing out mug to Tsuyu who seemed to be the only one not surprised by the news. “Yes? It was an accident though, so I don’t know if it counts”

“He was standing under the mistletoe talking to his brother and I wanted to ambush him” Izuku explained. “I jumped and he turned around at the last second. I was aiming for his cheek”

There was stillness in the room until Kaminari broke the silence. “So, is that a yes?”

They finally agreed to the game, on the condition that if someone dared a kiss then the one challenged to it could say no. As expected Kaminari took the chance to plant one on Kirishima, Shinsou and Ashido since they were the only ones who let him, and he seemed satisfied enough to lay low after that. They learned that Yaoyorozu had a birth mark in the shape of an octopus on her back, Aoyama had dyed his hair black once and regretted it forever, and Bakugou could walk on his hands after Uraraka dared him to.

Time flew by as they played and soon enough Izuku’s alarm was going off, signaling they only had a couple of hours left until bed time.

“We’ll change in your room, Midoriya” Ashido announced as she and the rest of the girls marched there. “You guys tell us when you’re ready! We don’t want to walk right into Boxerville”

“Yeeees” Her friends drawled, waving at her to hurry up and leave.

They were done pretty fast, which was lucky when a chorus of shrieking came from Izuku’s room.

Izuku jumped in alarm, his parents appearing into the hallway a second later at the noise, concern on their faces as they frantically looked around. Izuku could see the beginnings of smoke swirling from his father’s body as he fought against the need to muscle up.

Suddenly the door of his room opened and no one expected what came out.

“Midoriyaaa” Hagakure cried out, and Izuku’s entire face turned red when he saw she was wearing one of his old All Might themed onesies. “You were gonna keep these hidden from us, how cruel!”

‘Us’ being the rest of the girls, who all came out of his room after her wearing different styles of the same pajamas, Tsuyu wearing the same one as Jirou since she was a smaller size. Pony was walking very carefully to not damage the fabric with her hooves as she finished braiding her hair.

“How many of those do you even own?” Ojirou asked Izuku, covering his mouth with the fluff of his tail to keep his laughter at bay.

“There were a ton in there” Jirou commented, smiling apologetically at him even while she played
with the fake hair tuffs of her own set. “I tried to stop them but—”

“But you wanted to wear one anyway?” Shouji finished for her.

“Yaomomo is taller than Midoriya though” Satou pointed out. He was right; there was no way anything Izuku owned could fit her.

She tapped her fingers together bashfully. “I made one myself copying one of the designs” She said. “It looked fun”

Izuku covered his face with his hands. “I-I got a new set with every design of All Might’s suits every time I went up a size” He said. “I couldn’t just throw the old ones away”

“Well, I sure fricking hope you didn’t” Bakugou said, and it was so surreal to hear him mind his tongue. He pointed at the one Uraraka was wearing. “That’s a diamond age suit. They only made like a hundred of those, where the heck did you get one?”

“Ah, I used to work with All Might, actually” Toshinori stepped in to save his son. “He always had a soft spot for Izuku, so he made sure to give me one for him”

It was so weird for him to speak in third person like that, he couldn’t get used to it after so many years.

“You worked with him?!” Sero exclaimed, falling back into Kirishima and sending them both tumbling to the floor.

Kirishima nodded along, sharing his shock. “I thought you were just a school assistant, not a hero one!”

“We have two more!” Uraraka claimed, pulling out another of the pajamas, while Tsuyu held the second one. “Deku-kun, Tokoyami-kun, you two are the only ones who fit in these besides us”

“I was gonna sleep in my regular ones…” Izuku tried to protest weakly, being ignored as he was pushed into his room to change. Tokoyami wasn’t given the option of getting a word in before Jirou and Hagakure were dragging him to the bathroom while he trashed around.

“Have some fun, Fumikage!” Dark Shadow howled as he assisted the girls in shoving Tokoyami into the bathroom.

“Betrayed by my own quirk. This is truly he maddest of fates” He said from inside, the door drowning his complaints.

When they finally came back, clad in the colorful garments and trying to appear nonchalant, they found everyone gathered around a single spot, Toshinori’s blond poof of hair visible in the middle of the group.

Todoroki noticed them arrive and smiled at the sight. He stood up and approached Izuku while Tokoyami scurried around the group to hide behind Shouji. “Hey, took you long enough”

“Haha, yeah. I was convincing myself to come out” Izuku laughed self-consciously, hands wringing the extra fabric by his belly. Even while on his size, it was soft and loose.

Todoroki smiled softly at him, nodding in understanding. “It looks good on you. Don’t worry about it too much”
Suddenly there were screams and laughter coming from the group, many heads popping up to stare at Izuku with wide smiles on their faces.

“What are you guys doi—oh god no” Izuku started before interrupting himself when he saw exactly what they were doing.

Inko sat in the middle next to Toshinori, multiple thick books strewn around her as she showed all of Izuku’s baby pictures to his classmates.

“Nezu used to take him on walks around the school when he was looking after him” Inko kept talking as if Izuku wasn’t there. She was pointing at a photo of Izuku at around three or four years old, still a bit smaller than Nezu as the principal held his hand and pointed at something out of frame while Izuku fixed his wide eyes on it as Nezu talked to him. “Izuku used to get antsy if he was inside his office too long so they would go visit the other teachers”

“Is that Aizawa-sensei?” Yaoyorozu asked, pointing at a picture on the other page. It was one of the pictures Hizashi had taken during their babysitting days. Shouta was sitting cross-legged on the floor, Izuku sitting in the cradle of his legs as he played a match up game, cards turned face down in front of them.

Shinsou grinned like he’d just won the lottery. “I can’t believe Eraserhead was baby”

Izuku squeezed his way through the group and dropped between his parents, pulling at Inko’s sleeve. “Mom, what are you doing?” He hissed, face reddening in embarrassment.

Inko chuckled, turning to the next page to the delight of the other kids. “You were taking so long, I didn’t want your friends to get bored”

The next picture was snapped during nap time, with Shouta lying on the floor with Izuku snoozing on his chest. Shouta was just as lost to the arms of Morpheus, but his arms remained firm around Izuku as the baby drooled on his chest.

“Mon Dieu, why am I crying?” Aoyama pulled a handkerchief from the pocket of his frilly pajama top, dabbing at the corner of his eyes. “I cannot look at Aizawa-sensei the same way again”

“And all these books are Midoriya’s baby pics?” Todoroki asked, smiling as he picked one up and opened it at random. The ones nearby huddled up around him to get a closer look. “Oh, Iida is here too”

“Look at those glasses, class president!”

“We wanted to document every milestone on Izuku’s life after we moved in” Inko explained. “Every new person we met wanted to join in, and at some point it just spiraled out of control”

“You know, now that I think about it…” Uraraka said, looking around the room. There were many framed photos hanging from the walls, but there was a lack of some specific ones. “Do you have any of your wedding, Midoriya-sensei?”

They froze, Inko and Toshinori looking at each other while Izuku’s eyes met Tenya’s equally wide ones across the group.

Truth was, they had many photos of their wedding day and the little reception afterwards, but they were all stored away in a box hidden in the back of their closet. Since it had happened before Toshinori’s fight with All for One, he still didn’t have his weakened body that allowed him to blend in as a civilian. All those wedding pictures featured him as All Might, and it was impossible
for them to keep them around in visible places.

Toshinori was the first to speak, clearing his throat with difficulty. “Ah, you see, there was a bit of a fire in our house before we moved to UA, so they got lost in the fire”

“Y-Yes, we lost the negatives too, so we couldn’t get any copies done” Inko followed his lead.

“Oh no, I’m so sorry! I didn’t mean to bring up bad memories” Uraraka apologized, covering her mouth.

“Don’t worry about it, dear. It was the moment that mattered” Inko reassured her with a hand on her shoulder.

Izuku sighed relieved as his classmates picked up the chatter once more, the photo albums being distributed among them so they could keep perusing them at their leisure. All this emotions in such a short time had him overheating in his pajamas. “Mom, dad, I’m going outside for a while, I need some air”

“Are you alright, kiddo?” Toshinori asked him. “You need me to go with you?”

Izuku shook his head. “I’ll just be by the door. I won’t close it all the way”

At Toshinori’s hesitant nod he stood up, tip-toeing around the futons until he reached the door. Slipping his shoes on, he took a step into the coolness of the night.

True to his word, he just leaned back against the wall next to the open door, looking up at the stars twinkling in the sky above. The soft lights illuminating the garden cast a soothing glow that reached out towards the tree line. Some crickets could be heard among the plants alongside the croaking of frogs by the bird fountain.

He just needed a moment to gather himself. He loved having all his friends over for the night, having fun and enjoying time together; and was even more excited to know they would all be staying here from now on in the dorms, having them close enough to hang out after class, have study groups and extra training time with them all. But it wasn’t something he was used to and he got a bit overwhelmed at all the attention. It wasn’t like being in class. It was so much more private and intimate, it filled him with so much joy it scared him a bit.

“Aren’t you cold?”

Izuku startled at the voice, not having noticed Todoroki walking out after him just now.

“Todoroki-kun” He sighed, bringing a hand to his chest to calm his frantic heart. “No, I’m fine. These are very warm” He opened his arms to show his onesie.

Todoroki nodded, closing the door behind him. “I told your mom I’d be out here with you” He jerked his head towards the patio chairs by the garden. “Do you want to sit for a while?”

Izuku nodded, pulling back the hood of his onesie to let his hair free to the night hair. The soft sound of water streaming from the fountain was momentarily disrupted by the rustle of chairs being pulled back and brushing against the grass.

Todoroki wasn’t one for many words, content to just sit there and look up at the sky as Izuku had been doing moments before. He shoved his hands in the pockets of his sweatshirt and sighed, closing his eyes and enjoying the peace. The voices of the others could be heard coming from inside the house, laughing and shouting. It was impossible to know if they were still being shown
old photos or if they’d gone on to a new game.

“You know” Todoroki started. “Your dad said something strange just now, it caught my attention”

“Oh? What is it?”

He met his eyes, stare sharp enough Izuku could feel the sting. “You said, back during the Sports Festival, that he met your mother after you moved into UA”

“Y-Yes?” Izuku gulped.

“Then how come he said their wedding pics were burned on a fire before you came here?”

Izuku felt his heart stop beating.

Oh god. Oh god oh god oh god. They messed up big time.

“Well, you see, ah” Izuku stammered, trying to come up with a reasonable excuse. But there was just no way. How could he justify the clashing statements? He really should’ve asked his parents to make sure their stories held up.

“Midoriya, calm down” Todoroki was suddenly standing next to him, his warmer hand an anchor on Izuku’s shoulder. Izuku hadn’t even realized he’d started hyperventilating until he brought him back to Earth. “Breathe with me, come on”

Todoroki breathed in and out slowly, allowing Izuku to see his chest moving with each breath, making it easy for him to see and copy it. Izuku tried his best to follow suit, feeling the cotton in his brain dissipate slowly by the second. His outburst had made him break out into a cold sweat, and now that he could feel it he started trembling, his shirt sticking uncomfortably to his skin. Todoroki quickly took off his sweatshirt and draped it over Izuku’s shoulders.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to make you worry like that” He said softly, frown turned down in concern as he knelt down to be at eye level with Izuku. “Just forget about it, It’s not important”

Izuku nodded frantically, not trusting his voice to work right now. He fumbled to stick his arms properly into the hoodie while Todoroki zipped it closed. Despite it helping a bit in keeping him warm, he still was going to need to change his shirt. Todoroki wrapped an arm around him and offered a hand to help pull Izuku to his feet.

It was a short distance back into the house, and luckily everyone was too busy betting on Satou and Kirishima wrestling to notice them slip by. They reached Izuku’s room and Todoroki let him sat down on the bed while he found something fresh for Izuku to wear.

“You really have a lot of hero merchandise” Todoroki commented casually, trying to take Izuku’s mind somewhere else. “I can’t imagine how difficult some of these took to find”

Izuku nodded. “Eraserhead’s stuff is impossible to find” He muttered, looking at the sole figurine of the hero on his desk. “Present Mic found it for me on an old alleyway store”

Todoroki pulled out a worn down graphic shirt that looked soft enough to sleep in and handed it to him. Izuku thanked him quietly before walking out into the hallway; he had to clean himself up a bit before changing into the fresh shirt.

“Thank you. I’ll, um, be back out in a minute”
Todoroki nodded, following him out and standing still outside the bathroom for a second while he heard the lock click from inside. He sighed, feeling terribly guilty at having brought up a subject that would upset him like that. Even if he didn’t mean to, it seemed every time he tried to talk to Midoriya in private he set off an unpleasant reaction. He joined the rest out in the living room once more and flopped down on his futon next to Iida.

“Hey, I thought you went out with Izuku?” Tenya asked him, looking around for him.

“He’s in the bathroom” He said simply, not wanting to get into the unsavory details.

Tenya nodded. “I see. It’s getting close to bedtime anyway, I was about to go find you”

Izuku finally came back after a couple of minutes, color back on his face and still sporting Todoroki’s hoodie over his pajamas. His alarm went off one final time to let everyone know it was game over for the night’s activities and they had to go sleep now. The girls decided to share Izuku’s room so they could have an easier time getting ready in the morning instead of having to line up to use the bathroom to change into their suits.

Toshinori and Inko wished them goodnight and walked off, leaving them to settle down for the night. Once everyone had found their spots and were nice and comfortable, Shinsou turned off the lights as his futon was next to the switch.

When darkness filled the room Izuku felt his breath hitch. He knew where he was. He knew who he was with.

But the sounds of breathing and shuffling from around him, as peaceful and soft as they were, made chills run down his spine.

They were his classmates.

There were no yellow eyes looking at him from the darkness.

There was no iron bars surrounding him.

Suddenly an abrupt movement from somewhere near him made him jump. He caught his mouth moving and stopped, not having realized he was mumbling his thoughts out loud.

Bakugou had snapped to his feet, easily sidestepping the people around him as he reached the hallway and the door with the little All Might themed sign with Izuku’s name. He knocked on it and waited.

The door opened a sliver, a stream of light bleeding into the living room and catching the attention of the boys who still hadn’t fallen asleep.

“Bakugou?” Ashido asked. “What is it?”

“Can I go in?” He said, mindful of not just storming into the room in case someone wasn’t decent.

Ashido looked around inside the room, finally nodding and letting him in. There was the sound of shuffling and he was out of there in seconds, marching back and pulling out his phone to light the way and find an outlet where to plug in the nightlight he’d taken from Izuku’s room.

A soft orange light spread across the room, reaching out far enough to bathe everyone in the glow, but not so bright it would actually bother them.
Bakugou locked eyes with a surprised Izuku for a second and then he addressed the others.

“Whoever has any trouble can square up with me” He declared, waiting for someone to complain. He could heard a relieved sigh from Tokoyami not having to worry about Dark Shadow anymore, some snickers from Kaminari and amused huffs from Todoroki, but no one said a word otherwise. He wordlessly went back to his futon and wrapped himself up, back turned to Izuku.

Izuku bit his lips to contain the smile threatening to bloom across his face, and fell back into a peaceful, dreamless sleep.

When they woke up the next morning, Shouta was sitting in the kitchen, nursing a cup of coffee in his old cat shaped mug.

“So I take it you had a good time?” He asked as the kids groaned and stretched, yawning as they got up one by one.

After everyone dressed up and had the breakfast the training plan dictated, Shouta had them all follow him out to start their first day of ‘camp’.

“Uh, Aizawa-sensei?” Izuku asked, looking around as they walked. “Where are we going? The training fields are the other way”

Shouta hummed. “Sharp as always, Izuku” he said. “Since you all spend the night here we found ourselves with a bit of extra time, so I’ll be showing you your dorms”

Excited voices exploded from the group, everyone picking up the pace and forcing Shouta to walk a bit faster in turn to not be overrun by the kids.

When the building came into view he lost control of the group, most of them rushing and making their way in before he could tell them to wait up for him.

Once inside, he proceeded to explain the distribution of the common facilities and the rooms, letting them know their things were already here and they could go ahead and take a quick look around.

As the kids split up to run around the place, Izuku stood glued to the diagram Shouta used to explain their respective dormitories.

Specifically, the one with his name.

“Everything alright, kiddo?” Shouta asked him, a knowing smile on his face.

Izuku pointed at the diagram, clear as day between Shinsou and Aoyama’s rooms. “This one’s for me?” He asked softly, eyes drifting in thought.

“Mhm. We’re not gonna just exclude you because your house is here” Shouta said. “We know how much you want to experience a normal student life, so we wanted you to have the choice of staying home, or moving here. You can do both if you want”
Izuku let out a shaky sigh, smiling widely until his cheeks hurt. He giggled giddily and jumped in place, grinning at Shouta before taking off towards the elevators.

Apparently Izuku got a bit caught up in the wonder of living in the dorms, because he was still up there in his room by the time everyone else had reconvened in the common room to talk about their own.

Suddenly the ground started shaking, and at first they thought it to be a normal, small tremor, but soon it became clear it was a bit too strong to ignore. They ran out of the building, Shinsou offering to go find Midoriya while they evacuated. But as they got outside they halted almost immediately at what they found.

Four people stood there, dressed in colorful and frilly matching dresses and cat-inspired gear. One of them had her gloved hands on the ground, and as soon as she broke contact the tremor stopped. Shouta was standing nearby, a little boy next to him.

“Hello there!” The woman with the ground-based quirk clad in a blue dress greeted them cheerfully. “Hope you’re well rested to begin!”

The one dressed in red followed suit, striking a feline-like pose. “We’ll be taking care of you from now on!”

Uraraka stepped forward from the mass of frozen students. “Um, hi?” She said, a bit intimidated by the newcomers. “Aizawa-sensei..?”

“These are the Wild Wild Pussycats. We were originally going to go to their place of training for the camp, but they agreed to come here instead to follow the training plan” Shouta explained. “You brats better be ready”

Another of the Pussycats jumped in, her mint green hair swishing around as she smiled wide at the students. “It’s so nice to meet you all! Although introductions will have to wait a moment, because I smell a little kitten!” She shouted the last word, turning around and spreading her arms wide just in time to catch Izuku as he jumped at her, catching him securely and spinning him around as both laughed in joy.

“Ragdoll!” Izuku cried out, nuzzling his face on the hero’s neck, wrapping himself fully around her like a little octopus.

The sight allowed the class to relax; clearly someone Izuku liked so much couldn’t be that bad, right?

It was that bad.

The next hours were some of the most difficult, challenging and harsh training most of them had gone through in their life. They hadn’t even seen Tenya since they started as he was forced to run around the entire perimeter of UA’s grounds.

Sure, Izuku had been ecstatic at seeing the heroes, but they soon learned it was because they—but especially Ragdoll—had been the ones to find him and make his rescue a reality all those years ago, and so he held them in a special place in his heart. Didn’t mean they were going to have mercy on him or any of the others, though.

“Come on, I want to see some sweat here!” Tiger exclaimed. “I’m not seeing enough Plus Ultra!”

Izuku could barely feel his limbs anymore, but he kept going, panting as he punched and kicked
the air. He tried to see what his friends were tasked with, but his sweaty bangs fell on his eyes and blocked his view. If he tried to brush them back, Tiger would yell at him about not stopping.

“You should’ve brought a headband, foresight is as much a power as a quirk!”

Lunch time was a busy affair since they had to make everything themselves and they were hungry enough to eat ravenously before fitting in as much rest as they could before they were thrown back to the wolves—cats?—once more.

They barely had the energy to be social by the time the day was over, dragging their feet to the dorms to shower, make dinner and collapse until the next day.

As dinner was finished and Shouji offered to take care of the dishes to be over with it faster, Izuku intercepted Todoroki before he could hop into the elevator.

“Could you come with me for a minute?” He asked him, turning around and walking out of the building at Todoroki’s nod.

Izuku took them through the forest and into his house, were not only his parents were waiting inside, but also Tenya, Shouta and Nezu.

Todoroki blinked at the assortment of people, feeling considerably intimidated at the eyes on him. “…Am I expelled?”

“Not at all, Todoroki-san” Nezu smiled reassuringly, a knowing glint in his eyes. “We just wanted to have a chat with you”

“Izuku mentioned you two had a little talk last night” Shouta said, looking way more tired than normal.

Todoroki froze in place. Was this about Izuku’s panic attack? Were they going to punish him? He didn’t mean to, he was just asking questions, he wasn’t good at keeping his thoughts in check—

“It’s about what you asked me” Izuku said, his hand coming to latch onto Todoroki’s arm to guide him to sit down next to him. “You’re not in trouble, don’t worry”

Tenya cleared his throat. “You just stumbled upon something you shouldn’t have”

“I’ll admit, it’s mostly my fault” Toshinori said, smiling apologetically at him. “You realized a comment I made didn’t match up with what Izuku had told you first, and I commend you for your sharpness, my boy”

Todoroki stared at him, realization sinking in. “About the house fire you mentioned? Yes, Midoriya told me you and Midoriya-sensei didn’t meet until after they were living in UA. It was too strange for me to let it go”

Toshinori nodded. “Yes, well, you never quite got an answer, and it’s not the kind of question that we can avoid without telling the truth” He stood up and walked to stand in front of him and Izuku. “The real reason we can’t have old photos hanging around is that I didn’t look quite like this in them”

Todoroki tilted his head. “Okay? But how different could it be that you needed to hide them and make up a story?”

Toshinori grinned, and exploded in a cloud of smoke.
When the mist dissipated, Todoroki came face to face with the most unmistakable person in the world.

“It’s nice to officially meet you this time, young Todoroki” All Might said, his iconic smile wide and bright.

Then he choked and coughed up blood, puffing back into his weaker form while Inko handed him a handkerchief in a practiced move.

Todoroki was frozen in place, eyes wide and trying to bury himself as deep as possible in the back of the couch. His brain was running a mile a minute, trying to make sense of what he’d just witnessed.

Finally, he turned to Izuku, expression blank as he regarded his friend’s nervousness rolling off him in waves. “But you said he wasn’t—”

“I told you, not biologically!”

Nezu caught on immediately, cackling at the confused faces of the others in the room.

“But then, if he’s not your biological father, how come your quirks are so similar?” Todoroki asked, feeling a bit calmer now. “I was willing to believe it had something to do with your other parent, but now it’s too many coincidences to believe it’s not related to” He waved around at All Might. “this”

“I hope you’re not too tired then” Shouta said. “Because that’s an even longer story”

An hour or so later found Shouta trailing after them, Izuku and Tenya flanking Todoroki as he still processed what he’d been trusted with, mind reeling as he kept glancing at Izuku in wonder.

“Oh god” He mumbled after a moment, stopping dead in his tracks. He looked at Izuku again, eyes wide in horror. “The festival. You could’ve killed me”

Izuku laughed, latching onto his arm and pulling him along the rest of the way.

Tenya stayed behind, walking alongside Shouta. “Are you seeing what I’m seeing?” He asked the hero, crossing his arms with a warm smile on his face.

Shouta shared his smile, shoving his hands in his pockets. “I’m sure they’re the only ones not seeing it. Dumbasses”

Tenya snorted, bumping shoulders with him. “Like father, like son, huh?”

“Oh god I hope not. That was painful to watch”

Unsolved drama out of the way, the training camp went on as scheduled. The ones who had failed the practical exams were suffering more than the rest since they had to make up for it, but all in all it was easier as the days passed. The Wild Wild Pussycats were relentless in their training, and Shouta had them no pity as he oversaw the activities.

The only one apparently not having a good time was little Kouta, Mandalay’s nephew who was under her care since his parents’ death and didn’t like heroes at all. He would sneer at anyone who tried to talk to him, and had even punched more than a few, erm, weak spots trying to get his point across. He just looked miserable being there but there was no other option for him seeing he had no one else to look after him.
Izuku had tried unsuccessfully to get to him, attempting to talk, play, bond, anything to make him open up.

“I don’t care what you’ve done, heroes are stupid and you are stupid for trying to be one!” Kouta would scream at him before running off, not coming back for hours until dinner or bedtime.

Mandalay was thankful for the effort Izuku was investing on Kouta, but knew it was a futile effort and asked him to focus on his training.

She clearly didn’t know Izuku enough if she thought he would give up that easily.

Sharing his concerns with his friends was a bit of a double edged sword, since they agreed that it wasn’t good for Kouta to hold such contempt for people based on a common trait without further basis, but also understood that some people just didn’t find it easy to change without some professional help.

Todoroki casually mentioned how Izuku had a way of getting to troubled people, and pointed out the way he had helped him be comfortable with his fire quirk by way of force. He had a point when he said Kouta didn’t look the kind of kid to be swayed by promises; if he wanted to make him trust him, Izuku was gonna have to demonstrate it with action, not words.

“Just please, don’t go breaking your arms again”

Izuku couldn’t promise that.

One particular night the air felt weird and heavy, making everyone feel antsy and wanting to escape into their rooms as soon as training was over. As dinner was being distributed, Izuku noticed Kouta wasn’t around and hadn’t been there at lunch either. Mandalay hadn’t seen him either, knowing he tended to go exploring or stayed inside while they worked. She had spotted him here and there during the day but he never stayed in the same spot for long.

Izuku grabbed an extra plate and set out to find Kouta, knowing the kid was smart enough to not stray away from the main buildings if he didn’t want to get lost. There were many places he could’ve gone to to get away from everyone while still being within reaching distance of Mandalay’s quirk if she needed to send a telepathic message out for him, so he had to think about it long and hard to not spend all day looking for him.

There was a pond a little off ways near the administrative buildings where frogs and ducks lived that was a popular spot for having lunch or napping between classes. It was one of the few places were you could sit around and actually do something to pass time like skip rocks or kick your feet in the water. Izuku had a feeling Kouta might’ve come across the place during one of his walks and if he did, he might’ve chosen it as his hiding spot. Izuku also knew about Water Hose, and it seemed fitting for the boy.

He headed there on a hunch, wanting to hurry as the sun started to set.

The unmistakable sound of rocks hitting the water met him before he even saw the pond, and soon enough could pinpoint Kouta sitting beneath a tree with a pile of pebbles next to him.

“Kouta?” Izuku called out. Kouta jumped to his feet and glared at him, angry at having been found. “I brought you dinner, aren’t you cold out here?”

“Leave me alone” Kouta grumbled. He took a step back when Izuku tried to approach.

“Hey now, I get that you don’t like being here, but you have to take care of yourself” Izuku said
softly, offering the food once more. “Come on, you’ll get sick if you stay out here too long”

He reacted on time to dodge the rock Kouta threw at him.

“Go away!” He shouted, stomping his feet on the grass. “You think you can help anyone, but you’re just a bother!”

Izuku sighed, setting the plate down as he got ready for the usual debate once more. “This is not about heroism, I just want you to eat something and go inside. It’s almost night time and Mandalay will be worried”

“No!” He shouted. “I’m tired of being here, I wanna go home!” He picked up another rock to throw at Izuku, missing once more. “I don’t want to see you use your dumb quirks, or pretend to save someone, or, or” His voice cracked, involuntary tears slipping past his cheeks as he angrily wiped them away. “All heroes do is die and leave you behind!”

He turned around, and ran.

Izuku cursed, chasing after him. He tried not to use his quirk as that would likely upset Kouta even more, but it made it harder to reach him since he was small and slippery and got lost among the bushes.

He had taken for granted that Kouta had stayed close to the dorms while adventuring around, but apparently he was wrong. He could see the boy was running with purpose on a path he was familiar with, getting farther and farther away from where everyone else was.

For the gates.

Before Izuku could throw all caution out of the window and use One for All to reach him, Kouta crossed the gate and ran into the streets outside the school grounds.

Izuku stopped short of the entrance, breathing heavily as he stared at the city in front of him.

Memories of the USJ flashed in his mind, how easy it had been to get out inside the bus, how he’d enjoyed seeing the people on the streets living their life. How his world had come crashing down when they almost died at the hand of villains.

Was it different now? He had a quirk. His training had improved his technique.

His nightmares had been brought back up and his hands shook in fright at the idea of leaving the safety of his home.

He’d almost died here as well, kidnapped and threatened right under his caretakers noses.

Was he ready to leave once more?

“No, I’m not” He whispered to himself, and without a second thought ran out into the world.

He jumped high into the sky and managed to see where Kouta had run off to. He had taken a left, going through a residential street that was quiet enough at this hour no one was out to stop him. Izuku went after him, and managed to cut his path right as he was running past a construction site.

“Kouta! That’s enough!” Izuku stopped in front of him. “It’s dangerous to run off like that”

“I wouldn’t have run off if you had just left me alone!”
“Please, let’s just head back. Everyone will worry about you”

Kouta tried to run away again, but Izuku was ready this time and caught him on time. Kouta pulled at the hold he had on his arm; it wasn’t strong or hurtful, but it was firm enough to keep him in place. He shouted at Izuku to let him go to no avail, even kicking him and trying to bite him. Izuku took it all in stride and waited for him to give up so they could head back.

“Hey now, that much noise is gonna wake up the neighbors” A raspy voice interrupted them, and Kouta actually went silent at the stranger walking up to them.

He was huge, covered in a black cloak and looking completely out of place. His face wasn’t visible except for a strange glint from one of his eyes. Kouta had gone limp enough that Izuku had no problem pulling him behind him, shifting into a defensive stance.

“You’re that brat from UA, aren’t you? I’ve seen you on TV” The man said, pulling back his hood and letting them see his short blond hair, deranged smile and mechanical eye. Kouta whimpered behind Izuku and cowered further. “You can’t fight without breaking your bones, right? This will be easy, then”

“Who are you?” Izuku asked him, already checking his surroundings to check the possibility of casualties or collateral damage. This man was in for a fight.

“You can call me Muscular, although you won’t be speaking much in a moment” He chuckled, taking off his cloak completely and revealing the reason for his namesake. His quirk obviously mutated his body into what Izuku could see; fibers of muscle tissue bulging over his arms and neck and possibly the rest of his body. “You know, I was originally called in to help some guys into kidnapping one of you kids, but the plan was cancelled since you changed locations last minute. I was too hyped up to actually give it up, so I followed those cat heroes all the way here, waiting for a good time to find someone to kill” He raised an arm, pointing at Kouta. “And that boy gave me just the chance I needed, so I guess I should thank you”

Izuku let the energy flow through his body, feeling more than seeing the green lightning crackling around his body. “Kouta, listen to me” He said quietly to the boy. “I need you to run away and hide, okay?”

Kouta shook his head, holding onto Izuku’s leg, too scared to move.

“Don’t worry, I’ll keep you safe” Izuku smiled at him, stepping forward to get Kouta to unlatch from him. “I’m right here”

He saw Muscular’s quirk activate, and attacked.

The entire place was razed to the ground, beams and rubble strewn all over the place. Whatever those poor construction workers had build had been completely undone by the fight. A water pipe snapped in half was slowly flooding the crater Muscular’s body had left when his Pet had utterly crushed him in the fight.

Shigaraki side-stepped him, ignoring him in favor of the two figures laying nearby. His Pet was near unconscious, arms completely destroyed from the force of his attacks with bones shattered and blood pouring from his wounds. The little boy he had been protecting was crying by his side,
scared and not knowing what to do.

“That was quite a show” He said casually, standing next to them and rejoicing in the new terror filling the kid’s eyes at the sight of him. “It was a good idea to follow this guy after he stormed off, after all”

“Sh-Shigaraki” Izuku groaned as he struggled to stand up, wiling to keep fighting even if the entire League showed up one after the other.

“Now, now, I’m not here to fight” Shigaraki cooed, petting Izuku’s head with his pinky raised. “He did quite a number on you, didn’t he? It would be so easy, just a little touch and I’d be rid of you…”

The threat hung heavy in the air, Kouta watching with wide eyes and unable to stop his hiccupping sobs as he threw himself onto Izuku, latching onto his shoulders trying not to hurt him any further.

Shigaraki chuckled and ruffled his hair before standing up and walking towards Muscular. “I don’t want to, though. You’re too much fun to have around” He knelt down next to the crater and reached down to press all five fingers on the villain. He started crumbling into dust immediately, not a sound coming from him as he was slowly killed particle by particle. “Even if you don’t remember me, I’m sure you will at some point. And I’d like to have you back with us”

Izuku managed to stand back up, Kouta hanging from his back. “G-Go away”

“You can’t ask me to do anything, not in the condition you’re in” Shigaraki retorted. He started getting closer once more, and Izuku instinctively tried to raise his arms to fight. The pull at his destroyed muscles had him biting back a scream. “But I’ll let you be for now, if only because I want to see just what you’re capable of”

He cupped Izuku’s cheek carefully, thumb rubbing the black eye swelling his face in an ugly bruise. It took Izuku by surprise so much he couldn’t react when Shigaraki delivered a quick hit to a point of his neck that finished making him pass out, with Kouta falling along with him.

“Good night” He said last, reaching for the boy to repeat the treatment and have them both still in front of him.

He reached for the smaller kid first, lifting him up to set him down on Izuku’s chest. Then he carefully picked up Izuku, slipping his arms behind his knees and around his shoulders so he could carry them both at the same time. Kurogiri had no idea of his whereabouts and he didn’t want him to know in case he ratted him out to Sensei, so he had to keep a low profile and do the work himself.

They were heavy in their combined weight, but it was nothing he couldn’t deal with.

Happily humming a made up song, Shigaraki made his way back towards the hero academy.

When Izuku woke up, it took him a fraction of a second to wonder where he was before he remembered what had happened.

He jolted upright with a gasp, crying out in pain from his broken arms.
“Izuku!” He heard his mother’s voice through the ringing in his ears, and tried to see her through the tears blurring his vision.

“Kouta?” Was the first word he could get out, feeling around him but only finding sheets.

“He’s fine, Izukkun. You on the other hand” Recovery Girl shook her head, sitting on her desk by Izuku’s bed. So he was in the infirmary. “I can’t heal this much in the state you’re in, I’m afraid”

Izuku’s eyes roamed around the room, finding Kouta sleeping in the cot in front of his, thankfully looking unharmed and just a bit dirty. The Pussycats were sitting around him, looking so terribly normal in their casual clothes it made Izuku feel guilty he couldn’t keep him away from danger. He hoped Kouta was alright after what he had to witness. Especially learning that the villain had been the one who orphaned him in the first place.

“Ugh, what happened?” He fell back on his pillow, looking at his mother for answers.

She shook her head. “I swear, it’s like I can’t leave you out of my sight anymore” She sighed. “After you went to look for Kouta-kun and didn’t come back we started a search for you, but we couldn’t find any of you in the school” She reached for his face, hesitating before opting to run her hand through his hair instead. “Hound Dog found you both unconscious outside the school gates, completely battered and bruised”

Izuku looked at her, digesting the information. He kept quiet after, swallowing the lump in his throat. He remembered what had happened after the fight, and Kouta could confirm it for him when he was better. But for now he had to live with the knowledge that, for some reason, Shigaraki had brought them back home safe and sound, saying he wanted to keep having fun with him, to see his potential grow. And hopefully have him back at some point.

“Baby? Are you alright?”

Izuku smiled at her, deciding that in the meantime, it would be better to keep this to himself. “Yeah, I’m fine”

For now.

Chapter End Notes

EDIT: i forgot about tsunotori kfsjf I added her in a line and I think it should be enough i mean i try to give everyone a mention but it's not always possible ajhjgfasd

season 4 is upon us so soon enough many things that are coming won't be spoilers anymore! also you non manga readers will realize I ripped a huge part of the story for this fic but it's fine lmao.

I'm a shigaraki stan if you couldn't tell, especially after his arc like are you kidding me

ANYWAY this took so long bc my laptop kind of uuuuh died so I got myself a tablet and keyboard but had to wait for cyber day to afford it and then I could finish this but now I can write at work so good for me
as you know I skip parts that are exactly the same as in canon so the whole WWP training and muscular's fight were just jumped right over

and I feel like this chapter is a bit off, idk maybe I had to stop writing so long I lost my groove a bit but I'll be back up

also todoroki lmao

remember I'm chilean so if an 'earthquake' isn't strong enough we ignore them, so I used that experience for the scene with pixie bob lol

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!